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THE EU'S RESPONSE TO FEBRUARY 6 KAHRAMANMARAŞ EARTHQUAKES

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Abstract

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On February 6, 2023, Kahramanmaraş, Türkiye, experienced two of the most devastating earthquakes in recorded history, centered in Pazarcık and Elbistan districts. The disaster resulted in over 53,000 deaths, more than 100,000 injuries, and extensive damage to buildings. In the wake of this catastrophe, Türkiye issued a level 4 alert for the first time prompting a global response that included numerous countries and international organizations, particularly the EU. The EU activated the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, coordinating one of its largest search and rescue operations. This study focuses on the EU's response to Türkiye during and after the 6 February Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, utilizing primary sources from the European Commission, Council of Ministers, and European Parliament, as well as official statements and various reports. The analysis reveals the scale and effectiveness of the EU's aid, including the rapid deployment of rescue teams and humanitarian support and the organization of a Donors' Conference that raised over €7 billion for recovery efforts in Türkiye and Syria. Ultimately, the findings demonstrate that the EU did not abandon Türkiye but instead expressed solidarity through diverse forms of support.

Keywords: February 6 Kahramanmaraş/Türkiye Earthquakes, EU Civil Protection Mechanism, and EU Assistance.

Jel Codes: F50, F53, F35

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1. Introduction

Türkiye is prone to frequent natural disasters due to its location (Öztürk & Yetkiner, 2024: 120). In recent years, the country has faced various natural disasters, including floods, forest fires, landslides, avalanches, rockfalls, and, most notably, earthquakes. Earthquakes stand out as the most devastating in terms of their sudden, catastrophic impacts on society and the destruction they leave behind (Sabırsız & Şöhret, 2024: 574). These events are caused by sudden energy-induced vibrations in the earth's crust due to seismic activity, a geological process that has been occurring since the earth's formation (Aytış, 2023: 568). Throughout history, earthquakes have caused significant material damage and inflicted profound psychological trauma (Öztürk & Yetkiner, 2024: 120). They often result in immense tragedy for those affected. Many have died, paralyzed by fear, while others managed to escape and save themselves. Some victims endured hours or days trapped beneath debris before succumbing, and tragically, others lost their lives while attempting to call for help from under the rubble, but to no avail (Aytış, 2023: 570).

Türkiye has experienced numerous devastating earthquakes throughout its history. Among the most fatal and destructive were the 1999 Marmara earthquakes, the 1939 Erzincan earthquake, and the February 6, 2023, Kahramanmaraş earthquakes (Aydın, 2023: 2609). On February 6, two powerful earthquakes struck the Kahramanmaraş province. The first, known as the Pazarcık earthquake, had a magnitude of 7.7 on the Richter scale, while the second, the Elbistan earthquake, measured 7.6. These earthquakes affected an area spanning 110,000 square kilometers and impacted 13.5 million people, a scale of devastation rarely seen in human history. The destruction was likened to the impact of hundreds of atomic bombs (Akıllı, 2023: 3). The quakes resulted in thousands of deaths, injuries, and the demolition or severe damage of countless buildings. As a result, many politicians and researchers have referred to the February 6 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes as the greatest disaster of the century.

After the February 6 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, Türkiye issued a level 4 alert, requesting international assistance. In response, nations around the world offered their support, while those unable to provide direct aid expressed their condolences. A total of 102 countries deployed 11,488 international personnel from 90 nations to assist Türkiye. Numerous international organizations, including the EU, NATO, OSCE, the Organization of Turkic States, and others, demonstrated their solidarity with Türkiye (Akıllı, 2023: 18). These efforts demonstrate that, in the aftermath of the February 6 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, earthquake

diplomacy² was highly effective between Türkiye and third parties, including both states and international organizations.

Since the February 6 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, the EU and its member states have provided significant assistance to Türkiye. Furthermore, many local governments, non-governmental organizations, and private citizens also made substantial contributions to improve the situation in Türkiye. These aids included immediate humanitarian relief, such as the distribution of urgently needed food, drinking water, and medication, and longer-term support for those in need. In addition, the assistance covered the costs associated with the deployment of search and rescue teams, who were dispatched immediately after the disaster (ReliefWeb, 2023).

This study aims to analyze the EU's response to Türkiye's relief efforts following the February 6 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes. The study seeks to uncover how the EU supported Türkiye, a candidate country, throughout the most challenging period following the earthquake. The study specifically focuses on examining and explaining the aid provided by the EU. In addition, the EU's assistance to Türkiye after the 1999 Izmir and Düzce earthquakes has been mentioned, emphasizing that earthquakes contributed to Türkiye's recognition as a candidate for EU membership. The primary sources used in this study include publications from the European Commission, the Council of Ministers, and the European Parliament. Additionally, statements made by both EU officials during the earthquake crisis are examined. Other sources, such as news articles, earthquake reports, and academic works, have also been examined and referenced.

2. The February 6 Kahramanmaraş Earthquakes

Türkiye has experienced numerous massive earthquakes throughout its history due to its location on the highly seismically active Anatolian plate (Sabırsız & Şöhret, 2024: 574). Between 1900 and 2023, Türkiye suffered from 269 earthquakes, many of which resulted in fatalities and significant damage. More specifically, since 1900, the country has endured 20 earthquakes with a magnitude greater than 7 (Aydın, 2023: 2609). Some of the most destructive earthquakes include the December 27, 1939, Erzincan earthquake; the November 24, 1976, Van earthquake; the August 17, 1999, Marmara earthquake; the October 12, 1999, Düzce

² As a specific area of humanitarian diplomacy, earthquake diplomacy focuses on providing humanitarian relief following an earthquake. In other words, the humanitarian diplomacy method in general has built a bridge for cooperation and communication between states and societies throughout history (Şehitoğlu & Güner 2023: 1777).

earthquake; and most recently, February 6, 2023, Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, all of which had magnitudes above seven and caused severe loss of life and property (Sabırsız & Şöhret, 2024: 574)

Two earthquakes struck on February 6, 2023, with epicenters in Pazarcık and Elbistan, occurring at 04:17 a.m. and 1:24 p.m. Türkiye time. The depth of the first earthquake was 8.6 kilometers, while the second was 7 kilometers deep (Aydın, 2023: 2609). The February 6 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes affected several Turkish provinces, including Şanlıurfa, Osmaniye, Diyarbakır, Kilis, Adana, Gaziantep, Elazığ, Hatay, Adıyaman, and Malatya. Syria was also severely impacted, with the provinces of Tartous, Raqqa, Aleppo, Hama, Idlib, and Latakia (Avrupa Birliği Türkiye Delegasyonu, 2024: 5-6). Additionally, after causing widespread destruction and fatalities in Türkiye and Syria, the earthquakes were felt in Lebanon, Cyprus, Israel, Jordan, Egypt, and other nearby countries (Kavak, 2023: 22).

The February 6 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes in Türkiye directly affected 14 million people, resulting in 270,000 damaged buildings, 53,000 deaths, 107,000 injuries, and the displacement of 3 million people (Avrupa Birliği Türkiye Delegasyonu, 2024: 6). The devastation caused by the earthquakes and their aftershocks, combined with the psychological trauma, inadequate facilities, and widespread victimization, occurred simultaneously. While those trapped beneath the rubble struggled to survive, those outside faced harsh weather conditions and insufficient resources (Sabırsız & Şöhret, 2024: 575).

The earthquakes prompted a declaration of national mourning for one week, and on February 8, 2023, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan imposed a three-month state of emergency in the affected region (Özsalman & Yıldırım, 2024: 601). In response to the disaster, Türkiye issued a level 4 alert, seeking international assistance during its time of greatest need (Akıllı, 2023: 4). The earthquakes caused immense anguish not only for those directly affected but also for the people of Türkiye and beyond (Aytış, 2023: 570). In addition to governments and organizations like NATO and the EU, Türkiye's diplomatic missions overseas, Turkish nationals living abroad, and foreign nationals wishing to donate aid coordinated relief efforts. Expressions of sympathy and support poured in from around the world. According to statistics from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 88 countries sent field hospitals or medical personnel to assist with search and rescue operations in Türkiye by February 18 (Kavak, 2023: 22). President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan expressed his gratitude for the support received, stating, *"We will never forget the solidarity displayed during these difficult days by all our friends, by*

the EU together with its institutions as well as its member and candidate states, by the UN and other international organizations.” (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 2023).

3. EU Civil Protection Mechanism

Civil protection cooperation within the EU has reached significant improvements since the late 1980s (Rhinard, Hollis, & Boin, 2017: 249). To encourage member-state cooperation in the field of civil protection, the European Council created a resolution in 1987. Following that, a series of Council decisions and resolutions, as well as communications from the Commission, were put into effect, all of which were addressed to the Maastricht Treaty³ (Rhinard et al., 2017: 249). With the introduction of a “Community Mechanism to facilitate reinforced cooperation in civil protection assistance interventions,” the two-year program was modified in 1999 and turned into a five-year action program. The Mechanism is monitored by the Monitoring and Information Center to help with aid coordination in the case of a natural disaster that affects both EU member states and non-EU nations (Rhinard et al., 2017: 249). To successfully live up to the slogan of a “Europe that protects,” the EU and its member states must be prepared to take prompt action in times of emergency or natural disaster. Article 222⁴ of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU has a “solidarity clause” that aims to achieve this goal by mandating that the EU and its member states offer mutual aid to each other if an EU country is the subject of a terrorist attack or other natural or man-made catastrophe (Parker, Persson, and Widmalm, 2019: 1312). Furthermore, Lisbon Treaty⁵ signs out about cooperation under natural disasters.

³ “...Where a Member State is in difficulties or is seriously threatened with severe difficulties caused by exceptional occurrences beyond its control, the Council may, acting unanimously on a proposal from the Commission, grant, under certain conditions, Community financial assistance to the Member State concerned. Where the severe difficulties are caused by natural disasters, the Council shall act by qualified majority. The President of the Council shall inform the European Parliament of the decision taken.” (Article 103a Official Journal of the European Communities 1992).

⁴ “1. The Union and its Member States shall act jointly in a spirit of solidarity if a Member State is the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or man-made disaster. The Union shall mobilise all the instruments at its disposal, including the military resources made available by the Member States, to, p. (a) - prevent the terrorist threat in the territory of the Member States; - protect democratic institutions and the civilian population from any terrorist attack; - assist a Member State in its territory, at the request of its political authorities, in the event of a terrorist attack; (b) assist a Member State in its territory, at the request of its political authorities, in the event of a natural or man-made disaster. 2. Should a Member State be the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or manmade disaster, the other Member States shall assist it at the request of its political authorities. To that end, the Member States shall coordinate between themselves in the Council...” (Article 222, Official Journal of the EU 2012).

⁵ “1.The Union shall encourage cooperation between Member States in order to improve the effectiveness of systems for preventing and protecting against natural or man-made disasters. Union action shall aim to, p. (a) support and complement Member States’ action at national, regional and local level in risk prevention, in preparing their civil-protection personnel and in responding to natural or man-made disasters within the Union; (b) promote swift, effective operational cooperation within the Union between national civil-protection services;

In October 2001, the European Commission established the EU Civil Protection Mechanism to enhance collaboration among EU Member States and eight partner countries in disaster prevention, preparedness, and response (İKV, 2023). This mechanism has been created to strengthen systems for preventing, mobilizing, and responding to both natural and man-made disasters while also supporting and coordinating the civil protection efforts of EU Member States (Razumkov Centre, 2023: 21). In essence, EU civil protection aims to safeguard people, the environment, and property during and after major events, both domestically and internationally (Bremberg & Britz, 2009: 289). The mechanism is recognized as the world's most powerful system for coordinating international disaster relief and is a crucial component of Europe's civil protection framework (Razumkov Centre, 2023: 21). This goal has been implemented in operations involving emergency response teams, fire departments, and rescue services (Bremberg & Britz, 2009: 289).

The approval of a funding instrument for civil protection in 2007, which allocated \$189.8 million to support the mechanism between 2007 and 2013, significantly strengthened the Union's civil protection capabilities (Rhinard et al., 2017: 250). In December 2013, the EU's Civil Protection legislation was updated to include key elements such as preparedness, enhanced response systems, and disaster prevention, all of which are essential to a comprehensive disaster management program (Parker et al., 2019: 1318).

Currently, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism includes ten participating states (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Moldova, Iceland, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Norway, Türkiye, and Ukraine) in addition to the EU member states. Any country can request assistance through the Mechanism if it faces an emergency that exceeds its capacity to manage. The Mechanism plays a crucial role in coordinating disaster response by pooling knowledge and resources into a unified strategy. It covers 75% of the costs for operations and the delivery of aid to countries requesting assistance in emergencies. Since its inception in 2001, the Mechanism has been activated 600 times, with 114 activations in 2021 alone (İKV, 2023). For example, European leaders responded to major disasters such as the 2004 Asian tsunami and the terrorist attacks in Madrid (2004) and London (2005), emphasizing the importance of regional cooperation in civil protection (Ekengren et al., 2006: 458). Additionally, following

(c) promote consistency in international civil-protection work..." (Article 176c Lisbon Treaty, the Stationery Office Limited 2010).

the February 6 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism was activated. Pekka Tiainen, the European Union Civil Protection Team Leader, stated that

“We are here to coordinate and facilitate the European assistance to Türkiye after the request of the Turkish Government. We are close to 2,000 European rescuers here in the country; we have rescue teams and also medical teams supporting Türkiye in this very sad and serious situation. This is the biggest rescue operation for decades, at least 50-60 years, and (we have) everything that you can imagine to be able to support, to help Türkiye” (Avrupa Birliği Türkiye Delegasyonu, 2024, p. 34).

4. The EU’s Reactions to the February 6 Kahramanmaraş Earthquakes

As soon as Türkiye issued a level four alert and requested international aid, the diverse range of nations sending search and rescue teams became evident, along with the large number of individuals dispatched (Okumuş, 2023). Türkiye received assistance from countries as varied as the United States, Mexico, Australia, Japan, Azerbaijan, Russia, Algeria, Qatar, Germany, and Greece. In total, 102 countries responded to the call, with nearly 10,000 foreign workers from 90 nations- including engineers, seismologists, search dogs, and specialized search and rescue teams- deployed to the region. During the first month, 272,046 Turkish personnel, 11,488 international workers, almost 10,000 psychosocial support personnel, and 18,053 earthmoving machines, as well as hundreds of other vehicles, including ships, planes, helicopters, UAVs, and drones, contributed to the disaster relief efforts. Additionally, 36 fully equipped field hospitals, 21,714 containers, and 437,410 tents were set up to support the relief effort (Akıllı, 2023: 4).

In addition to states, international organizations like the EU also stepped in to assist Türkiye. On February 9, 2023, Commissioner Lenarčič visited Gaziantep in southeastern Türkiye to assess the impact of the devastating earthquake and explore ways for the EU to intensify its relief efforts in the country (European Commission, 2023i). The European Council extends its deepest condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in the tragic earthquakes that struck Türkiye and Syria on February 6, 2023, and expresses its solidarity with the people of both nations (European Council, 2023b). The conclusions of the February 2023 European Council meeting stated that

“...In the immediate aftermath of this tragedy and as a demonstration of the Union’s unwavering solidarity, over 1,600 rescuers were deployed to Türkiye. The European Council reaffirms the Union’s readiness to provide further assistance to alleviate the suffering in all

affected regions. The European Council welcomes the initiative of the Swedish Presidency and the Commission to host a Donors' Conference to mobilize funds from the international community in support of the people of Türkiye and Syria in Brussels in March. 33. The European Council calls on all to ensure humanitarian access to the victims of the earthquake in Syria, irrespective of where they are. The EU and its Member States have mobilized additional resources to support humanitarian efforts. It calls on the humanitarian community, under the auspices of the United Nations, to ensure the speedy delivery of aid..." (European Council, 2023b).

In response to Türkiye's request to activate the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, the EU swiftly mobilized its resources (Avrupa Birliği Türkiye Delegasyonu, 2024: 12). The mechanism played a critical role in the response to the February 6 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, facilitating one of the largest search and rescue missions in EU history (Okumuş, 2023). Following Türkiye's request, 19 EU Member States, including Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, France, Germany, Greece, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, and Spain as well as Montenegro and Albania, helped in coordination with the EU's Emergency Response Coordination Center and Turkish authorities (European Commission, 2023b). Urban search and rescue teams from several of these countries, including Malta, the Netherlands, Czechia, France, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Romania, and Poland, were quickly deployed to support the first responders. Rescue teams from Spain, Italy, and Slovakia also assisted. The EU's Emergency Response Coordination Center maintained ongoing communication with Turkish authorities to coordinate additional support as needed. Furthermore, the EU's Copernicus satellite system was activated to provide emergency mapping capabilities (European Commission, 2023a). In the early days following the earthquake, 1,750 European rescuers and 111 search and rescue dogs offered hope to those trapped beneath the debris (Avrupa Birliği Türkiye Delegasyonu, 2024: 12). By February 9, 2023, through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, 21 EU Member States, along with Albania, Montenegro, and Serbia, had deployed a total of 38 rescue teams and six medical teams. These search and rescue teams, coordinated via the Mechanism, had successfully saved 36 lives (European Commission, 2023c). Additionally, 12 European nations provided essential supplies, including winter tents, heaters, kitchen sets, hygiene kits, winter clothing, food, and mattresses, to Syrians affected by the earthquake through the Mechanism (Avrupa Birliği Türkiye Delegasyonu, 2024: 106). Several other EU Member States and Mechanism participants also provided bilateral aid to both Türkiye and Syria.

The EU and its member states are committed to providing significant support for relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction efforts in both Türkiye and Syria. The EU called on other international allies and donors to mobilize pledges that match the scale and severity of the damage, demonstrating solidarity with the people of Türkiye and Syria during these difficult times (European Commission, 2023f). Ulf Kristersson, then President of the Council of the EU and Prime Minister of Sweden, stated, “As President of the Council of the EU, Sweden will do everything in our power, together with the EU and international partners, to help those affected in the next phases of the rehabilitation and early recovery.” (European Commission, 2023f). Following the devastating earthquake of February 6, 2023, the European Council endorsed the conclusions of the Donors’ Conference held in March 2023 in support of the people of Türkiye and Syria, emphasizing that aid must be delivered swiftly and effectively (European Council, 2023a).

Over 60 delegations from the EU, its Member States, and partners- including the United Nations, international organizations, and European financial institutions such as the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development- met in Brussels alongside other key stakeholders to coordinate the response in the affected regions of Türkiye and Syria and to express solidarity with their people (European Commission, 2023e). The Donors’ Conference, organized in collaboration with the Turkish government, was attended by members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, EU members, candidates and potential candidates, neighboring and partner countries, G20 members (excluding Russia), the United Nations, international organizations, humanitarian actors, and international and European financial institutions. The event was co-hosted by Ulf Kristersson, Prime Minister of Sweden for the Swedish Presidency of the Council, and Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission (European Commission, 2023f).

On the day of the conference, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen emphasized that everyone had come together to support the survivors of the devastating earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria, which had occurred six weeks earlier (European Commission, 2023f). Leyen further expressed that the organizing countries of the Donors’ Conference stand with the people of Türkiye and Syria throughout their suffering. Leyen encouraged every country, as well as public and private contributors, to honor the lives lost, the courage of first responders, and, most importantly, work together to build a brighter future for the survivors (European Commission, 2023f). Additionally, Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson emphasized that the main objective of the Donors’ Conference was to turn words

of sympathy and support into concrete actions, providing strong, effective, and coordinated aid to those affected by the tragic earthquakes. Ulf Kristersson further stated, “For the Swedish EU Presidency, we are grateful for the good cooperation with the Commission in arranging today’s conference, and very impressed by the substantial results today, and humbled by the important work ahead of us” (European Commission, 2023e).

At the “Together for the people of Türkiye and Syria” event, the world community pledged a total of €7 billion. Of this amount, €6.05 billion in grants and loans was allocated to Türkiye, while €911 million in grants was designated for Syria (European Commission, 2023e). In short, following the tragic earthquakes, participants at the Donors’ Conference, along with their partners, raised a total of €7 billion to support the people of Türkiye and Syria. Team Europe contributed more than half of this total. Von der Leyen further stated that

“Today is a great day for international solidarity. Together with our partners, we have raised a total of €7 billion to support people in Türkiye and Syria following the devastating earthquakes. More than half of this donation comes from Team Europe. We have shown the world that we support those in need, and we always stand by our partners” (European Commission, 2023e).

In addition to the emergency relief provided through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, which is estimated to have cost €38 million, the EU supplied Türkiye with €78.2 million in humanitarian aid in 2023 and €26 million in 2024 for earthquake response efforts (European Commission, 2024b). The European Commission also announced plans to sign an additional €400 million in aid under the EU Solidarity Fund -the largest sum ever granted to a country in accession negotiations- to help rebuild critical infrastructure, including wastewater, water, education, and health systems. Furthermore, a €355.6 million package is being planned to assist affected communities and refugees, addressing both infrastructure restoration and socioeconomic support (European Commission, 2024b). These aid statistics demonstrate that the EU has been one of the primary contributors in supporting Türkiye during these challenging times.

The EU also has raised approximately €10 billion since 2012 to support refugees and their host communities. The Commission continued to implement the supplementary €3 billion package for 2021-2023, providing aid in areas such as basic needs, education, healthcare, protection, border management, and socioeconomic support (European Commission, 2023: 4). Furthermore, on February 2, 2024, the European Commission announced that an additional €26

million would be allocated as humanitarian aid to support Türkiye's most vulnerable refugees and the communities hosting them (European Commission, 2024a). At the joint press conference with Hakan Fidan, Foreign Minister of Türkiye, Commissioner Várhelyi states that

“As you have seen, we stood by the people of Türkiye when it came to the migration flow and when it came to the devastating earthquake, and we are partners in these times when we see tectonic movements of geopolitics around us and Türkiye” (European Commission, 2023g).

It is worth noting that 1999 was a difficult year, too, for Türkiye due to the earthquakes the country experienced on August 17 and November 12. These two devastating earthquakes caused significant loss of life and extensive damage to property and infrastructure (Humanitarian Aid Office, 1999: 3). As a result of the İzmit (Marmara) earthquake, official figures reported 17,000 deaths and 40,000 injuries, with thousands of buildings damaged or destroyed over a 400-mile region extending from the Marmara Sea to Bolu. The earthquake that struck Düzce resulted in over 500 deaths and more than 3,000 injuries, causing significant structural damage to a region already affected by the August earthquake (Humanitarian Aid Office, 1999: 6). Several nations sent search and rescue teams, medical professionals, and supplies to Türkiye during and after these earthquakes. The international community responded swiftly to the disaster relief efforts by providing rescue teams, medical care, firefighting equipment, and financial support (European Commission, 1999: 7). In the aftermath of the earthquakes, Türkiye received 2,463 search and rescue workers from 43 countries, medical teams from 19 countries, and medical supplies from 57 nations. A total of 90 countries sent humanitarian aid supplies to Türkiye following the Marmara earthquake, while search and rescue teams from 32 countries were deployed after the Düzce earthquake (Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 1999a: 47).

It is important to note that relations between Greece and Türkiye had deteriorated up until early 2023. However, following the devastating February 6 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, there was a noticeable improvement in their relationship (European Commission, 2023h). Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and President Katerina Sakellaropoulou contacted President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to offer their condolences and support to Türkiye and the earthquake victims. Mitsotakis stated that Greece was prepared to provide all available resources to help Türkiye (Akıllı, 2023: 16).

Türkiye also received substantial aid from the EU and its member states following these earthquakes. Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) (1999: 14) provided €30 million in emergency

funding. In addition to supplying essential items and shelter, the funding also supported post-trauma counseling and disaster preparedness initiatives. In a message to the President of Türkiye, EU Commissioner Romano Prodi, who served as President of the European Commission from 1999 to 2004, stated, “*Allow me to assure you that, if confirmed as President of the new Commission, I will attach great importance to working closely with the Member States in order to ensure that the European Union plays an active role in helping with the rebuilding of the areas most affected by the earthquake and in promoting ever closer co-operation between Turkey and European Union.*” (Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 1999b: 46). Furthermore, following the earthquake, on August 25-26, 1999, EU Commissioner Van Den Broek and Finnish Foreign Minister Halonen visited Türkiye to express the EU’s support (Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 1999a: 30). On August 19, the Commission adopted a funding decision of €2 million, followed by a second funding decision of €2 million two weeks later, on August 25 (Commission of the European Communities, 2000: 13). In short, to assist Türkiye in the reconstruction process, the Commission promptly allocated €4 million in emergency funding and established a €30 million support package (European Commission, 1999: 7). Additionally, the Commission responded to the Düzce earthquake by adopting a funding decision of €3 million on November 23. an additional funding decision of €23 million was adopted on December 20, bringing the total amount allocated to support earthquake victims in Türkiye to €30 million (Commission of the European Communities, 2000: 13).

Apart from the assistance, earthquake diplomacy proved to be highly successful at that time. In particular, relations between Greece and Türkiye improved as both nations supported each other through their respective earthquakes. The Greek government formed an emergency rescue force, EMAK, which promptly offered its services to the Turkish government, assisting in any way possible (Ker-Lindsay, 2000: 220). Furthermore, following the earthquake, high-ranking Turkish and Greek foreign ministry officials met in Athens on September 9-10, 1999, and in Ankara on September 16, 1999. Their discussions covered a range of topics, including tourism, the environment, trade and commerce, cultural cooperation, multilateral and regional collaboration, as well as efforts to combat terrorism, illegal immigration, organized crime, and drug trafficking (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1999). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye states that

“Probably the only positive dimension of this tragic catastrophe was the immediate response of many countries who poured in their assistance and shown solidarity. Our neighbour Greece who reacted immediately after the earthquake, also displayed that she was with Turkey

with her Government and NGOs by sending medical equipment, doctors, portable housing material, and fire extinguishing aircraft as well as the well-experienced EMAK search and rescue team, and contributed the pain be lesser felt.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2000).

While natural disasters like earthquakes often lead to political softening and improved relations between Türkiye and Greece, as seen in these cases, it is difficult to predict how lasting and permanent these post-disaster relationships will be. After the earthquake, Türkiye was deemed eligible for EU membership in December 1999. While the earthquake alone did not secure Türkiye’s acceptance as a potential candidate, it played a significant role in the EU’s decision, alongside other influencing factors. According to Kubicek (2001: 34), two significant events in the latter half of 1999 sparked renewed optimism for political reform. The first was the Marmara earthquake in August, which, beyond causing significant human and material losses, revealed weaknesses within the structure of the Turkish state. The second event was the EU’s decision at its December summit in Helsinki to grant Türkiye candidacy for membership. This raised expectations that the EU would encourage reforms, with Türkiye implementing measures to address its democratic shortcomings in exchange for potential full membership.

As understood, the EU helped Türkiye in both the 1999 and 2023 earthquakes. In 1999, the European Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) offered €30 million in financial aid, while in 2023, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism was activated, initially providing €11 million in humanitarian assistance. In both cases, the EU also sent search and rescue teams and delivered necessary supplies to support Türkiye’s recovery efforts. In terms of humanitarian aid, after the 1999 earthquakes, the EU supplied tents, blankets, and medical supplies and set up field hospitals. Following the 2023 earthquake, the EU provided over €14 million in immediate relief, focusing on shelter, water, and medical support. Additionally, the EU’s Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) coordinated efforts to mobilize extra resources for logistical support. In terms of financial aid, beyond the immediate humanitarian assistance, the EU provided an additional €30 million after the 1999 earthquakes. Following the 2023 earthquakes, the EU initially provided €11 million in immediate assistance and later pledged over €1 billion for long-term reconstruction efforts. In terms of technical and logistical support, satellite imagery and mapping were employed for disaster assessment after the 1999 earthquakes. In 2023, satellite systems like Copernicus were utilized for more advanced damage assessments.

While it may seem straightforward to assume that natural disasters like earthquakes can soften political positions and enhance relations between countries, the long-term sustainability

of these relationships remains uncertain. Following the February 6 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, Türkiye-EU relations are expected to strengthen through more proactive earthquake diplomacy. Key issues that need to be addressed include immigration, the modernization of the Customs Union, the revival of the Visa Liberalization Dialogue, and smoother negotiations for Türkiye's full EU membership. However, despite effective earthquake diplomacy, progress between Türkiye and the EU has been limited so far.

5. Conclusion

Türkiye ranks high among nations devastated by earthquakes (Aydın, 2023: 2609). On February 6, 2023, some of Türkiye's eastern and southeastern provinces, near the Syrian border, was struck by one of the largest earthquakes in the region in nearly a century, with a magnitude of 7.8, followed later that same day by a 7.5-magnitude aftershock. The Turkish government reported over 50,000 deaths and more than 300,000 buildings damaged or destroyed (European Commission, 2024a). By February 18, 2023, 102 countries had helped Türkiye, following the government's declaration of a level 4 alert, which calls for international aid (Kavak, 2023: 22). The international community, including the EU, responded with swift and substantial support, demonstrating the power of coordinated earthquake diplomacy. From the onset of the disaster, the EU has actively demonstrated its support at every level, responding promptly with significant emergency aid (European Commission, 2023: 3). The activation of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism played a pivotal role in mobilizing a large-scale rescue and relief operation, which was one of the largest in the EU's history. Through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, Türkiye has received extensive support, including financial assistance, help with search and rescue operations, and aid for housing needs (İKV, 2023: 1).

A total of 21 EU Member States and 3 EU Civil Protection Mechanism Participating States have already deployed 38 teams, including Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, France, Czechia, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, and Spain, alongside Montenegro, Albania, and Serbia (European Commission, 2023d). European nations have collectively pledged 1,750 rescuers and 111 search dogs. The Commission is also assisting 12 EU Member States in providing emergency shelter supplies, such as Relief Housing Units from the rescueEU reserve hosted by Sweden and thousands of tent beds hosted by Romania, all of which have been transported to Türkiye (European Commission, 2023d). Additionally, to secure funding for early recovery, relief, and reconstruction efforts in the affected areas, the European Commission and the EU Council, in coordination with Turkish authorities, organized an

international Donors' Conference in March 2023, raising over 6 billion euros for Türkiye (European Commission, 2023, p. 3). As it is seen, the EU's response highlights the importance of international solidarity in times of crisis and reflects its dedication to humanitarian principles, even beyond its borders. The Donors' Conference emphasized solidarity, with significant pledges aimed at rebuilding infrastructure and supporting the affected populations of Türkiye and Syria. This assistance, along with financial aid from the EU, showcased the EU's commitment to supporting Türkiye, not only in immediate rescue efforts but also in long-term reconstruction and rehabilitation. Thus, it can be stated that these efforts demonstrate that the EU has not abandoned its candidate country, Türkiye, in the aftermath of the earthquake.

It also should be noted that following the 1999 İzmit earthquake, the EU provided significant assistance to Türkiye, including rescue teams, medical care, firefighting equipment, and financial aid. More notably, Türkiye was accepted as an EU candidate nation after the earthquake, a decision that many scholars attribute, at least in part, to the disaster. Additionally, Türkiye's relations with Greece improved during this period. These tragic events of earthquakes rekindled diplomatic relations between Türkiye and several EU member states, illustrating the potential for earthquake diplomacy to foster cooperation in strained international relations. These examples highlight the importance of earthquake diplomacy when applied effectively. It is important to emphasize that the EU's support for Türkiye during these challenging times cannot be overlooked. Therefore, this study argues that the EU is a "foul-weather friend" to Türkiye.

In conclusion, the EU's comprehensive response to the February 6 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes underscores its role as a key partner in disaster management and highlights the importance of ongoing collaboration between Türkiye and the EU. The enduring impact of this aid will be seen not only in the physical reconstruction of the affected regions but also in the strengthening of diplomatic ties and the resilience of Türkiye's recovery efforts. The solidarity displayed throughout this crisis serves as a reminder that in the face of devastation, collective action can make a significant difference.

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