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RESEARCH ARTICLE / ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

Talking Past while Needing One Another: The Complex and Ambiguous Relationship between the EU and Türkiye

Birbirine İhtiyaç Duyarken Geçmişi Konuşmak: AB ve Türkiye arasındaki Karmaşık ve Muğlak İlişki

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Abstract

The Republic of Türkiye was one hundred years old by October 29, 2023. This also means 100 years of the Turkish Republic's foreign policy and diplomacy, 100 years of engagement with Europe, and an ambiguous relationship between the EU and Türkiye. In this paper, we argue that the relationship has always been characterised by competing forces of alignment and distancing from both sides. Thus, instead of glorifying EU-Türkiye relations or deploring their demise, in this study, we want to point to the ambiguities of the relationship around five themes in which both cooperation, harmonisation and conflict, divergence occur the most: identity, integration, economy, society, and security. We believe that these are both the main forces behind and affected by Türkiye's 100-year-old Europeanization process. In conclusion, we attempt to clarify that specific historical junctures and circumstances have benefitted different sides in their struggles against each other, and the result is a complex web of entanglements and ruptures that defies reductionist characterisations as "pro-" or "anti-European" in the past and today as well. Yet, we explain that Türkiye and Europe are entangled too deeply to completely break apart and too diverse to be attached to a clearly delineated joint future.

Keywords: European Union, Türkiye, EU-Türkiye Relations, Turkish Foreign Policy, Turkish Politics

Öz

29 Ekim 2023 itibariyle Türkiye Cumhuriyeti yüz yılını geride bıraktı. Bu aynı zamanda, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti dış politikasının, diplomasisinin, Avrupa ve AB ile süregelen muğlak ilişkisinin yüz yılı demek. Biz bu makalede Türkiye ve Avrupa arasındaki son yüz yıllık ilişkinin iki tarafta çekişen farklı güç odaklarının yer yer uyumlaşması ama bazen de birbirlerine mesafe koymaları şeklinde karakterize edildiğini iddia ediyoruz. Bu nedenle, bu çalışmada, AB-Türkiye ilişkilerini övmek ya da gelinen noktaya hayıflanmak yerine hem işbirliğinin hem de çekişmenin en fazla olduğu şu beş farklı alanda ilişkinin muğlaklığına işaret etmek istiyoruz; kimlik, bütünleşme, ekonomi, toplum ve güvenlik. Bu alanların hepsinin Türkiye'nin yüz yıllık Avrupalılaşma sürecinin arkasındaki ve süreci etkileyen temel faktörler olduğuna inanıyoruz. Sonuç olarak, özel tarihsel kesişim noktalarının ve koşulların farklı taraflara birbirlerine karşı yürüttükleri mücadelede faydalar sağladığını ve bunun sonucunun geçmişte ve günümüzde dahi "Avrupa yanlısı" veya "karşıtı" şeklinde var olan indirgemeci karakterleştirmelere kafa tutan karmaşık bir zorluklar ve uyuşmazlıklar ağı olduğuna açıklık getirmeye çalışıyoruz. Ayrıca, Türkiye ve AB'nin tamamen birbirlerinden kopamayacak kadar derin bir şekilde iç içe geçmiş olduklarını, ancak açıkça tanımlanmış ortak bir geleceğe baş koyamayacak kadar da birbirlerinden ayrı olduklarını açıklıyoruz.

Anahtar kelimeler: Avrupa Birliği, Türkiye, AB-Türkiye İlişkileri, Türk Dış Politikası, Türk Siyasal Hayatı

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Introduction

One hundred years of Turkish diplomacy also means one hundred years of engagement with Europe and one hundred years of ambiguous relations. While many have portrayed this relationship in black-and-white terms between mutual embracement and rejection, we argue in this paper that it has always been characterised by competing forces of alignment and distancing. We consider these forces an essential feature of the relationship between Türkiye and the EU, which have played out differently in various historical circumstances. Thus, Türkiye has always been part of Europe/the EU and at the same time outside. Economic, social, military, and political developments have moved the two countries closer together and yet have at the same time sparked movements of distancing. It is in this sense that we focus on the concept of ambiguity when reviewing the past century of Türkiye-Europe/EU relations. Ambiguity denotes "the permanent parallel existence of two options, meanings or interpretations and a resulting undecidability between these, which leads to the emergence of something new that is not reducible to the original parts" (Ahrens 2018: 203). In that sense, we suggest viewing Türkiye-EU relations as a system of interaction that, while not unique, has specific characteristics that cannot be adequately captured by the membership/non-membership binary or by referring to a "privileged partnership" (Macmillan, 2013) or an "open-ended" process (Uğur, 2010). These characteristics have often been the source of tensions, sparking transformations and backsliding at other points.

Thus, the birth of the Republic in 1923 following the Lausanne Treaty took place against the background of the European powers dividing up the Ottoman Empire in the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, as much as it encapsulated the desire to make Türkiye again an equal party to European international society. From the beginning of the post-Second World War European integration process, Türkiye sought close association and ultimate membership, while at the same time insisting on its sovereignty and thus running against the supranational spirit of European integration (Buzan and Diez, 1999). The European Union (EU) member states have been viewing Türkiye with considerable scepticism, while at the same time wanting to keep Türkiye in their orbit and influence its development. Since the 2010s, EU- Türkiye political relations have deteriorated, while significant parts of Turkish society and its economy remain Europeanised, and the EU is dependent on Türkiye's collaboration on several issues, particularly migration. The emerging focus on "transactionalism" (Kaliber 2024; Bashirov and Yilmaz 2020) in a predominantly "functional cooperation" (Saatçioğlu and Tekin, 2021; Müftüler-Baç, 2017) marks only the latest stage of negotiating the terrain of the ambiguous relationship and will surely succeed in new forms of alignment and differentiation in the future.

Thus, instead of glorifying EU- Türkiye relations or deploring their demise, we want to point to the ambiguities of the relationship around five themes: identity, political integration into the EU, economy, society, and military and security. These themes capture the different dimensions of the engagement between the EU and Türkiye. While one may think of other topics, such as migration, these may be subsumed under our five suggested themes. At the same time, while an unavoidable overlap between the themes, they are sufficiently distinct to warrant a closer examination under each heading. Thus, while identity and society are closely related, changing societal structures cannot be reduced

to identity. Identity refers to states as much as it refers to societies. Within the scope of this article, we are, of course, only able to scratch the surface of the issues and debates involved, but we hope to still contribute to a more nuanced understanding of EU-Turkish relations in their understanding as an ongoing struggle between competing and coexisting forces and navigating a complex terrain of identities and interests pulling in multiple directions. We thus do not want to replicate teleological stories of "Westernisation" or "Ottomanization", and, following other recent works (see e.g., Saatcioglu, Tekin, Ekim, Tocci 2019), instead emphasise the constant contestation over the future direction of the relations between whatever is defined as "Europe" and "Türkiye" as well as the reversibility of current trends. We see Türkiye and Europe entangled too deeply to completely break apart and too diverse to be attached to a clearly delineated joint future.

In developing this argument, we consider the development of the Europeanization literature, which has moved from a simplistic understanding of Europeanization as a top-down process to emphasise the importance of different actors in their respective locales as well as variations between different policy fields (Diez et al., 2005; Featherstone and Radaelli, 2003; Olsen, 2002). In such an understanding, the meaning of Europe is not merely imposed but constantly reconstructed: becoming "European" is not a linear, quasi-mechanistic process of automatic socialisation but full of contestation, and the degree to which states and societies change within a European context is uneven and not unidirectional (Alpan and Diez, 2014).

We divide our paper into five sections based on the five themes identified above. First, we discuss the ambiguities of Türkiye`s European identity as a nation state and the perceptions of Türkiye within EU member states. Second, we trace the ambiguous history of the political integration process. We chose to limit or discuss politics to the politics of the integration process as an analysis of the interrelationship of domestic political structures, while an important subject for research would have warranted a book-length treatment and is therefore beyond the scope of this paper. We then discuss mutual dependencies and divergences in trade and other economic aspects of the relationship. The final two sections discuss the ambiguous effects of Westernisation and Europeanization efforts in Turkish society and the tensions between the two sides in military and security matters. We argue that it is important to study the relationship between Türkiye and Europe across a range of policy fields rather than focusing on only one to avoid biases resulting from the idiosyncrasies of the respective field. Our conclusion reiterates the absence of unavoidable teleology in the Europe-Türkiye linkages. They are the product of the constant struggles of a range of interested actors who push them in different directions. While at various historical junctures, circumstances have benefitted different sides in these struggles, the result is a complex web of entanglements and ruptures that defies reductionist characterisations as "pro-" or "anti-European".

Identity

Whether the Republic of Türkiye as a nation-state and successor of the Ottoman Empire was geographically, socially, and politically "European" or not has been one of the deep-rooted historical identity discussions on Türkiye and Türkiye-EU relations (Müftüler-Baç, 2000). "Westernisation" of the Ottoman Empire began with the 1815

Concert of Europe. While the 19th century was the reform period of the old Empire, it could not escape being the "sick man of Europe" by the end of the century (Kedourie, 1968). Non-Muslims, particularly in the Balkans, who were affected by the nationalist and independence ideals and movements of Europe after the 1789 French Revolution, initiated ethnic, nationalist, and religious uprisings; consequently, the Empire witnessed devastating territorial losses in a short period. The Ottoman officers and generals who fought in the Balkan Wars and on different fronts of World War I became the leaders of the Independence War of Turks and the "founding fathers" of the Republic of Türkiye in 1923. Thus, the political, economic, and military developments of the 19th-century Ottoman Empire had a tremendous impact on the national identity formation of the last century's Türkiye, including the debate about whether Türkiye and Turkish society were a part of the West or Europe.

Since the very beginning of its establishment, the Republic, together with its political and social institutions, has been facing the ambiguities of trying to form a specific social and national identity that does not see its future outside of the West, which often, although not always meant "Europe", while simultaneously competing with the West. The new Turkish identity was to be forged both from above through governmental programmes and education, while simultaneously encouraging bottom-up change through a variety of social institutions such as family, civil society, religious organisations (*tarikats* and *cemaats*), kinship relations, and individuals. Yet these processes have stood in continuous tension with each other. The idea of creating a Turkish nation/society as part of "the West", particularly in science, technology, economic development, and secularisation of the state (laicism), but at the same time keeping its national, religious, and conservative societal and political characteristics, particularly in issues regarding family, individual rights and freedoms, gender equality, nationalism, and further democratisation, has created an ambiguity that has been at the heart of Turkish political identity constructions ever since the 1920s. Until today, narratives on Turkish political identity formation seem to be stuck in the continuing dilemmas of "Westernisation" and "anti-imperialism/nationalism", of secularisation/modernisation and Islamism/conservatism.

Bahar Rumelili has invited us to consider such identities as "liminal" and focus on their discursive production. In her account, Rumelili stated, 'the main problematise is no longer one of whether and how Türkiye can Westernise, but how Türkiye reproduces, reconfigures, and subverts the discourses on the West through its very presence and representational practises' (Rumelili, 2012: 497). Yet the multiple complex arrays of identities that transcend the existing dual understandings of Turkish society have often been written out of portrayals of Turkish history and politics. For instance, Türkiye has been politically polarised tremendously since the turn of the millennium, particularly until the 2023 presidential and general elections when the Justice and Development Party (JDP) and Erdogan government continued its one-party rule since 2002. This is the first time in modern Turkish political history that a political party and a leader have been ruling Türkiye for more than a quarter of a century. During the centennial anniversary of its establishment, Europe met a Türkiye that had moved further away from democracy and whose competitive authoritarian identity had been strengthened (Esen et al., 2023). However, the 2023 Presidential and general election results have also demonstrated that

almost half of the electorate would have preferred a possibility of change in government and thus in the direction that Turkish political identity is heading during the JDP's reign since 2002. 31 March 2024 Local elections in Turkiye strengthened this argument with the unexpected victory of the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (RPP), by winning the mayorships of most megacities, including Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Bursa, and Adana, and becoming the leading political party after 47 years. The Republic of Türkiye has been continuously ruled by the JDP government under the leadership of current President R. Tayyip Erdoğan ruled nearly a quarter of its history. The concentration of political power on one hand for decades is one of the reasons that accelerated political polarisation and transformation of the regime and political identity of Turkiye from a democracy to a hybrid regime, even almost an autocracy.

In addition, the country is experiencing rapid sociological and demographic changes that affect the political atmosphere as well because of the huge refugee influx since the eruption of the Syrian civil war in 2011, the increasing brain drain since the 2013 Gezi Park incident, and the recent economic turmoil. For example, according to the Turkish Medical Association, the number of medical doctors (MDs) who request documents from them to apply for a job outside Türkiye has been increasing tremendously since 2015. Although only 150 MDs were applied in 2015, this number has increased to 245 in 2016, 482 in 2017, 802 in 2018, 1047 in 2019, 931 in 2020, 1405 in 2021, and 2685 in 2022 (Turkish Medical Association, 2023). Most people who have emigrated from Türkiye since the mid-2010s have a profession, are well-educated, secular, supporters of a modern welfare state, and democratic Türkiye, and they mostly prefer to move to Europe or the USA. In other words, they represent the achievements of a hundred years of the Republic of Türkiye that the founding fathers of the country were dreaming of. However, this is where the dilemma lies – many of those who fulfilled Atatürk's dream are no longer in Türkiye (Çakır, 2023; Çavdar, 2023).

The EU now faces a new Türkiye in which multi-layered and complex identities are flourishing and in which there has been a marked shift away from the Westernisation agenda of the early Republic (Süleymanoglu-Kürüm and Gençkal-Eroler, 2023). While the shifts and turns in Turkish identity construction have a lot to do with domestic struggles, they have also been affected by the fluctuations of European approaches to Türkiye, including the perception of Türkiye's identity by EU member states and their societies.

However, there is no one Türkiye in European minds and hearts. In addition to the political identity of Türkiye, there are social and cultural perceptions of Türkiye that differ between societies and individuals throughout Europe. While some have been sceptical towards Türkiye's European identity, stuck with stereotypical associations of minarets or head-scarved women as represented in many media outlets, others have seen Türkiye as a part of European history and culture and have emphasised Türkiye's secular and modern history and society (Barysch, 2007).

Although politically and economically, Türkiye was a part of the Western camp during the Cold War, which meant that its foreign policy image and identity were also considered European and Western at that time, the ambivalent stance of European debates towards Türkiye's identity also dates back to the Cold War period. After the end of World War

II, the United States aimed to keep both Greece and Türkiye as allies and partners in the Western liberal order under a NATO umbrella. Yet, Türkiye's 1974 military intervention in Cyprus led to a reconsideration of its commitment to Western values, even though it was sparked by a coup attempt instigated by the right-wing junta in Athens. That Greece was admitted as a member of the European Community (EC) in 1981 in the first attempt of using membership to solidify the democratisation process, while Türkiye suffered from the fallout of the 1980 military coup signified a further estrangement between the two countries. This was followed by the rejection of Türkiye`s application to the European Council in 1989 and again in 1997 in the Luxembourg European Council. While these decisions confirmed Türkiye's principal eligibility to membership, the refusal to accept Türkiye as a membership candidate while pursuing enlargement to many Central and Eastern European countries (European Council, 1997) was a reflection not only of a strict interpretation of the so-called Copenhagen Criteria but also of the contested and ambiguous perception of Türkiye's identity in EU-ropean debates. Indeed, following the 2004 Big Bang enlargement and the accession of the Republic of Cyprus without a solution to the Cyprus dispute, opinion polls showed that many Europeans perceive Türkiye and Turks politically, socially, culturally, and religiously as "others" and "non-Europeans" (Barysch, 2007; Gerhards and Hans, 2011; Kosebalaban, 2007). Thus, support for Türkiye's EU membership in EU member states has declined from 36% in 1996 to 31% and 7% respectively in 2010 and in 2016 (Lindgaard, 2018). Among the core drivers of EU public opinion on Türkiye's accession are "perceived cultural differences" and the "presence of Turkish background minorities" (Lindgaard, 2018: 2).

While perceptions of such differences in identity have also been on the rise in Turkish society (Şenyuva, 2018; Şenyuva and Aydın, 2021), a large proportion of the population still see Türkiye as a European country and continue to support its membership (Aydin-Düzgit 2018). According to the 2022 German Marshall Fund survey on Turkish Perceptions of the EU, 61% of Turks and even 3 quarters of those aged 18 to 24 still favour Türkiye's EU membership (Ünlühisarcıklı et al., 2023). Yet, at the same time, many have come to believe that their goals have become unattainable.

Türkiye's foreign policy since the 2010s has also reflected several ambiguities in its political identity. It is a member of the G-20, yet at the same time it is one of the emerging powers and a part of the MIST countries, including Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, and Türkiye, which some see as following in the footsteps of the BRICS. While JDP-led governments have increasingly emphasised Türkiye's distinction from the West in anti-interventionist, anti-imperialist, and anti-exclusionary terms and in solidarity with the Global South, they have, at the same time, continued to insist on being a part and an enduring partner of the EU and NATO. The 2016 EU-Turkey Joint Statement and Action Plan agreed between Türkiye and the EU, and Türkiye`s bargaining with NATO over Finland and particularly Sweden's NATO membership are perfect examples of this situation. Türkiye`s ambiguities in its recent foreign policy towards the EU and the West have a clear reflection in Turkish society as well as in the increasing importance of Russia and China in people's minds. A recent poll after the 2023 elections shows that only 46,9% of the respondents think that Türkiye should prioritise the EU and the USA in its foreign policy, and 35.5% believe that Russia and China are the most important countries for Türkiye (Metropoll, 2023).

These findings reveal the inherent contentions, tensions, and ambiguities of the mutual political identity constructions of Türkiye and Europe. While the public debates and official policies have fluctuated between seeing these identities as either coalescing or distinct, they are, in fact, directly related to and even dependent on each other in their linkages and positive associations as much as in their mutual motherings and negative distinctions—they are, in David Campbell's term, "radically interdependent" (Campbell, 1993).

Politics

The political history of Türkiye since the Ankara Agreement provides us with multiple illustrations of how Türkiye's Europeanization as well as its distancing from European political integration have been intertwined (Alpan, 2021). Whenever Turkish politics has been less divided and favourably disposed towards Europeanization, the room for political and institutional integration and public support for integration has increased. Yet because these political attempts at integration have mostly been pursued by the political elite in a top-down approach, have often remained shallow, and because Turkish domestic politics has hardly ever come fully out of a crisis mode, political, economic, and social setbacks have continued to characterise the relationship and prevented further political integration of Türkiye into the EU. However, the de-Europeanization of Türkiye is not a unidirectional phenomenon. European political developments, decisions, and perceptions of Türkiye and related issues have also contributed to further entanglement and division. Table 1 demonstrates how successive moves of integration, disintegration, Europeanization, and de-Europeanization have appeared not only after the mid-2000s but have been a constant feature of EU-Türkiye relations.

Table 1
*A Brief Chronology of Türkiye`s Ambiguous European Integration**

European Integration	**Disintegration / De-Europeanization**
1963 Association (Ankara) Agreement on visa-free travel of Turkish citizens	1978, Türkiye suspended its obligations under the Additional Protocol because of economic problems
1970 Additional Protocol, including regulations on the Customs Union	1980, relations were de facto suspended because of military rule and democratic backsliding in Türkiye; Germany and France suspended visa-free travel for Turkish citizens.
1986, the Türkiye and EEC Association Council convened	1989 EC rejected Türkiye's application
1987, Türkiye applied for full membership	1993 Copenhagen European Council: 'No to Türkiye, yes to CEECs, Cyprus and Malta'
1995 Customs Union Decision	1997 Luxembourg EU Summit: Türkiye was not mentioned as a candidate, so Türkiye suspended its relations with the EU
1999 Helsinki EU Summit: Türkiye was declared an EU candidate	2004 Annan Referendum was held in Cyprus and rejected by the Greek Cypriots.
2005 accession negotiations opened for Türkiye – Türkiye meets Copenhagen political criteria	2005, Türkiye signed the Additional Protocol but declared that the move did not mean the recognition of the Republic of Cyprus.

European Integration	Disintegration / De-Europeanization
2006 Detailed Screening Meeting on Chapter 25: Science and Research and Screening meeting on all chapters were completed and the chapter was temporarily closed; this was the first and only chapter that temporarily closed.	2006, the EU stated that 8 chapters shall not be opened and that none of the chapters will be closed temporarily until the commitments related to the Additional Protocol of Türkiye
2011 was the Ministry for EU Affairs was established in Türkiye	2007 France stated that it will not allow opening of 5 chapters because these chapters are directly related to membership
2012 `Positive Agenda` with the EU	2012 German and French leaders mentioned the notion of `privileged partnership` and `strategic partnership`
2013 Türkiye and the EU launched a dialog on visa modernisation and signed the Readmission Agreement.	2015 President Erdoğan met EU leaders and Türkiye and the EU agreed on an Action Plan in Brussels to control refugee influx. Joint Action Plan (Refugee Deal)
2014 readmission agreement provisions for Turkish citizens were entered into force.	2016 The EU Commission indicated that 7 benchmarks are left from 72 benchmarks are left for the realisation of visa-free travel for Turkish citizens.
2016 The European Commission requested authorisation from the Council to begin negotiations on upgrading the customs union.	2016 In the EP the decision which called to suspend the accession negotiations temporarily with Türkiye was accepted.
	2018–2019 The EU stated ‘‘Türkiye has been moving further away from the European Union. Türkiye’s accession negotiations have therefore effectively come to a standstill, and no further chapters can be considered for opening or closing and no further work towards the moodernisation of the EU- Türkiye Customs Union is foreseen.”
2020 The EU offered a conditional Positive Agenda	2019 In the conclusions adopted by the EU Foreign Affairs Council, it was stated that in light of Türkiye’s activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Council decided to suspend negotiations on the Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement and agreed not to hold the Association Council and further meetings of the EU-Türkiye high-level dialogues for the time being. In addition, the Council stated that it endorses the Commission’s proposal to reduce pre-accession assistance to Türkiye for 2020 and invites the European Investment Bank to review its lending activities in Türkiye.
*Table was constructed by the authors.	

After World War II, Türkiye joined liberal West-led international institutions one by one. Concurrently, Turkish politics transformed into a multiparty system in 1946. The first competitive elections were held in 1950, resulting in the victory of the opposing Democratic Party (DP), which came into power for the first time. Following these democratisation steps, Türkiye became a NATO member in 1952. It also developed relations with the newly-established EC through the 1963 Association (Ankara) Agreement. Following the Agreement, Türkiye and the EC signed the Additional Protocol, which included regulations on a future Customs Union, in 1970. However, between 1950 and 1970, Turkish politics faced two military interventions, increasing polarisation among the main

political parties, the RPP and the Democrat Party (re-named as Justice Party after the 1960 military coup) and their supporters, the flourishing of different social movements and civil unrest, fighting between leftist and ultra-rightist nationalist groups, and an economic downturn. Consequently, due to political and economic crises in 1978, Türkiye suspended its obligations under the Additional Protocol. At the same time, sceptical views towards Türkiye prevailed in EC member states, partly because an increasing number of Turkish migrants, although economically desired, were constructed as a threat (McLaren 2007). In 1980, relations were de facto suspended because of military rule and democratic backsliding in Türkiye, and Germany and France suspended visa-free travel for Turkish citizens.

Military rule ended rapidly and Türkiye re-established its civil government after the 1982 elections under the Prime Ministry of Turgut Özal, who was the leader of the newly-established Anavatan (Motherhood) Party. Özal supported both `Westernisation` and economic `liberalisation` of the country. Yet simultaneously, he also looked Eastwards to extend Türkiye's influence on the Turkic states established after the collapse of the Soviet Union and provided more leeway for religious influence in public life. The transition to democracy and the establishment of a free market economy paved the way for the prioritisation of Türkiye-West/Europe relations during the 1980s (Hale, 2013). Thus, Türkiye applied for full membership of the EC in 1987, which the EC rejected in 1989. By the end of the Cold War, while Turkey's foreign policy's commitment to the international liberal order was strengthened, the newly founded EU prioritised its institutional deepening and widening towards Central and Eastern Europe. Yet, Türkiye was struggling with new political, economic, and social crises, including the failure of coalition governments, the financial and banking crisis, the Kurdish issue, and the rise of political Islam during the 1990s. Despite all this, Türkiye signed the Customs Union Agreement with the EU in 1995 and deepened its economic integration with the EU. However, the Agreement did not ensure further political reforms, integration and EU accession.

At the 1999 Helsinki Council meeting, Türkiye became an EU candidate and committed to intensive political and economic reform process, fostering Türkiye's "Europeanization" process. Türkiye passed multiple regulations in different policy areas within a short period of time as a requirement for opening membership negotiations, which started in October 2005. Although Türkiye has thus become a member of a network of countries in the EU's close orbit, it has performed weakly during the negotiations. Only sixteen out of thirty-five negotiation chapters were opened at the time of writing, and only one chapter (research) was successfully closed. The opening of all other chapters has been vetoed by the Republic of Cyprus because of ongoing conflict on the island, which has resulted in disputes over recognition and thus violations of the Ankara Agreement. The Agreement would have to be extended to all EU members, including the Republic of Cyprus, which Türkiye does not recognise as a sovereign state. Yet at the same time, other member states have done little to find a solution to this problem and have often hidden their own agendas behind Cyprus's stance (Kuşku-Sönmez and Türkeş-Kılıç, 2018: 264). France, for instance, added a clause in its constitutional law that requires a referendum on all future EU accessions after Croatia`s EU membership. In addition, in contrast to the

CEEC enlargement, no clear target date for the conclusion of membership negotiations with Türkiye has not been set. All of this has furthered Türkiye`s estrangement from the EU and its failure to comply with EU political reforms (Macmillan, 2013; Uğur, 2010).

Türkiye thus moved from being one of the allies of the Western Camp during the Cold War to a long-term accession country in terms of its European integration process and its relations with the EU, during the 2000s. While Bulgaria and Romania became EU members in 2007, Croatia, which initiated accession negotiations in parallel with Türkiye in 2005, became the 28th and latest member state of the EU in 2013. Yet, out of the six Western Balkan countries (WB6), five, excluding only Kosovo as a potential candidate, gained candidacy status. The EU created a visa-free regime with eight non-EU countries (Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine) until today. Due to the recent Ukraine War, Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova officially applied for EU membership in March 2022 (Gehrke, 2022) and became candidates in June 2022. As citizens of a candidate country since 1999, who signed an Association Agreement with the European Union in 1963 and became a part of the CU by 1996, Turkish citizens still cannot travel to the EU without a Schengen visa. While different modes of European integration for non-EU countries, opt-ins and outs, and differentiated integration (Leuffen et al., 2012) have created several opportunities for Türkiye's further integration into the EU under several emerging discourses, such as associate membership (Duff, 2013), dynamic association (Ekim, Ülgen and Saatçioğlu 2019), and functional integration (Müftüler-Baç, 2017; Saatçioğlu, 2020), particularly in specific policy areas such as trade, security, and migration, the current state of Türkiye-EU relations is a deadlock. While Turkish President Erdoğan emphasised several times during and after the 2023 elections that one of their ultimate goals is Türkiye`s EU accession, declaring that "Türkiye could part ways with the EU, if necessary" (Reuters, 2023) just after the announcement of the 2023 EU progress report on Türkiye, which harshly criticised democratic backsliding, violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms, and Türkiye`s Cyprus policy.

At the same time, both sides continue to "do business" with each other when it is in their mutual interest. The most obvious example of this is the 2016 EU and Türkiye Statement and Action Plan in the aftermath of the 2015 refugee crisis, which effectively made Türkiye a gatekeeper for migrants on their EU migration route. On the one hand, such cooperation in specific policy areas has indicated a rise of a transactional relationship rather than one grounded more fundamentally in joint institutions and norms (Bashirov and Yilmaz, 2020; Öniş, 2023; Turhan and Wessels, 2021). On the other hand, they have reinforced the ambiguous nature of the political relationship between Türkiye and the EU, which has been characterised by steps that have bound the two countries closer to each other and simultaneously distancing them from each other.

Economy

The area where Türkiye-EU relations are most integrated is the economy. Although economic integration is deeper than the other issues discussed here, the relationship between the Europe and Türkiye has encountered many ups and downs in this field during the last century as well. In the mid-19th century, the Ottoman Empire began to borrow

from European states. When the Ottoman Empire could not service its debts on time, these countries established Duyunu Umumiye, a Public Debt Administration, in 1881. Thus, foreigners began to manage the finances of the Ottoman Empire (Eğilmez, 2011). Therefore, it is not surprising that the Republic of Türkiye prioritised "full independence" and "anti-imperialism" in economic terms. However, Türkiye only paid its debts to foreign state authorities it had taken over from the Ottoman Empire in 1954. The payment of foreign debt became a trauma confronting Europe (West) and Türkiye both politically and socially. When the Ottoman free trade obligations with European states expired in 1929, Türkiye turned to import restrictions and a statist economic policy (Eğilmez, 2011) until the beginning of the Cold War to strengthen its autonomy.

Türkiye accelerated its economic integration with the West during the Cold War. Marshall Aid provided by the United States to European countries including Türkiye for the recovery of continental Europe after World War II coincided with the fact that the opposition Democratic Party came into power for the first time right after the transition to the multiparty system in Türkiye. The initiation of the EEC membership process in 1959 laid the groundwork for the gradual integration of the Turkish economy with the European one. While the Ankara Agreement facilitated the free movement of Turkish citizens to Europe and the right to establishment, the Additional Protocol to the Customs Union brought Türkiye one step closer to the EEC. However, one of the first and most profound blows to economic integration occurred during the 1970s, during one of the most turbulent periods in Türkiye 's domestic politics. In 1978, under the Prime Minister's Office of Bülent Ecevit, Türkiye suspended its obligations arising from the Additional Protocol on the grounds that the country was struggling with internal political and economic problems. During his election campaign in 1973, Ecevit, emphasising that "they are Partners, we are the Market", expressed his reservations about Türkiye's membership in the EEC. While his discourse played on the views of many people who defined themselves as anti-imperialist, leftist, Kemalist, and even Turkish nationalists in the Cold War Era-Türkiye, it also reflected the feelings and behaviours of most Turkish bureaucrats and political elites (Erdem, 2008).

The suspended relations with the EC after the 1980 military coup regained momentum with the initiation of the Customs Union process in the early 1990s. The Customs Union Agreement signed with the EU in 1995 was welcomed by political elites, especially by Prime Minister of the time Tansu Çiller, Turkish media, and pro-Europeans in Türkiye, almost as if Türkiye had become an EU member. The Customs Union enabled Türkiye to receive intense and high foreign direct investments (FDIs) from Western states. This situation has led to high profits, integration of bilateral economic relations, and increased trade volumes with European institutions and companies that trade with and invest in Türkiye. In this context, during the first decade of the Customs Union, an economic win-win situation emerged for both parties. Türkiye enjoyed remarkable economic growth together with a considerable decrease in unemployment and inflation rates since the beginning of the 2000s.

While the average per capita income of Western countries was US$6,000 in 1923 when the Republic was founded, the average per capita income of Türkiye was only 700 dollars (Eğilmez, 2011). The rate has increased continuously since the second half of the 1990s.

In 2013, Türkiye reached its highest per capita income in its history at 12,582 million USD. However, it has not exceeded this level since 2014. In 2023, the estimated average per capita income was 11,931 dollars (IMF, 2023).

In addition to the ongoing economic crisis in Türkiye today, it is clear that there are many problems regarding the functioning of the Customs Union between Türkiye and the Union. Among others, one of the main problems is that Türkiye remains the first and only state in a customs union with the EU without being an EU member. Türkiye thus does not have a say in bilateral free trade agreements (FTA) negotiated by the EU with third countries; there is a trade diversion through Türkiye after those FTAs enter into force (European Commission, 2019); Türkiye's various strong and competing sectors (such as automotive, textile, etc.) are negatively affected by this trade diversion; some sectors, importantly the agriculture sector, are excluded from the CU; and Turkish citizens are subject to travel restrictions. These problems make recovery difficult, but at the same time, they offer a window of opportunity for relations to be re-energised.

This brief overview of economic relations illustrates that ambiguities prevail even in highly integrated economic sectors. While the economies of Europe and Türkiye have been intertwined to a considerable degree, obstacles, partly stemming from identity and politics, have prevented further integration and have even led to centrifugal forces. Türkiye has thus sought to diversify its trade patterns and has pursued stronger linkages with partners outside Europe, including Central Asia and Africa. At the same time, Europe remains its largest trading partner. Likewise, EU member states have kept Türkiye at a distance and, for instance, have restricted migration while remaining dependent on Turkish labour force influx as well as the import of cheaply produced goods from Türkiye.

Society

The Kemalist project of Westernisation had a strong and paternalistic element (Dumont, 1984). For Atatürk and the elite of the new Turkish Republic, the masses had to be educated and transformed into a modern secular society. After World War II, linkages with the member states of the European integration project and their societies became an important pillar in this process. Anchoring Türkiye in Europe meant not only international recognition but also embedding Turkish society in (Western) Europe. At the same time, as the economic recovery of especially Western Germany led to a demand of labour immigration, Turkish citizens formed a strong presence in Western European states, particularly in industrial centres, while the diaspora retained deep-seated linkages to their "homeland" (Küçükcan, 2007).

After the Cold War, the Kemalist project of a transformation of Turkish society was mirrored in the conceptualisation of a top-down Europeanisation process through increasing linkages between the EU and Türkiye after the end of the Cold War. In such simplistic renderings of Europeanization, both scholars and practitioners expected domestic changes by bringing societies into the EU context (Kaliber 2014). At the same time, sceptics of Türkiye's EU membership within the EU saw Turkish society as alien to what they considered the EU's main values and identity. Ironically, in doing so, they shared their view of Turkish society as backward, non-Western, and in need of modernisation with the early Kemalists.

Clearly, both positions were misguided. Turkish society has long been linked to transformations in other parts of Europe (e.g., Deringil 2008), and societies in general are complex and diverse phenomena. Their development is a highly differentiated and contested process. At the same time, Europeanization does not function as a one-way street with a prefigured outcome (Yılmaz, 2015). How the societies of member candidate countries (as well as EU member states) react to the embedding in the EU context depends on their economic and social backgrounds, political predispositions, immediate interests, historical context, and many other factors. In addition, the Europeanization literature has long taken a turn to emphasising "uploading" as well as "bottom-up" processes that make the meaning of "Europe" a site of constant struggle (Featherstone, 2003).

Thus, instead of seeing Türkiye-EU relations as a one-way project of modernisation, we should conceptualise them as a highly complex enmeshment of EU member states and Turkish societies, which in many ways form a transnational space (Kaya, 2007). On the one hand, we find a dense network of business and academic contacts and links to civil society. These concepts have often but not always reinforced "Westernisation" as classically conceived. City twinning and scholarship programmes such as Erasmus, have led to enhanced contacts among civil societies. At the same time, diaspora organisations are embedded in the local lives of their "host societies" as much as they have been an avenue for Turkish governments to influence migrants and have replicated political divisions in Türkiye. The immense number of tourists visiting Türkiye from EU member states has only partly led to more exchange, as many have visited the country as part of all-inclusive package holidays, with little contact with the local population outside their hotels.

The effects of these complex links between EU and Turkish societies are full of ambiguity. In Türkiye, they have tended to reinforce existing polarizations between a secular, Westernised and a more traditional, religious part of the population, although this is an oversimplification. As Senem Aydın-Düzgit (2018) demonstrated on the basis of focus group discussions, whether or not citizens accepted the EU as a normative power depended much more on their value systems than on their immediate economic benefits. In EU member states, migrants from Türkiye and their descendants are sometimes fully integrated and part of the political and societal elite; they may sometimes consider themselves outcasts and find pride in the new Turkish nationalism of the post-2016 Turkish governments. The question of whether migrants of Turkish descent are part of European societies and their identities is still hotly debated among both societal majorities and sometimes among migrants themselves, even though life in most EU member states would be unthinkable without their presence (Karamik and Ermihan, 2023). Similarly, the issue of whether Islam is part of European societies, or vice versa, Christianity is part of Turkish society, has repeatedly stirred up highly emotional debates.

Thus, European and Turkish societies are strongly interlinked, forming a transnational space marked by high levels of trade, cultural, and labour exchange. This exchange has transformed both EU member societies and Turkish society and has made them dependent on each other to a significant extent. Yet as much as these societies need each other, significant parts of their members have time and again engaged in mutual Othering, have rejected the ties that have grown since the early Twentieth Century, and have looked

elsewhere for alternative linkages. Mirroring our findings in other dimensions of EU-Türkiye relations, the societal relationship is therefore highly ambiguous. While the concrete relationship between societies has changed considerably over the past 100 years, the underlying ambiguity has not.

Military and Security

Regarding military and security issues, the relationship between Türkiye and Europe must move beyond the EU and include NATO. Thus, analysing Türkiye-EU relations in foreign and security policy is complicated by the parallel development of the EU and NATO, as well as the longer trajectory of Türkiye and the EU in a broader European security context. For a long time, the relationship between European states, including the Ottoman Empire, was marked by power politics and military aggression. The resulting antagonisms led to two World Wars. While Türkiye took up some 100 German Jewish academics during the reign of the Nazis in the 1930s and 1940s, it maintained good relations with the Nazi regime, officially remained neutral during World War II, and only entered the war in support of the Allies in its final stages in February 1945 (Guttstadt, 2008). Its staunch Western orientation in security policy was a result of the ascending Cold War and claims by the Soviet Union on Turkish territory. Integrating into the Western alliance thus allowed Türkiye to shore up the security of its borders while allowing the US and NATO to put up its military defences in a strategically important area in the direct neighbourhood of the USSR. At the same time, Türkiye was critical of hegemonic ambitions and continuing colonial practises of Western great powers. Thus, it participated in the 1955 Bandung conference of African and Asian states but was met with considerable suspicion because of NATO's involvement and support of the West (Aydın, 2000).

Thus, despite Türkiye's clear Western orientation, security relations with European states were far from clear-cut even in the early days of the post-World War II international system because of a simultaneous discourse that saw the West as colonial. The fact that Greece joined NATO with Türkiye did not make the situation any less complex. Despite both being NATO members, the two countries have been close to war several times and, in 1974, confronted each other directly in Cyprus. The EU membership of the Republic of Cyprus has also complicated EU-NATO cooperation in Security and Defence Policy, as Türkiye does not want the Republic of Cyprus, which is not a NATO member state, to gain access to strategic military information. At the same time, Greece and Türkiye have experienced historical phases of *détente* and even expressions of friendship, for instance, after the devastating earthquakes of 1999. However, in every instance, optimism about the overcoming of enmity (Rumelili, 2007) quickly dissipated.

The post Cold War period generally made matters more difficult. Removing the "overlay" of bipolarity has provided regional powers in an "insulator" position between regional security complexes such as Türkiye with new opportunities to follow more active foreign policy (Diez, 2006). While Türkiye as a NATO member and EU candidate is bound to strategic decisions within NATO and expected to align its foreign and security policy with the EU, it has increasingly diverged from both, particularly since the 2010s. Its strategy of diversification has included a focus on previous Ottoman regions, claiming

leadership in the Global South, and increasing links with Russia and China. It became a "dialog partner" of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in 2012 and declared its intention to intensify its relations with the observer status or even membership. President Erdoğan sought close links with Russian President Putin. Türkiye's purchase of Russian S-400 air defence missile systems demonstrates the "sitting-on-the-fence" policy of the Turkish government since 2017: while buying from the Russians, Türkiye also ordered US-made F-35 fighter planes and invested in developing its national air defence system. In the Ukraine war, Türkiye has supplied Ukraine with its B*ayraktar TB2* drones and has advocated NATO membership while maintaining close economic ties with Russia and not fully supporting EU sanctions on Russia. Furthermore, disputes over Kurdish activists' human rights treatment continue to sour relations between Türkiye and EU member states. At the time of writing, Türkiye was still blocking NATO membership of Sweden, an EU member.

The list of disagreements between the EU and Türkiye on strategic matters is thus as long as their common interests, although one should add that tensions also run deep between EU member states on many issues, from developing their own defence systems to sanctions on Russia. Expectations that membership in joint security organisations may lead to a "security community" with a growing common identity have been disappointing. Domestic and international historical contexts have turned out to influence security identities and interests more than institutional membership, which has, however, prevented a complete break-up. Thus, security is a policy field that is symptomatic for the EU and Türkiye both needing each other and drifting apart, and simplistic expectations of EU integration have been proven wrong. Instead, what we have witnessed since the end of World War II is a movement between phases of increasing cooperation and enmity, the development of parallel and often contradictory relationships, and increasing complexity due to diminishing structural constraints after the end of the Cold War in combination with a regime change away from Kemalism in Türkiye.

Conclusion: Entanglement and Estrangement

In the early 2000s, after the customs union had been agreed, Türkiye had become an official EU membership candidate, and the Annan Plan had promised a solution to the Cyprus conflict. Many analysts of EU-Türkiye relations expected the effects of Europeanization to unfold within Türkiye. Europeanization was intended to reinforce democratisation of the political system and the rule of law, to further intensify economic linkages, and to strengthen civil society. When the EU membership process stalled, the Annan Plan failed, and the AKP-led government under President Erdoğan increasingly followed an EU-critical foreign policy stance, observers quickly observed processes of "de-Europeanization". Instead of buying into such dichotomies, we have pointed out the inherent ambiguities and tensions in the relationship between Europe and Türkiye over the past century, specifically after the end of World War II and the beginning of the European integration process. Our review of five different aspects of the relationship demonstrates a situation of both entanglement and estrangement rather than a clear unidirectional movement.

In relation to identity, we noted how Türkiye and Europe have defined themselves as both opposing and intertwined with each other. We argue that even mutual mothering

relied on radical interdependence that bound Türkiye and Europe to each other. In the political realm, we have traced the ups and downs of Türkiye's and Europe's complex relationship and have shown how processes of political integration and distancing often occurred simultaneously or in quick secession. Even in the economic sector, which has been deeply integrated since the 1960s, we found both dependencies and efforts towards diversification and separation. Societies in EU member states and Türkiye are likewise strongly interconnected, but it is this interconnection that has at the same time led to rejection and distancing. And last but not least, we argue that NATO, in particular, has provided a strong institutional embeddedness of Europe and Türkiye that cannot easily be untangled, while tensions remain and alternative strategic options have been explored.

What does this mean for our assessment of the relationship between Türkiye and Europe after 100 years of the Republic? One clear conclusion is that there is no "natural" place for Türkiye inside or outside "Europe" or the EU. Throughout this paper, we have emphasised how this relationship is the result of continuous struggles in a context of path dependency and ever-changing global and domestic contexts (Rumelili and Süleymanoglu-Kürüm, 2017). Both those who saw Türkiye on an unstoppable path towards EU membership in the 2000s and those who argued that turning East and South is Türkiye's only future today have underestimated not only the contestations but also the room for manoeuvre and the opportunities provided by Türkiye's liminality. There is no determinacy or teleology in such complex societal relationships, and we cannot assume automatic processes of change.

Is this a problem? Certainly, for those who prefer clear-cut boundaries and futures, our discussion demolishes the ground on which they intend to stand. Yet history has shown repeatedly that such a firm foundation does not exist. From our point of view, it is thus better to accept the ambiguities and embrace the struggle, but also reflect that countercurrents exist that one must factor in and even accommodate. Thus, the ambiguous relationship between Türkiye and Europe will continue and provide as many opportunities as risks. As analysts, a hundred years of studying Türkiye and Europe taught us to steer clear of simple truths and teleology, and emphasise the need to think in terms of complexities instead.

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