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PERIODS OF TURKISH MIGRATION IN CZECHIA: A DIACHRONIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE TURKISH COMMUNITY

Çekya'daki Türk Göçünün Dönemleri: Türk Topluluğuna Diakronik Bir Bakış

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Abstract

This study examines the historical development of Turkish migration to Czechia through a diachronic perspective, identifying three main phases: the period of entrepreneurial pioneers (1989–2004), the period of transition and transformation (2004–2016), and the period of community formation shaped by highly skilled migration and labor mobility (2016–2024). The study employs qualitative research methods, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, digital ethnography, and thematic analysis. The phenomenon of migration is shaped not only by economic factors but also by cultural ties, individual preferences, and collective memory. During this process, which marks the evolution of migration from a community-based phenomenon to a diasporic formation, spatial concentration has been observed in cities such as Prague and Brno. Moreover, the recent increase in highly skilled migrants has significantly transformed the socio-demographic profile of the Turkish community in Czechia. The study reveals that migration between Türkiye and Czechia has transcended the patterns of classical labor migration, taking on a multi-layered and hybrid structure.

Keywords: Czechia, Migration, Turkish Community, Diaspora

Öz

Bu çalışma, Çekya'ya yönelik Türk göçünün tarihsel gelişimini diakronik bir perspektifle ele alarak göçün üç ana döneme ayırmaktadır: Girişimci öncüler dönemi (1989–2004), dönüşüm ve geçiş dönemi (2004–2016), yüksek nitelikli göçmen ve emek göçü ile birlikte topluluğun oluşma dönemi (2016–2024). Bu çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden derinlemesine görüşme, katılımcı gözlem, dijital etnografi ve tematik analiz yöntemleri kullanılmıştır. Göç olgusu sadece ekonomik etkenlerle değil; aynı zamanda kültürel bağlar, bireysel tercihler ve topluluk hafızasıyla da şekillenmiştir. Göçün topluluktan diasporik bir oluşuma evrildiği bu süreçte, Prag ve Brno gibi şehirlerde mekânsal yoğunlaşma gözlenmiştir. Ayrıca, son yıllarda artan yüksek nitelikli göçmenler Türk topluluğunun sosyo-demografik yapısını önemli ölçüde dönüştürmüştür. Bu çalışma, Türkiye-Çekya hattında göçün, klasik işçi göçü kalıplarının ötesine geçtiğini; çok katmanlı ve hibrit bir yapıya büründüğünü ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çekya, Göç, Türk Topluluğu, Diaspora

1. INTRODUCTION

Prominent representations of the Turkish community in Europe are often tied to countries like Germany, France, Austria, and Belgium. Beginning with the guest worker programs initiated after World War II, Turkish migration to Europe has not only persisted but increased over time. With a migration history spanning nearly seventy years, approximately six million Turks now reside across Europe (Faßmann & İcduygu, 2013), highlighting their significant demographic presence on the continent. While Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium have traditionally been the primary destinations, the Turkish population has now spread to a broader range of countries, including Sweden, Austria, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. As of 2023, data compiled from official institutions in these nations provides a clearer picture of the current demographic distribution resulting from this ongoing migration. While the term "Turkish Community in Europe" might generalize the experiences of Turkish people living across the continent, the reality is that the stories of Turks in each European country are unique and distinct. These differences become even more pronounced when considering specific themes. An examination of the literature on Turks in Europe reveals four principal themes: migration and demographic trends, social and economic integration, political participation and diaspora dynamics, and cultural and social structures (Baycan, 2013; Biffi, 2013; Faßmann & İcduygu, 2013; Katzenson, 2016; Kaya, 2011; Kaya & Kentel, 2023). Thus, it can be argued that Turks in Europe—with their diverse and interconnected experiences—represent a rich and multifaceted phenomenon.

The frequently emphasized claim in this study—that Turkish migration to Czechia differs from classical labor migration patterns—reflects not only a historical reality but also an analytical necessity. The absence of a formal labor migration agreement between Türkiye and the former Czechoslovakia clearly distinguishes this case from the guest worker flows to countries such as Germany, France, or Austria. Thus, the study should not merely state this distinction but rather advance a clear conceptual framework regarding the typological positioning of Turkish migration to Czechia. In this context, the migratory trajectory observed in Czechia cannot be classified as state-sponsored labor migration, nor can it be reduced solely to entrepreneurial migration based on capital investment. Rather, it is more accurately understood as a multi-layered migration regime, initially shaped by entrepreneurial pioneers and subsequently driven by individual agency, familial ties, and an increasing influx of skilled labor. Reframing this migration process through the intersecting axes of “entrepreneurial migration,” “family reunification,” “brain drain,” and “labor mobility” would not only enhance the study’s conceptual originality but also contribute to a more meaningful placement of the Turkish presence in Czechia within the broader European migration landscape.

As of 2024, the Turkish population in Czechia is estimated at approximately 6,000 (CZSO-The Czech Statistical Office, 2024)- a relatively modest figure when compared to Turkish communities in other European countries and to the foreign population within Czechia. Turkish migration to Czechia began following the collapse of the communist regime and initially remained limited in scope. Prior to the 1989 political shift, despite diplomatic and commercial ties between Czechoslovakia and the Republic of Türkiye, as well as historical relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire before 1918, significant migration between the two countries did not occur. Consequently, the Turkish community in Czechia is a relatively recent phenomenon, distinguishing it from more established Turkish communities across Europe. Given the recent emergence of Turkish migration to Czechia, scholarly research on this community remains limited. In this context, Tungul's (2020) study, which examines the recent community transformation process within the Turkish community in Czechia, stands out as a notable exception.

This study aims to explore the migration history of the Turkish community in Czechia, organizing it into distinct chronological periods. To achieve this, it is beneficial to first consider the general migration history of Turks in Europe and identify aspects that overlap with their migration to Czechia. It is important to note that dividing migration history into periods is a subjective endeavor, as migration is a continuous process. However, segmenting this continuity allows for a more detailed examination of the social, political, and economic developments in both Türkiye and the destination countries.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a range of qualitative research methods to investigate the historical development and transformation of Turkish migration to Czechia. A qualitative approach was chosen in light of the study's aim to reconstruct migration periods, explore subjective experiences, and capture the socio-spatial complexities of post-1989 mobility. Rather than relying solely on aggregate statistical patterns, the study focuses on the narratives, practices, and community dynamics that shape and are shaped by migration processes—especially in a post-socialist context characterized by institutional fluidity.

Three primary methods were used: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and phenomenological engagement. A total of 34 individuals were interviewed between 2021 and 2023. The sampling was purposive and designed to reflect diverse migration periods, gender, age, occupational status, and worldview. The interviews included early entrepreneurs, students, families, second-generation migrants, and Turkish-Czech couples. Interviews were conducted in Turkish, Czech, or English depending on participants' language preferences. Turks residing in Czechia or traveling regularly for trade and holidays were interviewed in Turkish, while Czech partners of Turkish citizens were interviewed in Czech or English. Interviews were semi-structured, based on a guide that evolved during the research process. While no full appendix is included, the key thematic areas included migration motivations, everyday life practices, transnational ties, and perceptions of host society.

Complementing the interviews, participant observation was conducted during cultural events, cultural and social institution visits, and formal/informal gatherings organized by the Turkish community in Prague and Brno. Observations focused on spatial practices, generational interaction, and expressions of belonging.

A third layer of insight came from phenomenological immersion: one of the researchers, having lived in Czechia for 15 years, brought long-term familiarity with the Turkish community and participated in everyday social life over an extended period. This insider-outsider dynamic enabled sustained access and a nuanced understanding of migration as a lived experience, while also requiring reflexive awareness of positionality and potential bias.

Additionally, the study analyzed digital content from four Facebook groups and three different WhatsApp groups used by Turks in Czechia. These platforms provided insight into everyday concerns/life, business activities, and informal support networks. This form of digital ethnography served to complement the face-to-face interactions and added a layer of real-time community discourse.

To supplement the qualitative data, statistical data from the Czech Statistical Office (CZSO) and Turkish diplomatic sources were reviewed. These datasets provided information on residence permits, gender distribution, and population figures over time. However, they have notable limitations: they often fail to distinguish between legal statuses, omit undocumented populations, and lack detailed categorization by migration motive or region of origin. Despite these shortcomings, these statistics helped contextualize the qualitative findings and supported the construction of a periodization model.

Data analysis was carried out using manual thematic coding, allowing for a close and interpretive engagement with interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and digital communications. This approach facilitated the identification of key temporal, spatial, and social dynamics that have shaped Turkish migration to Czechia over time. Triangulation across these diverse data sources strengthened the validity of the findings and supported a more nuanced understanding of shifting migration patterns.

Methodologically, the research design was crafted to address the core analytical aim of the study: to trace the historical phases of Turkish migration in a manner that is both empirically rigorous and theoretically attuned to questions of structure and agency. The periodization developed through this process was not imposed a priori but rather emerged inductively through iterative engagement with the data. This periodization framework—rooted in macro-political shifts, demographic trends, and migrants' lived experiences—is elaborated in Chapter Four, titled "Turkish Immigration in Czechia: Periods." There, the criteria guiding the delineation of these phases are presented and critically examined.

3. AN OVERVIEW OF THE FOREIGN POPULATION AND LOCATING TURKISH MIGRATION IN CZECHIA

The emergence of Turkish migration to Czechia in the aftermath of 1989 can be productively situated within the broader theoretical framework of post-communist migration. Unlike classical migration models based on bilateral labor agreements or colonial ties, post-communist migration often unfolds in the context of sudden systemic transformation, market liberalization, and rapidly shifting institutional landscapes. In this regard, Czechia's transition from a centrally planned economy to a liberal market system, coupled with its reintegration into European economic and political structures, generated a new migration environment that attracted entrepreneurial actors from countries like Türkiye.

Post-communist migration theories highlight the role of institutional voids, weak regulatory frameworks, and emerging opportunity spaces in shaping early migratory movements. Turkish migrants—particularly small-scale entrepreneurs active in textiles, tourism, and retail—entered this fluid landscape not as classical labor migrants, but as opportunistic actors responding to the uncertainties and gaps/openings of the transition period. This aligns with findings in the literature that emphasize how post-socialist spaces often became experimental grounds for new forms of mobility, shaped more by informal economies and social capital than by state-level policy design.

Given that Turkish migration to Czechia commenced after 1989, providing a concise overview from this period to the present will offer valuable context and enhance understanding of its development over time. The 1990s marked a period of profound change and transformation in Czechia. With the country's accession to the European Union in 2004 and entry into the Schengen Area in 2007, a new wave of migration emerged, which has continued into the present. Excluding the Vietnamese migration that began during the communist period and Ukrainians arriving due to the war in Ukraine, the primary reason for the increase is its appeal as a hub for neighboring and Eastern countries. Additionally, the presence of global and local technology companies in Czechia, particularly after 2010, has increased the number of highly skilled migrants, which is also one of the reasons for the rise in the number of Turks in Czechia. An examination of the foreign population in Czechia over time reveals a consistent increase from 1989 to the present. This growth trend in the foreign population is well-documented (Baršová & Barša, 2005a; Drbohlav et al., 2009). As will be further elaborated in the following section, although the foreign population began rising in 1993, Czechia's accession to the EU in 2004 marked a pivotal shift, transforming the country from an initial 'transit country' to a 'destination country' for migrants (Burianová & Votradsocová, 2018).

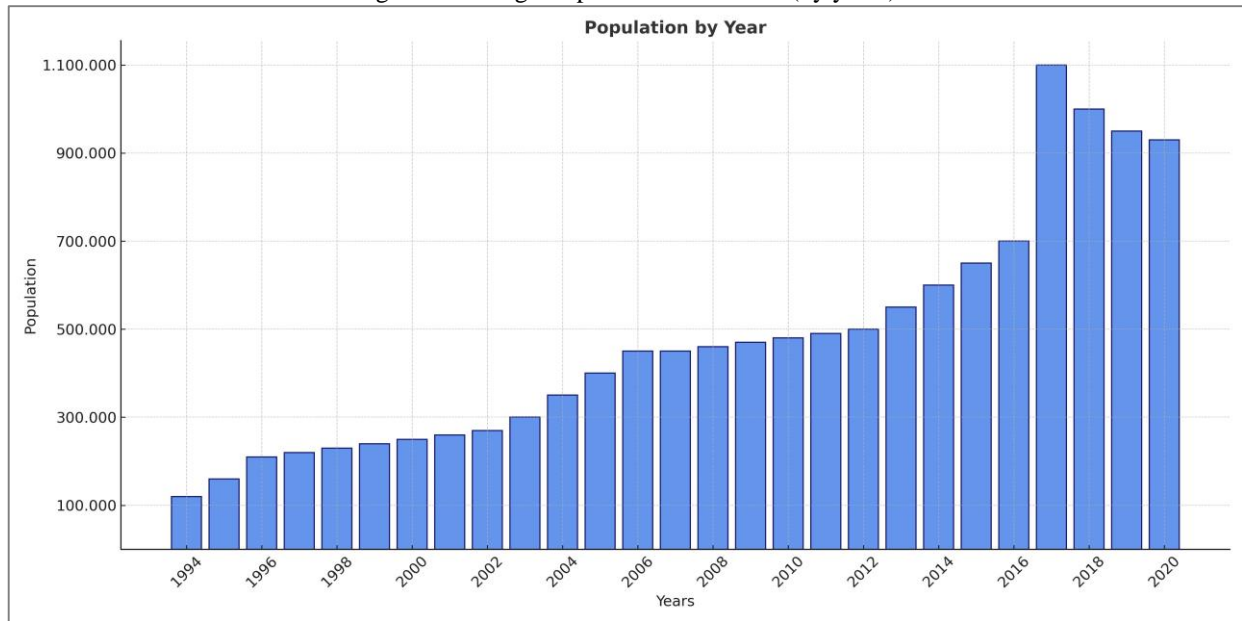
In 1989, at the time of the Velvet Revolution, the foreign population in Czechia stood at 35,961. Following the Velvet Divorce and the establishment of Czechia in 1993, this number had risen up to 77,998 in just 4 year period. By 2004, when Czechia joined the EU, the foreign population reached 254,294. The country's accession to the Schengen Area in 2007 led to a further increase, with the foreign population climbing to 437,565 by 2008 and remaining around this level until 2016. In 2017, the foreign population rose to 524,142, growing to 632,750 in 2020. By 2022, this figure had surged to 1,113,698, (see figure 1.) driven largely by an influx of Ukrainians fleeing the war in Ukraine.

According to 2024 data, the foreign population in Czechia is 1,030,656, with Ukrainians constituting nearly half of this population at 536,558 individuals (Uherek, 2009; Uherek, 2016; Strielkowski & Gryshova, 2016). The next largest groups are Slovaks, numbering 119,856 (Drbohlav, 1994; Stojarová, 2019), and Vietnamese, with 68,181 individuals (Czech Statistical Office, 2024; Müllerová, 1998; Kocourek & Šímanová, 2018). These groups—particularly Ukrainians, Slovaks, and Vietnamese—are the most influential in the context of foreign migration in Czechia and have thus received the most scholarly attention (see table 1.).

The Czech Statistical Office (2024) provides statistics on the foreign population in Czechia by country of origin, including data for the top 25 countries. As reflected in these statistics, Türkiye ranks 21st, with a population of 5,568. Türkiye first appeared among the top 25 countries in 2016. As indicated in the Czech Statistical Office's 2024 publication (see figure 2.), suggesting a gradual increase in both the number of Turks in Czechia and their

proportion within the overall foreign population. Additionally, data from the Turkish Embassy in Prague indicate that 7,000 Turkish citizens are registered with the embassy.

Figure 1- Foreign Population in Czechia (by years)



Source: CZSO, 2024

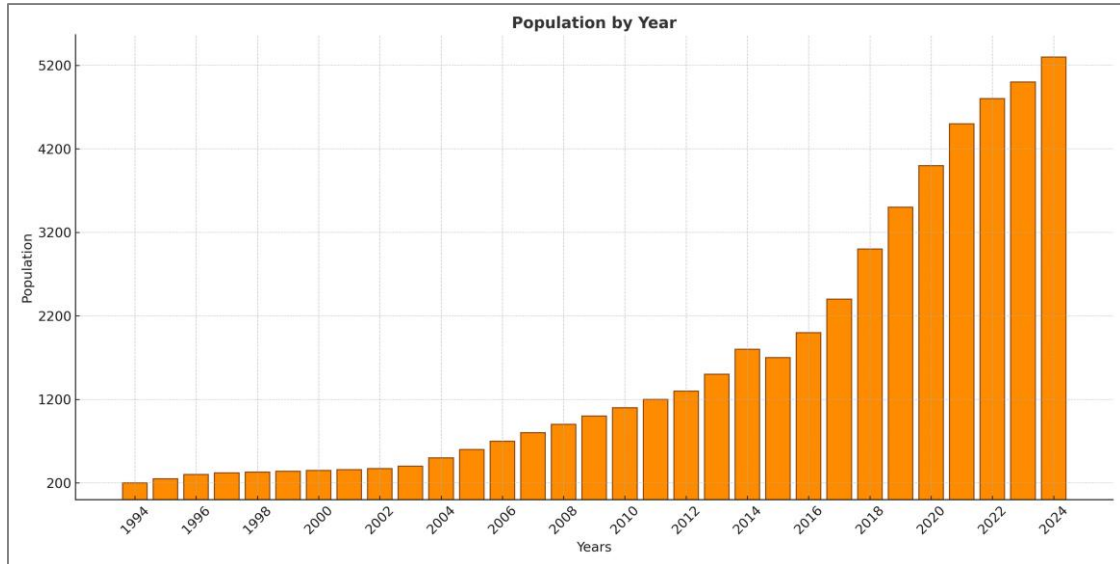
Table 1. Foreign Population in Czechia by Country of Origin (Top 25)

Nu	Country	Population	Nu	Country	Population
1	Ukraine	536,558	15	The UK	7,882
2	Slovakia	119,856	16	Moldova	7,759
3	Vietnam	68,181	17	Belarus	7,671
4	Russia	40,498	18	Philippines	7,416
5	Romania	20,716	19	Italy	6,194
6	Bulgaria	17,973	20	Serbia	5,927
7	Poland	17,817	21	Türkiye	5,668
8	Mongolia	12,738	22	France	4,129
9	Germany	12,429	23	Uzbekistan	3,494
10	Hungary	11,309	24	Croatia	3,349
11	Kazakhstan	10,082	25	South Korea	3,037
12	India	9,117		Others	71,666
13	The USA	9,669		Total	
14	China	9,101		1,030,656	

Source: CZSO, 2024

There is limited data on the demographic characteristics of the Turkish community in Czechia, except for "gender characteristics and residence status" of the population. Based on available data, field observations, and interviews conducted throughout this research, the demographic profile of the Turkish community in Czechia can be outlined as follows: A substantial portion of this community consists of individuals between the ages of 20 and 30, making the Turkish population in Czechia relatively young. This trend holds true across both labor migrants and highly skilled migrants, with youth forming the majority of the Turkish demographic. According to 2024 data from the Czech Statistical Office, 1,241 individuals hold 'permanent stay' status, while 4,427 fall under 'other types of stay.' Although the rate of permanent residence is low, a significant proportion of individuals express a desire to transition to permanent residency. Additionally, of the total Turkish population of 5,668 in Czechia, 3,958 are male, and 1,710 are female (CZSO, 2024).

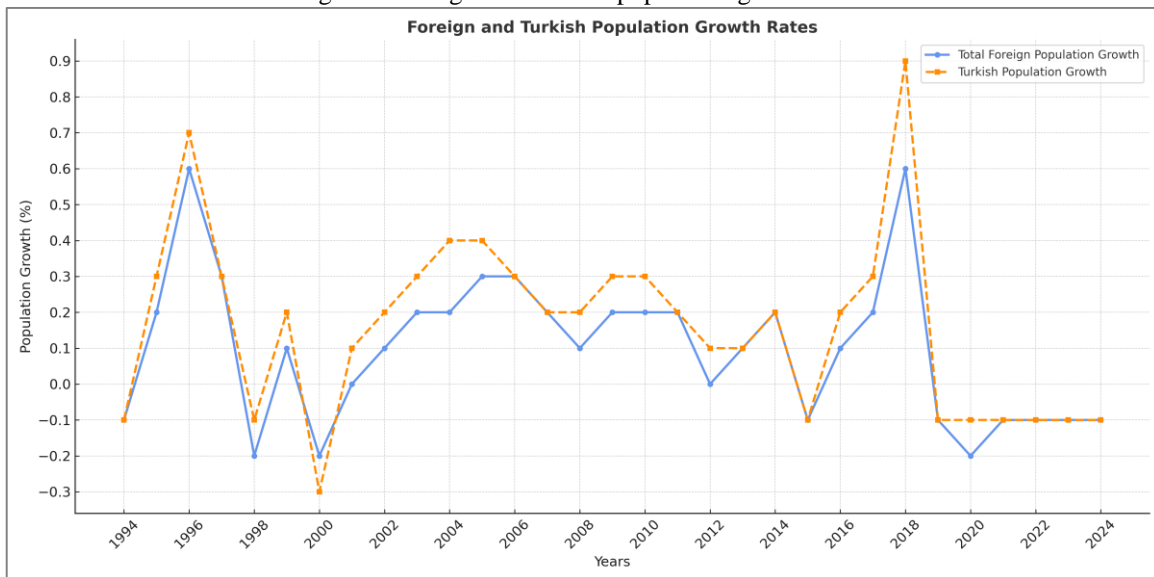
Figure 2- Turkish Population in Czechia (by years)



Source: CZSO, 2024

The geographic distribution of the Turkish community in Czechia largely reflects that of the broader foreign population. Consequently, the majority of Turks in the country reside in Prague, making it the primary hub for the Turkish community. Approximately half of the Turkish population in Czechia is based in Prague, with Brno emerging as the second most significant center. Turks who arrived in Czechia post-1989 initially settled in Prague and, during the 1990s, often referred to themselves as 'a handful of Turks in Prague.' In recent years, however, as the Turkish population has grown, similar expressions have been used to describe other cities, with statements like '*compared to Prague, we are a handful of Turks in Pilsen*' and '*we are a handful of Turks in Olomouc*,' reflecting the relative sizes of Turkish communities across various locations.

Figure 3- Foreign and Turkish population growth rates



Source: CZSO, 2024

Beyond these general descriptions about the demographic characteristics of the Turkish community in Czechia, it is crucial to examine the population's demographic, political, social, economic, and cultural characteristics in detail. This study adopts a diachronic perspective on the Turkish community in Czechia, focusing on the historical dimension of the phenomenon. Now, it is necessary to follow this question: How many periods can the Turkish migration to Czechia, be divided into, and what are the characteristics of these periods? Answering

this question is critical to understanding the historical development of Turkish migration. Each period has its own unique characteristics and impacts.

The figure 1. shows the population growth trends of the Turkish and overall foreign populations in Czechia from 1994 to 2024. Both groups exhibit fluctuating growth rates over time, with the Turkish population generally displaying more variability compared to the broader foreign population. While the foreign population's growth has been relatively steady, the Turkish population has experienced more dynamic shifts, indicating distinct migration patterns between the two groups. Overall, Turkish migration seems to be more sensitive to external factors, while the foreign population shows a more stable trend.

4. TURKISH IMMIGRATION IN CZECHIA: PERIODS

The periodization of Turkish migration to Czechia in this study is based on three interrelated criteria. First, the country's evolving migration policies, broader social and political transformations, and key migration-related events in the post-1989 era form the foundational framework. Second, developments in Türkiye's emigration patterns since 1989—shaped by economic conditions, political changes, and individual strategies—have been taken into account. Third, and perhaps most distinctively, the subjective temporal representations articulated by members of the Turkish community in Czechia—particularly those who migrated in the early post-1989 years—serve as a crucial source for understanding how the migration experience itself is narratively and collectively structured through "before" and "after" distinctions. These three dimensions, when considered together, offer a comprehensive and grounded basis for the historical periodization of this migration trajectory.

An initial lens through which Turkish migration to Czechia can be periodized involves an examination of the host country's migration governance and broader socio-political trajectory in the post-1989 era. As of 2024, although the number of Turks living in Czechia is relatively small, with approximately 6,000 individuals, their unique characteristics justify an in-depth examination. There are challenges, advantages, and disadvantages to dividing the migration of a community into periods. First and foremost, the act of periodizing a social phenomenon must be understood as inherently relative. When dividing the Turkish community in Czechia into periods, the dynamics in Türkiye and Czechia were considered. Research focused on evaluating migration policies plays a pivotal role in the periodization of foreign migration within Czechia (Kušniráková & Čížinský, 2011). The post-1989 period is characterized by the adoption of liberal migration policies. The accession of Czechia to the EU marked a significant turning point in its migration policies. Consequently, after this period, the phenomenon of international migration in Czechia shifted to a different dimension requiring adaptation (Bauerová, 2018). Considering studies on migration policies in Czechia and the reflections of international migration trends in the country (Janská, 2002; Baršová & Barša, 2005b; Drbohlav, 2003; Drbohlav, 2006), the following events are milestones in the phenomenon of international migration in Czechia: the transition to a market economy with the 1989 Velvet Revolution, the dissolution of Czechoslovakia into Czechia and Slovakia in 1993, the economic crisis in Czechia in 1997-1998, Czechia's accession to the EU in 2004, the Schengen Agreement in 2007, the 2008 Economic Crisis, the 2015 Migration Crisis, and the 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Considering all these events, migration in Czechia between 1989-2024 can be divided into the following periods:

- i) Transition to New Migration Policy: Adoption of liberal migration policies post-1989.
- ii) Integration into the EU and Free Movement Process: Efforts to harmonize Czech migration policy with EU laws between 1993-2007.
- iii) Transition from Transit Country to Target Country: Transition from being a transit country to a target country for migrants between 2007-2015.
- iv) Adapting to Being a Target Country and Migration Crisis: The phenomenon of Czechia as an attraction center for foreign migrants and adapting to the new situation caused by the migration crisis between 2015-2024.

A second line of analysis draws attention to the transformations within Türkiye's own migration landscape, reflecting the country's internal socio-political shifts and its evolving relationship with global mobility regimes. Since the 1990s, international migration from Türkiye has undergone multiple phases shaped by economic restructuring, regional dynamics, and global mobility trends. This evolution can broadly be examined in four

interrelated periods. Although Turkish migration to Europe is often discussed under the general rubric of labor migration, notable conceptualizations that bridge past and present trajectories include “From Guestworkers to Transnational Citizens” (Abadan-Unat, 2002) and “From Guestworkers to Global Talent” (Yanasmayan, 2008), both of which offer valuable insights into the changing nature of migration.

Since the early 1990s, international migration from Türkiye has undergone a dynamic transformation shaped by regional realignments, domestic economic developments, and changing global mobility patterns. The dissolution of the Soviet Union opened up new geographies for Turkish migrants, particularly entrepreneurs from small- and medium-sized backgrounds who began to seek economic opportunities in newly independent states across the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia (Öz, 2003). These early movements were largely short-term and commercial in nature—often involving shuttle trade and construction work—and reflected Türkiye’s increasing engagement with its broader historical and cultural hinterland. During the same period, traditional labor migration to Western Europe slowed, though ongoing family reunification and circular mobility maintained transnational ties with countries like Germany and France (Tellal, 2005).

In the 2000s, Türkiye’s political and economic stabilization led to a shift in migration patterns. Emigration became more selective and professionalized, as rising numbers of students, researchers, and skilled workers moved to countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Germany. Educational aspirations, career opportunities, and access to global networks played a central role in this trend. Simultaneously, Türkiye’s outreach to its diaspora intensified through business, cultural, and religious organizations, while some members of the established diaspora also began returning to Türkiye in response to its growing economic appeal (Çağlar, 2015).

From the early 2010s onward, international migration from Türkiye began to diversify further, particularly among younger and more educated segments of society. Factors such as personal development, access to quality education, and lifestyle preferences became more prominent in shaping migration decisions. High-skilled mobility gained momentum, with a noticeable increase in professionals choosing European destinations that offered attractive residency and employment pathways (Ağca-Varoğlu, 2020; Çevik ve Kutlu, 2023; Purkis ve Bulut, 2024).

In recent years, especially from 2018 onward, economic challenges and the global shift toward digital and remote work have added new layers to Turkish emigration. Two overlapping trends have defined this phase: on one hand, a rise in high-skilled, lifestyle-oriented migration toward Central and Western Europe—including emerging destinations like Czechia, Poland, and Austria—and on the other, a growing flow of low- and medium-skilled labor migrants heading to Eastern Europe, particularly in sectors such as logistics, construction, and services. The migration of entire families, rather than individuals, has also become more common, often driven by long-term planning, children’s education, and the search for overall life stability.

A third and more experiential dimension of periodization emerges from the narratives, memories, and subjective categorizations articulated by members of the Turkish community in Czechia—particularly those who migrated in the formative post-1989 years. These early migrants, often regarded as the founding generation, commonly draw a sharp distinction between the “early years” and more recent phases of migration. This experiential divide is more than temporal; it is closely entangled with broader shifts in Czechia’s migration regime and Türkiye’s emigration landscape.

Interviews conducted with members of this cohort reveal a consistent “before and after” framing, expressed through statements such as “*We were very few before, now we are more*” or “*There are many more Turks in Czechia nowadays*.” Such reflections convey not only demographic growth, but also a qualitative transformation in the nature and perception of migration. The 1990s are frequently remembered as a kind of golden era, characterized by entrepreneurial freedom, low competition, and the excitement of engaging with a newly liberalized post-socialist economy. With minimal regulation and few multinational actors in the market, Turkish entrepreneurs carved out successful niches in textiles, gastronomy, and small-scale retail, positioning themselves more as independent economic actors than conventional labor migrants.

This situation began to shift in the early 2000s, particularly after Czechia’s accession to the European Union in 2004. The integration of Czechia into global economic networks and the entry of large international firms are

widely perceived by early migrants as the end of this entrepreneurial golden age. Increased regulation, rising competition, and structural market changes diminished their relative autonomy, gradually reclassifying them—both socially and economically—within the broader framework of immigrant labor.

Moreover, Czechia's accession to the European Union significantly enhanced its attractiveness as a migration destination, especially for highly skilled individuals. Over the past decade, a new wave of Turkish migrants—comprising engineers, IT professionals, academics, and students—has arrived, drawn by employment opportunities, EU mobility, and educational options. For the earlier generation, this influx marks a double shift: not only in the demographic and socio-economic composition of the Turkish community, but also in their own relative visibility and status within it.

Taken together, these narratives underscore that the periodization of Turkish migration to Czechia cannot be fully understood without accounting for the community's own temporal consciousness. Their lived experiences reflect and reinforce the macro-level transformations identified in the first two criteria—namely, Czechia's evolving migration landscape and Türkiye's shifting emigration dynamics. This third, subjective dimension thus enriches the analysis by demonstrating that migration is not only shaped by structural and economic forces but is also remembered, narrated, and reinterpreted across generations.

In line with this perspective, when Czechia's migration policies are taken as a reference point, Turkish migration trends can broadly be divided into two phases: the post-1989 period, following the collapse of the communist regime, and the post-2004 period, after Czechia's accession to the European Union. This distinction—between those who migrated before and after EU membership—emerged clearly in interviews conducted with Turkish migrants and appears to reflect a shared collective understanding. The first phase of Turkish migration to Czechia thus corresponds to the period between 1989 and 2004. Notably, the accession to the EU did not lead to an immediate increase in the Turkish population; rather, it marked the beginning of a transitional phase in which new legal and institutional conditions gradually shaped the landscape for Turkish migrants.

The period in which the number of Turks in Czechia began to increase more visibly aligns with the past decade, marked by the rising presence of highly skilled migrants. This trend parallels the broader increase in migration from Türkiye to Europe driven by political dissatisfaction. The conclusion of the transitional period and the beginning of a third phase is anchored in the year 2016, when Türkiye first appeared on the Czech Statistical Office's list of the top 25 countries of origin for foreign residents. This statistical recognition was taken as a proxy for demographic visibility and therefore serves as the demarcation point for the third phase. Accordingly, the second phase spans from 2004 to 2016, while the third phase extends from 2016 to the present.

Undoubtedly, any attempt to impose clear-cut periodization onto a complex historical phenomenon carries an inherent degree of speculation—this constitutes one of the study's primary limitations. Nevertheless, such a framework is analytically valuable in tracing the historical contours of Turkish migration to Czechia. The proposed three-phase model seeks to interpret migration dynamics by situating them within broader developments in Türkiye, Czechia, and the evolving experiences of the Turkish community itself.

4.1. The Initial small steps: 1989-2004

The adoption of new immigration policies in the post-communist era has transformed Czechia into a land of opportunity, especially appealing to entrepreneurs. During these years, although in small numbers, Turks began to arrive in Czechia, marking the beginning of Turkish migration to the country. The narrative of Turks who migrated to Czechia in the 1990s necessitates an in-depth examination of three spatial dimensions: (i) the socio-spatial transformations occurring within Czechia during the 1990s and their connections to migration dynamics, (ii) the migration of Turks from Türkiye to Czechia, and (iii) the movement of Turks from other European countries into Czechia.

After the Cold War, former communist countries became highly attractive for entrepreneurs seeking new opportunities and Türkiye was not an exception. During this period, Türkiye's relationship with these former communist countries was characterized mainly by shuttle trade with Soviet Russia and Turkish entrepreneurs investing in these countries. Turkish entrepreneurs who ventured into these former communist countries were mostly small-scale entrepreneurs, and they predominantly preferred the newly established states in the Balkans

and Asia. The primary reason for this preference was cultural and historical ties. Most entrepreneurs felt a connection to these regions due to geographical, historical, and cultural reasons. Czechia was not a preferred destination for small and medium-sized entrepreneurs compared to other countries. Nevertheless, a small number of entrepreneurs from Türkiye did make their way to Czechia. The number of Turkish people in Czechia was 223 in 1993, and this number reached 520 in 2004. Although the number of Turks in Czechia increased during this ten-year period, it was still quite small compared to the foreign population in Czechia. Turks who came to Czechia in the 1990s expressed this situation with statements like, *"We were just a handful at that time, only as many as the fingers of one hand."* Although the number of Turkish immigrants to Czechia between 1993 and 2004 was small, it is significant because it influenced later periods and reflected the changes and transformations in Czechia during this time.

In the 1990s, designated as the initial phase of Turkish migration to Czechia, two distinct groups of migrants emerged: the pioneering members of the Turkish community, and those who subsequently followed the pathways these pioneers established. The pioneers were frequently depicted as indispensable figures within the community, with remarks such as *"They hold the authentic narrative of Turks in Czechia"* and *"Their accounts must be heard."* In interviews, they were characterized by terms like *"adventurous," "trailblazing," "vanguard,"* and *"courageous,"* underscoring their foundational role in shaping the community's early history. Given the socio-economic context of 1990s Türkiye, these early migrants generally possessed traits such as being *"educated, open-minded, and of middle-class or higher socio-economic status."* These individuals played an instrumental role in establishing businesses and making investments in Czechia, which itself was transitioning to a free-market economy during this period. Over time, they have come to hold positions of *"respect"* within the Turkish community in Czechia, symbolizing both their integration and the influential role they continue to occupy in the community.

In the early 1990s, the primary reasons for the connection between pioneers who came to Czechia and the country were mostly investment and subsequent marriages. In this context, the word *"choice"* is significant. For the pioneers, settling in Czechia meant making a conscious choice among various alternatives. This is reflected in their statements: *"Initially, we were considering Germany, but since my spouse is Czech, we came to Czechia,"* *"We lived in Türkiye for a while, then decided to move to Czechia,"* *"If it weren't for my spouse, I wouldn't have any business here; I would have gone to another country."*

Besides foreign marriages, another significant factor creating a bond between pioneers and Czechia was investment. Among those who came to Czechia for investment, some settled permanently, while others frequently traveled to Czechia for business. During this period, it was common for Turks coming to Czechia from Türkiye and Europe for investment purposes to seek help from Turks married to Czechs to overcome language barriers and resolve legal issues.

Notably, the first wave of Turkish entrepreneurs migrating to Czechia in the 1990s primarily invested in the textile industry. The primary reason for this is the relatively advanced state of the textile industry in Türkiye. Following the end of the communist era, Czechia became an attractive market, as reflected in expressions like *"There was nothing in the country"* and *"Whatever you brought, it sold."* Turks played a significant role in developing the textile sector in this market. The term *"Laleli merchants"* used for Turks involved in the textile business in Czechia during the 1990s explains many phenomena. The Laleli¹ neighbourhood in Istanbul became a hub for trade with former communist countries. For instance, Russians would buy products in bulk from this neighbourhood and take them back to their countries, or Turks would sell products bought in Laleli to former Soviet states. During this period, textile products produced in Türkiye found profitable buyers in Czechia. The Turkish traders involved in the textile business in Czechia sourced their products from Türkiye.

¹ Laleli, located in the historical district of Istanbul, stands as one of the most prominent sites reflecting the social, economic, and cultural transformations that have shaped the city over time. During the late Ottoman period and the early years of the Republic, Laleli functioned as a cultural hub. However, following the 1980s, it emerged as a key center of human mobility and economic activity in Istanbul, mirroring the rural-to-urban migration trends in Türkiye. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Laleli became one of the initial points of contact for traders arriving from former Soviet countries (Öz, 2003), and played a central role in the rise of the suitcase trade during that era. In subsequent years, Laleli continued to develop as a dense commercial zone, with its merchants coming to represent a spirit of entrepreneurship and outward-looking economic engagement.

The textile business for Turks in Czechia initially started in Ostrava and Prague, later expanding to other regions. This activity involved wholesale supply to clothing stores and direct sales in markets. However, establishing stores and entering retail was not feasible for Turks in the textile business in Czechia, with two notable exceptions; one of them being a Brno-based clothing store. By the early 2000s, due to reasons such as "increased competition, dominance of global companies in the market, and diversification of consumer preferences," the textile business lost its appeal for Turks. Consequently, nearly all those involved in this industry withdrew from the sector by the mid-2000s.

A similar situation also occurred in the souvenir sector. In the 1990s, there were about 20 souvenir shops owned by Turks in Prague's old town. However, similar to the textile sector, the number of Turks involved in this business has decreased over the years. Today, the number of Turkish-owned souvenir shops in Prague has dwindled to five. Additionally, the activities of the Türkiye-based company which specialized in the jewelry sector (which deals with items like gold) hold a significant place within the Turkish community in Czechia.

Another sector in which Turks invested during the early 1990s was tourism. The prominent company of this period, a Tourism Agency, held a significant market share. However, it was adversely affected by the 1997 economic crisis and subsequently ceased operations. While other tourism companies were established by Turks during the 1990s, these companies did not have long-term success.

In 1998, with the outlawing of gambling in Türkiye, two Turkish casinos relocated their operations to Czechia. Some employees from these casinos migrated to Czechia during this transition. Although not significant in number, this movement is notable for representing a different aspect of migration within the Turkish community in Czechia. This migration highlights the diversity and presence of the Turkish community across various sectors in Czechia.

4.2. Changing conditions: 2004-2016

The period after 1989 in Czechia was marked by comprehensive transformation across all sectors. This era of change brought both opportunities and challenges simultaneously. Czechia During this period, immigration policies in Czechia were twofold. Firstly, there was an influx of immigrants, particularly from neighboring countries, as Czechia transitioned from a transit country to a destination country. Secondly, the country sought to balance European Union immigration policies with its national policies. Despite the labor market's needs, a more "restrictive immigration policy" was adopted. Czechia

For the first Turks arriving in Czechia, the 1990s were a period of "*opportunity and advantage*." However, conditions changed in the new period after 2004. The advantages of the previous era ended, and a new reality emerged. Whether they had capital or not, Turks who came to Czechia from Türkiye and other European countries in the 1990s were primarily driven by investment and entrepreneurial ideas. The main reason for this was the perception that "*Czech lands were a country of opportunities in the new period*." Thus, it can be said that almost all Turks who came to Czechia in the 1990s viewed themselves as "*adventurous and entrepreneurial*." An interesting aspect is that this perspective also influenced their discourse. These individuals did not prefer the relatively negative term "immigrant" to describe their situation. According to them, an "immigrant" is someone who moves out of necessity, while their choice was "*voluntary and unique*." This perspective changed in later years.

During this period, the Turkish population in Czechia experienced a gradual increase, though the rise was not pronounced. In 2004, the community numbered 520 individuals, growing to 1,664 by 2015. This period signifies a transitional phase in which an emerging social fabric began to intertwine with the established social structure, reflecting an evolving and complex sociological landscape. The question is: What did the Turks who came to Czechia in the 1990s do in the 2000s, and how did they transform? This question can be answered under three main headings: "The efforts of Turkish entrepreneurs to establish themselves in Czechia, the decline in the importance of the textile sector for Turkish immigrants, and the search for new business sectors by the first Turks to arrive in Czechia."

The Turkish community in Czechia underwent a transformation in the 2010s. This shift also changed the perception of Czechs among Turks. Czechia transitioned from being seen as a "former communist country" to

being considered a "developed country in Europe." Consequently, the concept of "moving from Türkiye to Czechia" in the 1990s evolved into "migrating from Türkiye to Czechia" in the 2010s. Undoubtedly, changes in Türkiye also influenced this phenomenon. According to many, while Türkiye's economic and political conditions were relatively better between 2002 and 2012, they deteriorated after 2012. As a result, migration from Türkiye to abroad accelerated after 2012. The features defining the third period actually began in the second period. That is to say, the labor migration and highly skilled migrant influx into Czechia's Turkish community started in the second period, but it became the dominant characteristic in the third period.

4.3. Increase in Numbers Due to Kebab Shops and Highly Skilled Migrants: The Third Period, 2016–2024

The 2015 Migrant Crisis was one of Europe's most significant challenges, and it became a prominent issue within Czechia as well. Although Czechia was not directly impacted by this crisis, it sparked intense public and media debate around migration and migrant-related issues. This period also coincides with a notable increase in Turkish migration to Czechia. Amid heightened discussions on migration across Europe, particularly in Türkiye and Czechia, the number of Turks relocating to Czechia rose considerably—from 1,664 in 2015 to 5,500 by 2024 (Czech Statistical Office, 2024). This indicates that the Turkish population in Czechia has grown more rapidly during this period compared to previous years. Although the phenomenon of migration is undoubtedly complex, these theories are important as a starting point for understanding the connection between the country of origin and the country of migration. Therefore, to grasp the reasons behind migration during this period, it is useful to examine the situations in both Türkiye and Czechia, particularly focusing on the factors affecting international migration in Türkiye post-2010.

In reflection of the factors delineated above, the number of highly skilled migrants from Türkiye to developed European countries has increased since 2015. This phenomenon has similarly impacted migration flows from Türkiye to Czechia, resulting in a marked increase in the arrival of highly skilled migrants in recent years. Simultaneously, labor migration from Türkiye to Czechia has also seen a significant uptick. Thus, in this third phase of the Turkish community's development in Czechia, both highly skilled and labor migrants have contributed to the population's growth in parallel. These two migrant groups have played a pivotal role in the formation and ongoing evolution of the Turkish community, shaping its demographic profile and social structure within Czechia.

Czechia has become an attractive destination for labor migration in recent years (Kurylo, 2024). In this context, the Turkish labor migration in Czechia is often associated with the kebab sector. Doner kebab, one of the most renowned products of Turkish cuisine, is widely consumed across Europe. Introduced by Turkish workers who migrated to Europe in the 1960s, doner kebab has become one of the most popular fast food options on the continent today. Reflecting this trend, kebab shops began to open in Czechia in the 2000s, with their visibility increasing significantly by the 2010s. According to interviews, the first kebab shop in Czechia was opened in 1993 by a Turkish individual who moved from Switzerland to Czechia. Located on in Prague, this kebab shop closed shortly thereafter. However, Another Kebap shop, which opened in Prague in 1995, has continued to operate to this day and has therefore earned a special place within the Turkish community in Czechia. Consequently, this shop recognized as the earliest continuously operating Turkish kebab shop in the country.

Following 1995, similar restaurants began to appear across Czechia; however, the prevalence of kebab shops remained relatively limited until the 2010s. However, post-2010, there was a noticeable increase in the number of kebab shops, making them more visible in the urban landscape. As of 2024, there are approximately 2,000 kebab shops in the country, with their distribution aligning with the spread of the foreign and Turkish populations. It is estimated that there are around 400 kebab shops in Prague, 100 in Brno, and about 50 in Ostrava, with kebab shops now present in every city and town across Czechia. During this period, the kebab sector has played a significant role in the increase of Turkish migration to Czechia and in shaping the Turkish community there.

In recent years, highly skilled migration has emerged as a central focus within migration studies in Czechia (Schováňková, 2013; Bernard et al., 2012; Bernard et al., 2014; Čuhlová and Potužáková, 2017). In the third phase of the Turkish community's evolution in Czechia, there was a notable increase in its population, driven

predominantly by the arrival of highly skilled migrants from Türkiye. As of 2024, approximately 2,500 out of the 5,668 Turks in Czechia are highly skilled migrants. Although the overall Turkish population in Czechia is small, the recent influx of highly skilled migrants has contributed to a relative increase, leading to the conceptualization of "old comers and new comers." This group of migrants often refers to themselves as "white-collar" workers. However, this new situation has its history. This prompts an inquiry into the evolution of white-collar workers within the Turkish community in Czechia over time. Addressing this requires consideration of the global expansion of multinational and technology companies, alongside the sectoral growth within Czechia. Therefore, three main factors influencing the migration of highly skilled migrants from Türkiye to Czechia include: the changes in professions and migration patterns due to globalization and digitalization, the increase in highly skilled migration from Türkiye, and Czechia's attractiveness as a technological hub for the educated population from countries like Türkiye.

Table 2- Periods of Turkish Migration in Czechia

Period	Turkish Population in CZ	Turkish Migration Types	Factors Affecting Turkish Migration to Czechia
First Period First Steps (1989-2004)	224 in 1994	Entrepreneurs who came after the communist regime, Investments in textiles, tourism, furniture, souvenirs, entertainment, optics.	The end of the Cold War, the removal of ideological borders, Small-scale entrepreneurs from Türkiye to former communist countries
	520 in 2004	Turkish concentration in textiles and souvenirs,	Post-1989 transformation in Czechia Transition to a free market economy
Second Period Changing Conditions (2004-2016)	520 in 2004	-Successful and unsuccessful entrepreneurs - The search for new job opportunities and changes in professions - Labor migration and Highly skilled migrants	Czechia's entry into the EU Schen Visa agreement.
	2,163 in 2016		
Third Period Increasing Number (2016 - present)	2,163 in 2016	Labor migration and increase in the number of Kebab shops Increasing number of highly skilled migrants.	Increasing international cuisine in Czechia Czechia as a technology hub Presence of global technology companies in Czechia
	5,668 in 2024	Incidence of illegal migration	

The influx of highly skilled Turkish migrants entering Czechia via employer sponsorship remains relatively limited, representing an isolated occurrence rather than contributing to a broader sociological trend. The increase in the number of highly skilled migrants in Czechia parallels the rise in the migration of educated individuals from Türkiye abroad since the mid-2010s. In Turkish academic literature, the term "brain drain" is often preferred over "highly skilled migrants," and studies have highlighted the migration of educated individuals from Türkiye to other countries. These studies underscore Türkiye's enduring and escalating challenge of brain drain (Tansel & Güngör, 2003). Since the 1950s, Türkiye has experienced substantial external migration, establishing it as a prominent sociological phenomenon. Naturally, the characteristics of this migration have shifted significantly over time, evolving from labor-intensive flows to knowledge-intensive migration over the past 70 years (Kahya, 2022). The roots of brain drain in Türkiye trace back to the 1960s, when professionals such as doctors and engineers were among the earliest to migrate (Kattel & Sapkota, 2018).

5. CONCLUSION: THE FORMATION OF THE TURKISH COMMUNITY IN CZECHIA

When discussing Turkish migration in Europe, the existing literature is predominantly concentrated on countries such as Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands. This focus is unsurprising given the historical and demographic weight of these contexts. However, following the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, new migration destinations have emerged across Europe. One such example is Czechia, where a small yet notable Turkish community has taken shape. Despite its significance, scholarly engagement with this emerging phenomenon remains remarkably scarce. Apart from a single study by Tungul, there is virtually no literature on

the subject. This study seeks to address that gap. Nonetheless, it sharply diverges from Tungul's analysis. As emphasized throughout this work, there has been a recent increase in the number of highly skilled migrants from Türkiye to Czechia. Tungul, however, explains this trend primarily through the lens of Türkiye's domestic political developments, thereby reducing the entire migration phenomenon to a singular explanatory framework. In contrast, this study aspires to offer a more nuanced understanding by exploring the historical trajectory of Turkish migration to Czechia and examining the contemporary drivers of migration alongside the social, political, cultural, and economic dimensions of the Turkish community that has emerged over time.

This study has offered a diachronic examination of Turkish migration to Czechia, highlighting its evolving character through distinct historical phases and situating it within the broader context of post-1989 migration regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. The analysis reveals a shift from entrepreneurial, small-scale, and often transient migration in the 1990s toward a more diverse and demographically complex community in the 2000s and 2010s, characterized by the increasing presence of highly educated and professionally mobile individuals.

Rather than merely documenting population growth, the study underscores how the Turkish community in Czechia has transformed into a visible and spatially embedded migrant group, particularly in urban centers like Prague and Brno. The proliferation of Turkish-owned businesses, cultural events, and social gathering spaces suggests not only a consolidation of communal presence but also a gradual transition from migrant presence to diasporic formation. While the term "diaspora" has often been reserved for large, transgenerational, and politically organized communities, emerging scholarship emphasizes the fluidity of diasporic identities and the significance of transnational practices, symbolic attachments, and everyday place-making in the construction of diaspora (Brubaker, 2005; Vertovec, 1999). From this perspective, the Turkish population in Czechia may not (yet) constitute a fully institutionalized diaspora, but it can be analyzed as a diasporic formation in progress, marked by increasing communal visibility, cultural expression, and spatial anchoring.

Significantly, although recent trends point to a growing influx of highly skilled Turkish migrants—many of whom are motivated by economic prospects, educational opportunities, and an enhanced quality of life—any attempt to forecast future demographic trajectories must be approached with analytical caution. The projection of continued growth in the Turkish population in Czechia is underpinned by a constellation of mutually reinforcing factors: the consolidation of migrant networks that facilitate subsequent arrivals, the increasing enrollment of Turkish students in Czech institutions, the expanding footprint of Turkish actors within the gastronomy sector, and Czechia's immigration policies that remain receptive to the entry of high-skilled individuals. While estimations of future demographic expansion inevitably involve a degree of speculation, such speculative dimensions are intrinsic to the nature of migration forecasting itself. Given current socio-political and structural conditions, it is nonetheless plausible to anticipate a sustained rise in the number of Turkish migrants settling in Czechia. However, this projection must also be critically balanced against possible future constraints, including restrictive immigration policies, rising xenophobia, and broader anti-immigrant sentiments across Europe—Czechia included. Research on migration governance and public discourse in Central Europe has documented the ambivalent role of smaller migrant communities in public perception, particularly when racial, religious, or cultural difference is emphasized (Drbohlav & Džurová, 2017). Hence, the future trajectory of the Turkish presence in Czechia will be shaped not only by individual aspirations or economic incentives but also by structural factors, including legal frameworks, media narratives, and political climate.

In light of these findings, this study proposes that Turkish migration to Czechia be understood within a hybrid conceptual framework that moves between post-entrepreneurial migration, diasporic emergence, and high-skilled mobility. These categories, while analytically distinct, are empirically interwoven in the Czech context. Recognizing the community's heterogeneity and layered temporalities allows for a more accurate and nuanced account of its current status and future potential. Furthermore, this approach contributes to the broader literature on emerging migrant geographies in Central Europe, offering insight into how "new" migrant destinations reconfigure classical understandings of diaspora, integration, and transnationalism.

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