




RESEARCH ARTICLE

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## Türkiye's Harmonization With the EU's Maritime Policies: An Analysis in the Framework of the EU Country Reports Between 2018 and 2023

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### Abstract

This study addresses Türkiye's policies in the maritime sector to evaluate their compliance with European Union (EU) maritime policies. Maritime transport serves as a catalyst for the economic development and prosperity of the EU. The EU adopts a maritime transport policy that is environmentally friendly, sustainable, fair, and developed within the framework of competition rules, requiring international cooperation and coordination, as well as integration with digital systems. Türkiye is a candidate state for EU membership, which means that it is supposed to converge its policies to those of the EU and make required harmonization in its national legislation. Therefore, Türkiye must develop policies and align its legislation in the maritime sector with the EU's policies in this domain. In this context, the study, utilizing a document-based analysis in a qualitative research approach, aims to investigate the current level of Türkiye's alignment with EU maritime policies. This is achieved by examining the EU country reports published by the European Commission between 2018 and 2023. The study concludes with findings and recommendations regarding Türkiye's adherence to EU maritime policy, particularly in the areas of international agreements, marine safety, environmental protection, legislation, digitalization, and port management.

**Keywords:** European Union, Maritime Policy, Transport, Maritime Transport, Türkiye

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### Article Information

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## 1. Introduction

With its unique geographical location at the intersection of Africa, Asia, and Europe, Türkiye holds a significant position in global trade, accounting for 87.5% of its foreign trade by sea in 2023 (DTO, 2024, p. 109). This number demonstrates that trade by sea occupies a considerable position in Türkiye's commercial connections, which leads to the conclusion that Türkiye is supposed to embrace a policy aimed at enhancing the quality and competitiveness of its maritime transport in international standards.

The necessity for Türkiye, as a candidate state for EU membership, to maintain its maritime transport up to international standards aligns with its obligations arising from the membership process. Maritime transport serves as a catalyst for the economic development and prosperity of the EU. It is the primary mode of transport for European imports and exports with the rest of the world and accounts for approximately 90% of EU foreign trade (EC, 2023a). Therefore, the EU attaches importance to ensuring integration between transport modes, developing short sea shipping, and growing trans-European transport networks. The EU adopts a maritime transport policy that is environmentally friendly, sustainable, and fair. It is developed within the framework of competition rules, requiring international cooperation and coordination, and integrates with digital systems.

This study examines Türkiye's maritime policies to assess their adherence to EU maritime policies, with a particular focus on reviewing EU country reports from 2018 to 2023. Since 1962, Türkiye has integrated maritime policy into its development plans, with national priorities serving as the primary determinants until the 1990s. Despite initiating the association relationship with the EU in 1963, Türkiye included the integration of the maritime sector into the EU's agenda in the mid-1990s. The EU granted Türkiye the status of a candidate state for EU membership in 1999, and the full membership negotiation process began in 2005, making the maritime sector one of the most significant topics for bilateral relations. In this context, the study examines Türkiye's maritime transport actions and the process of harmonizing them with the EU, while taking into account the fundamental principles of the EU's maritime transport policy. It specifically aims to generate answers to the questions of "What are the maritime policies of the EU and Türkiye?", "To what extent are Türkiye's maritime policies compatible with the EU maritime policies considering the EU country reports between 2018 and 2023?", "What actions should Türkiye take to ensure compliance with EU maritime policies?"

This article seeks to address the aforementioned questions through a qualitative, document-based analysis. Some studies handle Türkiye's harmonization with the EU's maritime transport policies, to the best of their ability. For instance, Erdönmez and İncaz (2016) examined the latest developments in maritime transport in Türkiye within the framework of the communication from the Commission, "Strategic Goals and Recommendations for the EU's Maritime Transport Policy Until 2018," published in 2009. Aygün (2012) conducted an analysis of Türkiye's maritime policies, based on progress reports and country reports covering the period from 2005 to 2011. Karahan (2011) perused the EU's maritime policies from a legal and historical perspective and addressed the relationship between EU maritime policies and Turkish legislation in the

maritime sector. Özen (2007) delved into the maritime policies of the EU, its member states, and Türkiye and made recommendations on Türkiye's harmonization with EU maritime policies. This article examines the current level of harmonization between Türkiye and the maritime policies of the EU by examining EU country reports from 2018 to 2023, with the aim of making a modest contribution to the existing literature on this topic.

The subsequent section, following the introduction, delineates the maritime transport policies of the EU by examining the communications and reports published by the Commission. The third section analyzes Türkiye's maritime transport policy, evaluating the implemented national development plans. The fourth section is related to Türkiye's initiatives to harmonize its law with the EU's *acquis* in the maritime sector. The fifth section addresses Türkiye's progress towards the EU maritime policies in the framework of the country reports between 2018 and 2023 issued by the Commission. Finally, the discussion and conclusion section emphasizes the main findings and offers recommendations about Türkiye's adherence to EU maritime policies.

## **2. EU's Maritime Transport Policies**

Most of the EU's current maritime policies date back to the mid-1990s (Karahan, 2011, p. 48). In 1996, the Commission issued two documents: "Towards a New Maritime Strategy" (EC, 1996a) and "Shaping Europe's Maritime Future—A Contribution to the Competitiveness of Europe's Maritime Industries" (EC, 1996b). These documents emphasized the necessity for enhanced regulation regarding navigation safety, the liberalization of the maritime market, the management of state aid within the maritime sector, the continuity of port policy, and the development of short-sea shipping. The White Paper of 2001 introduced a system consisting of sixty measures aimed at improving the transportation system in Europe, covering the maritime sector. It stated the requirement of advanced rules for maritime safety and called for strengthened cooperation with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) regarding minimum working conditions (EC, 2001, p. 42). The Commission published the "Programme for the Promotion of Short Sea Shipping" in 2003, outlining fourteen actions with legal, technical, and operational dimensions to boost short-sea shipping in Europe (EC, 2003).

In 2006, the Commission adopted the "Green Paper Towards a Future Maritime Policy for the Union: A European Vision for the Oceans and Seas" to establish a wide-scale discussion on the need for an EU approach to maritime policy. The document offered a policy addressing oceans and seas in a holistic way and aiming to mutually reinforce economic growth, social well-being, and environmental protection for sustainable development (EC, 2006, pp. 4–5). The Commission issued the "Progress of the EU's Integrated Maritime Policy" document in 2007, which embraced a holistic approach to all EU maritime policies. The document stated that the EU's integrated maritime policy aimed to establish a framework for coordinating maritime activities, guaranteeing the most sustainable use of oceans and seas, facilitating the expansion of maritime areas and coastal zones for maritime transport, enhancing the efficiency of maritime transport in Europe, ensuring the sector's long-term competitiveness by creating a barrier-free Europe, and formulating a transportation strategy for maritime transportation between 2008 and 2018 (EC, 2009, p. 9). The Commission adopted "Strategic Goals and

Recommendations for the EU's Maritime Transport Policy Until 2018" in 2009 to specify strategic goals and recommendations for the EU's maritime transport policy, which rested on sustainable development, economic growth, fair competition, and the opening of new markets in the context of high social and environmental standards. Another significant document for the EU's maritime policy is the "Valletta Declaration" under the title of "Priorities for the EU's Maritime Transport Policy Until 2020," published in 2017 during Malta's Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The document stated the priorities of the EU's maritime transport policies as competitiveness, digitalization, and decarbonization (Ubillos et al., 2021, p. 3).

The main objective of the EU is to establish a policy that promotes fair competition, sustainable development, quality transportation, qualified personnel, international cooperation, and digital transformation in maritime. Moreover, when evaluating transportation and maritime activities from a green perspective, the EU has taken significant steps to reduce the environmental harm caused by these activities. These measures include preventing pollution from ships, promoting energy-saving measures, and lowering the emissions of maritime practices (Pape, 2020, p. 7). In this regard, the EU published the European Green Deal (EGD) in 2019, adopted a set of targets, including zero greenhouse gas emissions throughout Europe by 2050, and implemented several initiatives to achieve these targets. One of these initiatives is the Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) system that is applied to ships over 5,000 gross tonnages entering, leaving, or operating in ports of EU member states, which provides the EU with collecting accurate information on large ships by monitoring fuel consumption, carbon dioxide emissions, distance traveled, time spent at sea, details of cargo carried, shipping work, and average energy efficiency (Luo et al., 2024, p. 1). As of January 1, 2025, general cargo ships between 400 and 5,000 gross tonnages and seagoing vessels of 400 gross tonnages and above will also fall within the scope of the amended MRV Regulation (EMSA, 2024). Another significant initiative within the framework of the EGD is the publication of the "Fit for 55" proposal package by the Commission in 2021, which aims to align the EU's climate, energy, land use, transportation, and taxation policies with the 55% emission reduction target. This package includes suggestions such as expanding the application of emissions trading to new sectors, tightening the existing EU Emissions Trading System (ETS), boosting the use of renewable energy, enhancing energy efficiency, providing low-emission transportation modes, infrastructure, and fuels to support them, and aligning taxation policies with the climate target (European Council, 2024). The Commission promotes the use of renewable, low-carbon fuels and clean energy technologies for ships, which are essential to support decarbonization in the sector, by adopting the FuelEU Maritime Directive in July 2023. Regardless of their flag, ships over 5,000 gross tonnage calling at European ports are subject to the maximum limits set by FuelEU Maritime for their annual average greenhouse gas intensity of energy (EC, 2023b). Another significant step is the expansion of the EU ETS to include the maritime sector, effective from January 1, 2024. This agreement will subject all intra-European routes and 50% of the extra-European routes operated by ships of 5,000 gross tons and above to the EU ETS. This represents approximately 90% of the carbon dioxide emissions of all vessels calling at ports in the European Economic Area (Vierth et al., 2024, p. 2).

Furthermore, the EC has decided to include ships from non-EU countries in the ETS's scope starting in 2027 (EC, 2024).

Port management is another matter to which the EU attaches great significance. Europe's ports are vital gateways connecting transport corridors to the rest of the world. Sea transports 74% of goods entering and leaving Europe, and Rotterdam, Antwerp, and Hamburg boast some of the world's best port facilities (EC, 2023c). The EU adopted a declaration on the port policy in 2007 with the purpose of creating an EU port capable of meeting future challenges. The declaration included recommendations for improving port performance and hinterland connections, increasing port capacities in an environmentally friendly manner, modernizing ports, ensuring equal conditions for investors, operators, and users, establishing communication between ports and cities, and improving working conditions in ports (EC, 2007, pp. 3–8).

Digital maritime services across the EU aim to facilitate maritime transport in a safe, secure, and competitive manner. The EU needs digital maritime systems to respond to the growing trade and market volume in the maritime sector and carry out operations faster and with fewer errors. (Eyit et al., 2022, p. 43). In this regard, it conducted specific initiatives such as SafeSeaNet, which provides maritime data sharing for the EU's digital maritime systems; e-Manifest, which aims to reduce the administrative burden for ship data providers; and e-Maritime, which seeks the better use of applications, information, and communication technologies to promote the competitiveness of the European maritime transport sector and achieve more efficient use of resources (EC, 2023d, 2023e, 2023f). Such innovative practices provide safety, security, and sustainability at sea, as well as the unhindered continuation of European maritime transport activities.

The EU places importance on the training and employment of maritime workers. Competent personnel are significant not merely to ensure maritime safety and protect the marine environment but also to support the growth and prosperity of the maritime sector. In this regard, the EU has adopted a set of special rules concerning the training and certification of seafarers since 1994 with the purpose of transposing the international standards stated by the Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping (STCW) Convention and providing all seafarers on the EU's ships with a level of competence at least equivalent to that required by the STCW Convention (EC, 2023g). The ILO adopted the Maritime Labor Convention (MLC-2006) at the international level in 2006 to guarantee decent working and living conditions on board for all seafarers, irrespective of their nationality or the flag of the ships they sail on, and to provide fairer competitive conditions for rule-abiding operators who often suffer from substandard shipping. The EU fervently supports MLC-2006 and has transposed most of it into its law, although it is neither a party to the ILO nor the Convention (EC, 2023h).

### **3. Türkiye's Maritime Transport Policies**

Türkiye's transport policies largely depended on railways and sea transportation between 1923 and 1950 (TMMOB Makine Mühendisleri Odası, 2019, p. 9). The shares of railway, maritime, and road transportation in Türkiye's trade were, respectively, 55.1%, 27.8%, and 17.1% in 1950. Since 1950, the adoption of policies supporting road transportation has led to a dependence

on this mode of transportation (DPT, 2007a, p. 1). Since 1962, the development plans for five-year periods have significantly advanced the maritime sector and other sectors in Türkiye.

In the First Five-Year Development Plan (1963–1967), the main principles and general objectives were the best use of the existing capacity without further investment and the improvement of services by reducing costs in passenger and freight transportation (DPT, 1963, p. 384). One of the short-term goals was to carry at least half of Türkiye’s export goods on Turkish-flagged ships. Building a newer modern merchant marine fleet capable of competing with foreign-flagged ships in international waters was among the long-term goals (DPT, 1963, p. 387).

The Second Five-Year Development Plan (1968–1972) aimed to coordinate all transportation modes in a single center, the Ministry of Transport, and specified the essentials of transportation policy. The plan included the goals of renewing the maritime sector and achieving competitiveness for the first time. The plan emphasized the need for a comprehensive modernization of the maritime sector, encompassing management, administration, organization, and planning, to foster a progressive, dynamic, and adaptable structure. The plan also specifically underlined the establishment of a “General Directorate of Ports” affiliated with the Ministry of Transport to manage port-related services from a single source (DPT, 1968, p. 581). The Third Five-Year Development Plan (1973–1977) designated the first tangible target, the operation of four ships and two trailers with a total capacity of 5,000 in 1975 for the Turkish maritime sector (DPT, 1973, p. 600).

Due to the rapid increase in oil prices worldwide at the time, the Fourth Five-Year Development Plan (1979–1983) indicated the priority of decreasing the use of fuel in transportation services and the external dependence of the transportation sector. The plan emphasized the need to implement the necessary measures to shift the industry’s freight transportation to railway and sea routes, increasing the proportion of maritime transport from 9.5% in 1977 to 10.7% in 1983 (DPT, 1979, p. 413).

In light of increasing fuel costs and growing environmental consciousness, the Fifth Five-Year Development Plan (1985–1989) proposed strategies to transition domestic transportation towards maritime options, which presented more economical unit prices. The plan also emphasized completing existing port investments in the prescribed period, investing in a new port in the Marmara region, and preparing projects to build container terminals in some of Türkiye’s most important ports in international transportation. Thus, it aimed to render the Turkish merchant marine fleet compatible with international maritime transportation by adopting a modern management approach (DPT, 1984, p. 115).

During the Sixth Five-Year Development Plan (1989–1994), the maritime sector was considered a transportation system that would promote the country’s development, facilitate international trade, and contribute significantly to the country’s balance of payments. This plan prioritized integration with the EU for the first time, with the aim of harmonizing with the EU’s transportation policies. It prioritized personnel training in infrastructure and management to closely pursue international developments and configure services for the maritime sector in accordance with Türkiye’s needs (DPT, 1989, p. 270).



The Seventh Five-Year Development Plan (1996-2000) provided an integrated and stable approach to transportation systems and also designated the preparation of a "Transportation Master Plan" since a transportation policy parallel to the economic and social development of Türkiye could not yet be determined (DPT, 1995, p. 147). The report underscored the achievement of national regulations on marine insurance, the environment, financial rent, shipping agency regulation, and the establishment of a specialized maritime court to fully comply with the conditions of global maritime trade and with the EU's maritime policies (DPT, 1995, p. 151).

The Eighth Five-Year Development Plan (2001-2005) aimed to enhance, modernize, and expand the capabilities of Turkish ports in accordance with the "National Ports Master Plan," finalized in 2000, to establish Türkiye as a transit corridor in transportation (DPT, 2000, p. 157). Given that Türkiye's accession to the EU would terminate the coastal transportation monopoly, it was resolved to implement measures that would support coastal cargo and passenger ships in port services and fueling. This initiative aimed to shift Türkiye's cargo and passenger transport towards maritime transportation, deemed essential for enhancing the competitiveness of the merchant marine fleet in anticipation of potential EU competition upon membership (DPT, 2000, p. 158).

The Ninth Development Plan (2007-2013) included the objective of providing road and railway connections to be a logistics center capable of combined transportation. Additionally, it was emphasized that ship and port investments would be enhanced for the improvement of short-sea shipping. The plan also underlined the improvement of flag, port, and coastal state controls and, in this regard, the achievement of projects for ship traffic services in ports and gulf areas to ensure maritime security (DPT, 2007b, p. 71). The Specialization Commission Report for the Ninth Development Plan underscored the significance of the TRACECA project and the Marco Polo program in compliance with the EU's maritime transport policies (DPT, 2007a, pp. 53-54).

The Tenth Development Plan (2014-2018) laid emphasis on the need for a balanced distribution of transportation among transportation modes. It was affirmed in the plan that considerable progress had been achieved in the areas of port and coastal state control as stated by the Paris Memorandum of Understanding on Port State Control (Paris MoU hereafter), which promoted Türkiye to the white flag. Owing to the particular advancements in flag, port, and coastal state controls and putting the automatic identification system into operation, Türkiye accomplished significant developments in the maritime security field (Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2013, p. 108).

The Eleventh Development Plan (2019-2023) reiterated the measures to eliminate the imbalances among transportation modes, which included plans primarily related to roads and railways. In this plan, maritime transport was of secondary importance, and some evaluations were made specifically for ports. In this regard, the plan aimed to holistically coordinate the port investments of the public and private sectors and disseminate environmentally friendly and sustainable port practices. It was also marked that the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure (MTI) would take the necessary steps in coordination with relevant stakeholders to prevent small-scale, dispersed, inefficient, and low-quality port infrastructure and that Green

Port practices would be supported to enhance energy efficiency, minimize environmental impacts, and ensure sustainability in port operations (CSBB, 2019, p. 117).

The Twelfth Development Plan, the current development plan covering the period from 2024 to 2028, outlines the main objectives. These include developing intermodal and multimodal transportation applications, establishing a safe, accessible, holistic, environmentally friendly, and low-cost transportation system, creating an infrastructure that supports competitive production and exports, and maximizing the potential to become a regional base in transportation and logistics (CSBB, 2023, p. 136). The plan suggests enhancing coastal facilities and Turkish maritime trade to establish Türkiye as a regional and continental hub for maritime transport. The plan proposes the construction of a main port in the Eastern Mediterranean region to serve as the gateway to the Middle East and Central Asian countries, draw transit cargo, and boost exports. The plan also emphasizes the need to augment the number of low-tonnage vessels, which are significant for short-distance maritime transport, and implement appropriate financing models for the development of the Turkish maritime trade fleet (CSBB, 2023, pp. 137–139).

#### **4. Türkiye's Efforts in Complying With the EU's Maritime Transport Policies**

The EU prioritizes the maritime sector and has adopted policies to make this sector safer, more competitive, and more environmentally friendly (Karahan, 2011, p. 35). Motivated by the Single Market, the EU liberalized maritime cabotage on January 1, 1993, which led to disagreements among the EU's members. Although the Cabotage Regulation came into force, its implementation was a thorny process due to the ambivalent attitudes of the member states (Sefara, 2014, p. 109). Published in 2001, "National Programmes for the Adoption of the Acquis" indicated that the EU and Türkiye would agree on a timetable for the commencement of maritime cabotage trade (ABB, 2001, p. 208). However, upon EU membership, Türkiye should abolish the Cabotage Law in accordance with national law harmonization, allowing foreign-flagged ships to transport goods between Turkish ports. Thus, the Turkish maritime trade fleet needs to be modernized and brought to a level that can compete with that of the EU. As the member states of the EU, which were initially hesitant about the liberalization of cabotage, Türkiye should start a gradual liberalization of maritime cabotage (Demir, 2020, p. 71).

The elevation of Türkiye from the blacklist to the whitelist in the Paris MoU proves the improvement and development of Turkish maritime transport regarding port controls over the years (Cebeci, 2019, p. 122). In fact, the inspections conducted in 2021 under the Paris MoU revealed that only one out of a hundred ninety-three ships faced detention, marking the lowest detention rate to date (UAB, 2022, p. 118). Moreover, Türkiye has conducted a series of initiatives to comply with the EU's law regarding maritime transport. In 2004, the Directorate General for Maritime Affairs launched the "Support for Strengthening Maritime Safety" project, successfully harmonizing with the EU *acquis* to guarantee maritime safety and prevent ship-induced marine pollution (BABGS, 2011, p. 22). The ISM (International Safety Management) Code, which entered into force on March 24, 2006, is another initiative for maritime safety. Its purpose is to establish and implement security management systems on ships and the shore,



inspect ships by the flag state and port state administrations to control these systems, and establish maritime safety. As of its entry into force, the EU has introduced the requirement to obtain an ISM certificate for cargo ships and passenger ships making regular voyages to or from EU ports, regardless of their flag (EU, 2006, p. 5). Türkiye complied with this regulation in 2009.

The EU considers the privatization of EU ports and the amelioration of service quality. In accordance with the EU's maritime transport policies, public authorities of its member states have autonomy in making decisions about the functioning of ports and operational matters. However, public port authorities in Türkiye embrace a centralist approach (Arslan, 2011, p. 98), resulting in heavy bureaucracy, jurisdictional controversies, and workflow inhibitions. Türkiye should handle this matter, which induces a waste of resources and time in port operations, and all data related to port operations should be collected and managed from a single source by the MTI. Digitalization of port operations and workflow processes is among the ways to promote efficiency.

In line with the EGD's goal of zeroing greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, the green transformation of ports, which are sea and land connection centers, is of crucial importance. The EU has achieved considerable progress in reducing environmental pollution from transport in port areas and the maritime environment. The Commission issued the "European Ports Policy" in 2007, emphasizing the development of environmentally friendly port policies. The EU assists member states in promoting infrastructure, innovation, and green transformation in ports through specific initiatives like the Connecting Europe Facility Programme, which provides financial support for port infrastructure projects. EGD aims to transform the production infrastructure, resource consumption profile, and environmental and climate policies of the member states of the EU as well as non-members trading with it (Yıldırım Keser & Ceyhun, 2023, p. 59). Türkiye also supports the EGD, which is significant since Türkiye's trade relations are intense with the member states of the EU (Türker & Aydın, 2022, p. 3). Türkiye had already produced policies parallel to those of the EU. In 2013, Türkiye implemented the "Green Port" project, and in 2014, the MTI and the Turkish Standards Institute signed the Green Port Cooperation Protocol to audit the green port standards (TSE, 2023). In this regard, the MTI adopted the Regulation on the Issuance of Green Port Certificates for Coastal Facilities (UAB, 2023). Some ports, such as Asyaport, Altın Port, Bodrum Cruise Port, Borusan Port, Ege Port, Evyaport, Hopaport, Kumport, Limakport, Limaş Port, Mardaş Port, Marport, Petkim Port, Solventaş Port, Nemport, Efesanport, QTerminals Antalya, Poliport, and Samsunport, have green port licenses (Türklm, 2024). The European Sea Ports Organization has granted the Asyaport the EcoPort status, the most prestigious Environmental Management System Certificate in Europe, making it the first Turkish port to do so (Asyaport, 2023). The Borusan Port, having invested significantly, has also made significant strides in green port management (see Demirci & Arıcan, 2024). We can evaluate the environmental investments and advancements in Turkish ports as positive developments in line with the EGD and the EU's maritime targets.

Another critical issue for Türkiye is the training and employment of workers. Türkiye had 145,000 active seafarers in 2021, one of the countries with the highest numbers in quantity. Approximately 2000 officers graduate from universities every year. The supply of officers is

high, but there are significant difficulties in their employment in the national and international markets, partly because of qualitative incompetence. The number of public and private institutions providing maritime training has risen in recent years, yet there is still a labor shortage in the engineering officer class. Thus, maritime companies cannot employ officers with the qualifications they require. Although 70% of Turkish seafarers work on Turkish-flagged ships, this rate for foreign-flagged ships is below 1%, which indicates that the supply of seafarers is not compatible with the requirements of the international market (UAB, 2021, p. 182). The IMO's white list includes Türkiye, demonstrating complete compliance with the STCW Convention's training and certification requirements for its member countries. Since Türkiye implements the convention, it has signed protocols with thirty-five countries, enabling Turkish seafarers to work on ships flying their respective countries' flags. The European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) and the MTI conduct inspections in Türkiye to verify the compliance of the seafarers' training and certification system with the EU law on maritime transport. This law recognizes the qualification certificates issued to seafarers by EU member states (UAB, 2020, p. 459).

Türkiye is currently conducting the "Analysis of the Transport Legislation of Türkiye in the Process of Harmonization with the EU Acquis" (ATLAS) Project as part of its harmonization with the EU acquis. The MTI's implementation of the ATLAS Project aims to support Türkiye's economic and social development policies, as well as its integration with the EU, by fostering competitive, environmentally friendly, and sustainable transportation that aligns with the EU acquis. As one of the most significant manifestations of Türkiye's resoluteness in complying with the EU's transport policy, the project displays the differences and gaps in the regulations between the EU and Türkiye and brings recommendations to eliminate these gaps for Türkiye's harmonization. Regulatory impact assessment studies will support the suitability of the recommendations, and Türkiye will prepare a strategy report and action plan (ATLAS, 2023).

## **5. Türkiye's Harmonization with the EU's Maritime Policies in the Context of the EU Country Reports between 2018 and 2023**

The relations between Türkiye and the EU rest on the association partnership, established by the Ankara Agreement signed in 1963, and the candidate status, adopted at the Helsinki Summit held in 1999. Türkiye's membership negotiations with the EU commenced on October 3, 2005 (Reçber, 2016, p. 1). Screening meetings are the first stage of the negotiation process for accession.

In the screening process that started on October 20, 2005, the MTI directly undertook the coordination process in the Transport Policy, Chapter 14, and TEN, Chapter 21 (UAB, 2020, p. 734). Since December 2006, the negotiation process with the EU has suspended eight chapters, including the transport policy, due to Türkiye's failure to enforce the Additional Protocol (Reçber, 2016, p. 244). Despite the suspension of Chapter 14, which pertains to transport policy, the dialogue between Türkiye and the EU has continued. Türkiye has continued its efforts to harmonize with the EU acquis and concluded a number of projects within the framework of the EU's financial cooperation. To resolve issues and expedite technical collaboration, Türkiye established a high-level transportation dialogue mechanism (UAB, 2020, p. 734). In 2013, the

first High-Level Dialogue meeting took place, but the process remained dormant until 2017 (EC, 2019, p. 3). In 2017, during EU Transport Commissioner Bulc's visit to Türkiye, they decided to revitalize the Türkiye-EU High-Level Transport Dialogue (UAB, 2020, p. 734). The EU conducted the second meeting in the same year, and the last one took place in Brussels in January 2019. However, the EU imposed sanctions in July 2019 due to Türkiye's drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, which led to the cancellation of the high-level contract process and the Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement negotiations between Türkiye and the EU (EC, 2020, p. 3). The tension in the Eastern Mediterranean alleviated at the beginning of 2021, and the EU recommitted that it would be fruitful to advance a strategic relationship with Türkiye based on collaboration and mutual benefit in a stable and secure environment in the Eastern Mediterranean. Hence, the EU was inclined to gradually and proportionately sustain relations with Türkiye (EC, 2021, p. 2). In this regard, we expect the EU to re-establish the same transportation dialogue, where high-level talks on climate, migration, and security issues have taken place.

Each year, the Commission prepares country reports for the EU, which provide a comprehensive analysis of political, economic, and legal developments in candidate countries and evaluate their progress towards membership. The 2018 Country Report stated that Türkiye's transport policy was of moderate preparedness. The report underlined that the institutional and technical capacity for the implementation of international agreements regarding maritime transport was not well qualified, and the competent authorities should maintain their efforts to safeguard the marine environment and strengthen their capacity to respond to spills. It also reported that Türkiye was not yet a party to all crucial conventions of IMO, including Annex II of the Convention on the Facilitation of International Maritime Traffic, and did not put a signature on the Paris MoU. To fulfill their responsibilities under the IMO conventions that Türkiye had already ratified, maritime authorities needed to significantly build their institutional and technical capacity. Additionally, to participate in the Vessel Traffic Monitoring and Information System, they needed to further enhance the legal and technological framework for monitoring maritime transport, which international law recognized as applicable to coastal states (EC, 2018, pp. 76–77).

According to the 2019 Country Report, Türkiye's preparedness for transportation policy was considered moderate. The report highlighted that Türkiye, as a party to two IMO conventions on the control of harmful anti-fouling systems on ships and the safe and environmentally sound recycling of ships, must establish the necessary institutional and technical capacity to fulfill its responsibilities under these conventions. The report emphasized that Türkiye, despite being on the whitelist, refrained from signing the Paris MoU. According to the report, Türkiye adopted essential legislation to comply with the EU's policies on vessel traffic monitoring and information systems (EC, 2019, pp. 77–78).

In the 2020 Country Report, it was stated that Türkiye was moderately prepared in the field of transport policy, some progress was achieved in completing key sector reforms, most of the recommendations in the 2019 Country Report were prevailing, and negotiations on a comprehensive agreement in the aviation sector were suspended in line with the July 2019 Council decisions on Türkiye's drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. Regarding the maritime transport sector, the report expressed that Türkiye was at a good level of preparation.

The report also underlined that Türkiye aimed to establish the maritime single window, which requires the EU's maritime sector, and ensure financial capabilities to provide green maritime and decarbonization of maritime transport, which was considered a constructive step for the harmonization of the Clean Power for Transport Package and achievement of the global purposes stated by the Paris Agreement. The report marked that Türkiye should further invest in the institutional and technical capacity required to fulfill its IMO convention responsibilities and comply with EU regulations on seaports (EC, 2020, pp. 82–83).

The 2021 Country Report stated that Türkiye had moderate preparation in the field of transport policy and had made good progress in harmonizing with the EU's maritime transport law during the reporting period. The report highlighted the necessity for Türkiye to align the 2019 maritime single window with the *acquis*. Additionally, the General Directorate of Maritime Affairs, in collaboration with the EMSA, conducted training sessions on Marpol Annex VI, ballast water management, and marine pollution. The report recommends that Türkiye adhere to the new *acquis*, which mandates the comprehensive implementation of the one-off principle in port reception facilities for the reception of ship waste (EC, 2021, pp. 101–102).

Similar to previous reports, the 2022 Country Report emphasized Türkiye's moderate preparation in transport policy and its good performance in the maritime transport sector. Türkiye produced an online electronic legislative inventory tool to establish a monitoring system for continuous gap assessment, fill the gaps of the national legislation with that of the EU, and list a digital inventory of the Turkish transport legislation in English. The status of harbor masters was rearranged in April 2022 to enhance administrative efficiency. Türkiye has developed a financial support mechanism to facilitate the renewal of the Turkish maritime fleet with energy-efficient and environmentally friendly ships. This mechanism allows ship owners to receive grants up to two and a half times the salvage value of the ship, provided the new vessels use alternative fuels for their propulsion system. A revised regulation on the transport of dangerous goods by sea and safe loading came into force in April 2022. In December 2021, Türkiye significantly enhanced the capacity of the Maritime Safety Centre by adding a maritime simulator center. Additionally, as part of its ongoing intensive training program on oil pollution and maritime aid, it opened up the National Emergency Response Centre in Tekirdağ to neighboring countries (EC, 2022, pp. 109–110).

According to the 2023 Country Report, Türkiye's transport policy preparedness was moderate, while its maritime transport sector was at a good level. Türkiye published a new regulation to support the shift of freight transport from land to maritime. In August 2022, Türkiye adopted a new regulation that mandates the payment of \$2 per nautical mile to ro-ro operators to stimulate the establishment of new ro-ro lines. In this context, a new line was opened between İzmir and Sete. Türkiye's efforts to ensure decarbonization and green shipping in maritime transport continued by renewing its maritime fleet with energy-efficient and environmentally friendly ships. The government planned a transition to alternative fuels, such as green hydrogen and green methanol, under the framework of incentives. Türkiye has not yet prepared national legislation for the implementation of the European Union Port Services Regulation (EC, 2023i, pp. 110–111).

## **6. Discussion and Conclusion**

This study has examined Türkiye's maritime policies to assess their compliance with EU maritime policies, specifically through a review of EU country reports from 2018 to 2023. The EU assessed Türkiye's transport policies as moderately prepared, and the relevant EU country reports appraised its maritime transport policies as well prepared. Türkiye, as a candidate state to the EU, intently follows the developments in the EU's maritime sector. It has improved its legislation and taken significant steps in terms of harmonization with the EU acquis in this sector. However, considering the EU country reports between 2018 and 2023, Table 1 below summarizes Türkiye's shortcomings in the maritime sector and highlights the need for further enhancements to harmonize its maritime policy with that of the EU.

During the period between 2018 and 2020, the EU notified Türkiye about the development of institutional and technical capacity, as well as the signing of international agreements in the maritime sector. However, no specific notification was made on this matter between 2021 and 2023. According to the legislation, the EU noted positive developments when Türkiye became a party to two IMO conventions on the control of harmful corrosion prevention systems on ships and the safe and environmentally sound recycling of ships, issued a regulation on the Carriage of Hazardous Goods by Sea in 2022, and adopted a new regulation to promote the shift of cargo transportation from land to maritime transportation.

The Commission has started to evaluate the transport policy under the title of green agenda and sustainable connectivity in the country reports it has prepared since 2021, which indicates that the EU prioritizes green transformation and attaches particular importance to maritime safety and protection of the maritime environment in line with the Paris Climate Agreement and the EGD targets. Türkiye's efforts towards the adaptation to green transformation were generally considered positive by the EU. Regarding digitalization at sea, Türkiye adopted all necessary legislation in 2019 to comply with the EU's ship traffic monitoring and information system policies. Furthermore, the expectation is that the maritime single window will align with the EU acquis. However, Türkiye must adopt its national legislation to implement the European Union Port Services Regulation and comply with the EU's unprepared seaport legislation.

Türkiye's efforts to align with EU maritime policies prove its intention to raise its maritime standards and increase cooperation with the EU despite its turbulent bilateral relations. Within the scope of the research questions specified in the study's introduction section, the five headings identified above provide propositions for Türkiye's alignment with EU maritime transport policies. Türkiye should review the regulations adopted by IMO and the EU and harmonize its national legislation with these regulations. It should complete the approval process of MLC-2006 and align its current practices with this convention. The development of new regulations by Türkiye aimed at reducing ship-related emissions for maritime safety and environmental protection, as well as expanding the use of environmentally friendly alternative fuels in ship operations, would align with the goals of the EGD. Furthermore, since the EU attaches great importance to green ports, Türkiye may produce incentives to increase the number of green ports, which may decrease the use of environmentally harmful equipment in ports.

**Table 1**  
*Maritime Sector in Türkiye Within the Scope of EU Country Reports Between 2018 and 2023*

Subject	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
International Agreements	Institutional and technical capacity is limited.	Institutional and technical capacity is limited.	More investment is needed to improve institutional and technical capacity.	-	-	-
Maritime safety and protection of maritime environment	Technical studies are needed to protect the marine environment and strengthen spill response capacity.	Türkiye is a party to two IMO conventions on the control of harmful anti-fouling systems on ships and on the safe and environmentally sound recycling of ships.	Türkiye is developing a financial facility to enable green shipping and decarbonization of maritime transport.	The General Directorate of Maritime Affairs, in cooperation with EMSA, organized training on Marpol Annex VI, ballast water management, and marine pollution.	Türkiye has improved the financial support mechanism for the renewal of its maritime fleet with energy-efficient and environmentally friendly ships.	Türkiye's efforts to achieve decarbonization and green shipping in maritime transportation have continued with the renewal of its maritime fleet with energy-efficient and environmentally friendly ships. Within the scope of government incentives, a transition to alternative fuels such as green hydrogen and green methanol is planned.
Legislation	Türkiye has not signed the Paris MoU and is not a party to all of the IMO's fundamental conventions.	Despite being on the white list, Türkiye has signed the Paris MoU.	-	-	The Revised Regulation on the Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Sea and Their Safe Loading entered into force in April 2022.	A new regulation has been published to support the shift of freight transport from highways to maritime transport.
Digitalization	Further improvements are needed in the legal and technological framework for monitoring maritime transport.	Türkiye has adopted all necessary legislation to comply with the EU's policies on ship traffic monitoring and information systems.	Türkiye aims to establish a single maritime window.	Türkiye needs to bring its maritime single window into line with the acquis	Türkiye significantly increased the capacity of its Maritime Safety Center by adding a maritime simulator center in December 2021.	-
Port Management	-	-	Türkiye needs to comply with the relevant EU legislation regarding seaports.	-	In April 2022, the port authority status was rearranged to increase administrative efficiency in Türkiye.	Türkiye has not yet prepared national legislation for the implementation of the European Union Port Services Regulation



It should also finalize the necessary technical and administrative infrastructure preparations for the transition to digital systems in marine vessels and ports and promote the use of autonomous ships and R&D. Moreover, Türkiye's digitalization of port operations could potentially reduce the workforce and increase productivity by transitioning to autonomous and smart systems. It should also establish cooperation with international organizations such as the IMO and EMSA, and plan training to meet international and EU maritime standards for the implementation of international agreements.

Considering the determinations and propositions stated in the EU country reports analyzed in this study, it is recommended that Türkiye, as a candidate state, enhance its maritime policies and either become a party to or ratify international conventions to enhance its international competitiveness and strengthen its position in the EU membership process. This study clearly provides a general framework for understanding Türkiye's level of harmonization with the EU's maritime sector, allowing for a document-based analysis. A more specific or subject-focused study will be more insightful in shedding light on the shortcomings of Türkiye in this sector. Moreover, conducting interviews with the competent bodies of Türkiye and the EU can facilitate the harmonization of the former's maritime transport policies with those of the latter, based on the determinations and suggestions stated in the EU country reports. Such research may also be conducted with maritime companies since they need to keep their standards up to the international level to be competitive.

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#### ETHICS

The author declares that this article complies with ethical standards and rules.

#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

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#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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