PROF. DR. ATILA ERALP'E ARMAĞAN / IN HONOR OF PROF. ATILA ERALP

DERLEYENLER / GUEST EDITORS: Asuman Göksel - Zerrin Torun

ÖNSÖZ / FOREWORD

MAKALELER / ARTICLES

Foreword: A Conceptual Register for the European Studies in Türkiye: A Tribute to Prof. Atila Eralp

'Europe' has always been a pivotal determinant in Turkish political history but this intense preoccupation gained a particular momentum and form with the 1963 Ankara Agreement (the Association Agreement between Turkey and the European Union-EU). Since then, European Studies has been a significant academic area of interest in Türkiye. Interestingly enough, ebbs and flows in Türkiye-EU relations during all those years left this academic interest intact and since the 1960s, the most established Turkish universities kept opening European Studies Centres including METU and has been involved in extensive research and teaching activities famously known all over by European academia. From the start, the urge to disassociate practical hurdles of the EU integration process from cutting-edge research on European integration has been a challenging yet enriching experience for the European Studies in Türkiye. Centre for European Studies at METU (CES-METU) has been founded in 1997 as one of the leading research centres specializing on European integration within Türkiye and its region against this background. CES-METU was granted the title of a Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence in 2007 and has been recognized as one of the best practices of its kind in Europe and beyond. In this respect, with its openness to the civil society, accumulated knowledge on EU integration and academic expertise to explore the correlation between academic knowledge and everyday information on European integration, CES-METU has been a significant initiative with its potential to foster development of novel teaching, research and knowledge exchange within the epistemic community in Türkiye. In this respect, if there is one name that needs to be honoured for contributing to the establishment and institutionalisation of Centre for European Studies in METU, as well as to the emergence of European Studies in Türkiye as a distinct discipline, it is Prof. Atila Eralp.

This foreword aims to put the challenges and opportunities faced by the European Studies in Türkiye in a conceptual and historical perspective, mainly with the aim of paying tribute to Prof. Atila Eralp, one of the pioneers of European Studies in Türkiye. Prof. Eralp, among others, has been pivotal for the establishment of the European Studies Programme and the Centre for European Studies of METU in 1997, which aimed to academically equip bureaucrats and policy makers in Ankara who wanted to specialise on European integration against the background of the 1999 Helsinki decision as well as to develop a well-qualified academic cadre in METU as well as in other Turkish universities particularly specialised on European Studies (Eralp, 2023: 7). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the context which contributed to the proliferation of European Studies in Türkiye. In this

respect, this foreword will first explore the academic and disciplinary hurdles of theorising and practicing European Studies in a candidate country like Türkiye, which is in the EU's waiting room for more than 60 years against the background of the historical development of Türkiye-EU relations. We will then assess the experience of integrating European Studies within the Turkish bureaucracy in general and within the Turkish Foreign Policy in particular, which will be followed by a final discussion on the future projections on the European Studies in Türkiye. The final part presents the contents of this issue prepared in honour of Prof. Atila Eralp.

Challenges and opportunities of teaching and learning the EU in a candidate country

Research and teaching on the EU and the European integration process has been a largely Eurocentric exercise (Alpan and Diez, 2022: 202). This potentially led to the tendency that European Studies predominantly lacked critical perspectives, a linkage of policy advice and analysis, and a bias towards the prevalent modalities of EU governance. Outside the EU, and in the immediate neighbourhood in particular, EU scholarship has traditionally been dominated by research and material produced within the EU, recycling dependency structures and the academic framework set by the European integration. Thus, it creates a particular dilemma on the part of the European Studies researchers from non-EU countries that they either have to keep their original and critical perspective within the European Studies and get unheard and unpublished, or they have to adopt mainstream approaches to the EU, thereby being able to be heard in the academic circles. The picture gets even more complicated when it comes to teaching European Studies in countries like Türkiye as the EU integration is predominantly an ongoing process and a moving target and the European Studies faces the danger of being perceived as a derivation of how the country in question is doing with regard to the European integration rather than an autonomous scientific discipline in these countries. In this respect, it is necessary to uncouple practical hurdles of the EU integration process from academic research within the EU Studies and sustaining academic dialogue on these challenges. Turkish scholarship on the European Studies seems to suffer from these challenges. Within the European Studies discipline in Türkiye, epistemic diversity has remained fairly limited given the lack of geographic diversity in authorship knowledge production in EU–Türkiye studies and has been mainly Eurocentric due to the almost exclusive use of grand and up-and-coming theories/concepts of European integration. Moreover, the proliferation of issue areas since the launch of the discipline has not culminated in a strong focus on non-

traditional, avant-garde research topics as such (Turhan and Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm, 2022: 290).

Having said that, it is equally inspiring to see that the European Studies is a quite a well-established and institutionalised discipline. The puzzling co-existence of both longevity and complexity in the EU–Türkiye relationship propelled a rich body of literature on the topic and its dissemination through a wide array of established journals to the extent that we can enunciate the strong presence of 'EU–Türkiye studies' (Turhan and Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm, 2022: 291). Turkish scholars explored 'Europeanization' of public policies (Güney and Tekin, 2016) and specific policy areas in Türkiye such as foreign policy (Torun, 2021; Günay and Renda, 2014), minority policy (Yılmaz, 2017; Atikcan, 2010), gender policy (Aybars et. al., 2019; Bodur-Ün, 2021), employment policy (Göksel, 2011) and migration policy (Kale et. al, 2018; Kaya, 2021). Beyond that, the second-generation European Studies research agenda also included the study of European debates on Türkiye (Şenyuva and Baydarol, 2024; Aydın-Düzgit, 2012), discourses (Aydın-Düzgit, 2016; Alpan, 2014), identities (Rumelili, 2008; Nas, 2012) and public debates (Kaliber, 2016). Nevertheless, Turkish scholars also focused on various processes and policies in the EU per se, such as European Neighborhood Policy (Kahraman, 2005); conflict resolution (Üstün and Akgül-Açıkmeşe, 2021; Ergun and Valiyev, 2024) and the EU's approach to the Middle East (Altunışık, 2008; Cebeci, 2019) underlining the fact that European Studies in Türkiye is not limited to focusing on the EU policies' impact on Türkiye.

Türkiye-EU relations and the development of European Studies in Türkiye

Türkiye-EU relations have long been a cornerstone of Türkiye's foreign policy and a subject of academic inquiry. Although Türkiye's association with the European project dates back to the 1963 Ankara Agreement, this relationship has been marked by fluctuations, shaped by geopolitical shifts, mutual expectations, and domestic politics on both sides. The intricate dynamics of Türkiye-EU relations have fostered the development of European Studies as a vibrant academic field in Türkiye. This field has grown significantly, driven by increased engagement with the EU institutions, mobility and funding opportunities such as Erasmus+ programs, and academic partnerships under frameworks like FP6, FP7, Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe. Turkish scholars have actively contributed to debates on EU enlargement, foreign policy, migration diplomacy, trade relations and democratic governance, often providing unique perspectives informed by Türkiye's strategic position at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and the neighborhood.

Universities and research centres in Türkiye have established dedicated programs and institutes to European Studies. One of the pioneer institutions

established in 1987 was the European Communities Research Center (ATAUM) at Ankara University. In Istanbul, the European Union Institute at Marmara University, fostering interdisciplinary research and dialogue on European integration, law, and policy followed soon. At METU, the Center for European Studies under the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences was established by Prof. Atila Eralp and Prof. Ali Gitmez in 1997. The Centre's establishment was followed by the imitation of its interdisciplinary graduate programmes. The European Studies interdisciplinary programme was initiated by Prof. Atila Eralp and Assoc. Prof. Galip Yalman in 2001. The post-graduate studies transformed into two separate programmes of European Studies and European Integration. Under Prof. Atila Eralp's guidance and the collaborative efforts by the scholars at METU and elsewhere, these programmes and the center became hubs for critical scholarship and dialogue, attracting academics, policymakers, and students from Türkiye and abroad. These developments contributed to the proliferation of numerous courses in European Studies developed and initiated by the faculty members of the Faculty of Economic and Administrative Sciences such as Assoc. Prof. Galip Yalman, Prof. Aylin Ege, Prof. Nuri Yurdusev, Assoc. Prof. Gamze Öz, Assoc. Prof. Sevilay Kahraman, Prof. Özgehan Senyuva, Assoc. Prof. Asuman Göksel, Assoc. Prof. Zerrin Torun, Assoc. Prof. Başak Alpan, Assoc. Prof. Onur Bahçecik and Assoc. Prof. Başak Kale.

Prof. Atila Eralp also contributed significantly to building academic networks and collaborations, particularly through EU-funded projects and partnerships, which enhanced the visibility and credibility of Turkish scholarship on European integration. One of the first social science 6th Framework (FP6) EU-funded projects (CESCER) in Türkiye was achieved by the young academics of this Center through the guidance of Prof. Atila Eralp. The Delegation of the European Union later donated its Documentation Center to the CES-METU making it more accessible to undergraduate and postgraduate student and scholars.

CES-METU developed research projects through various EU-funded programmes and Prof. Eralp also received the title of Jean Monnet Chair. The Delegation of the European Union acknowledged that METU students have been the number one recipient of Jean Monnet Scholarships in Türkiye. European studies and European integration related extensive curriculum is definitely contributed to this achievement. The CES-METU later became a Jean Monnet Center of Excellence in 2007 (its Jean Monnet Seminar Programmes are still running since then), and it was recognized by the European Commission as one of the most outstanding centers of excellences around the world in 2010. There is no doubt that the success of this center lies in the collaborative research and teaching environment that has been achieved through its young scholars, research assistants, social

scientists, visiting scholars and academics continuously contributed and benefited from its activities and resources.

Prof. Eralp's legacy extends to mentoring generations of scholars who continue to shape European Studies in Türkiye and internationally. His emphasis on combining rigorous academic inquiry with policy relevance has created a tradition of scholarship that engages deeply with the challenges and opportunities of Türkiye-EU relations. Even as the political landscape evolves and Türkiye's path toward EU accession faces uncertainties, Prof. Eralp's contributions provide enduring frameworks for understanding the dynamics of European integration and Türkiye's role within it. His impact is not only reflected in his publications, but also in the institutional and intellectual foundations he laid for European Studies in Türkiye together with his colleagues, students and collaborators. Dr. Funda Tekin, the Director of the IEP (Institut für Europäische Politik) based in Berlin and honorary Professor at the University of Tübingen explains that:

> "Atila Eralp has not only been one of the leading scholars on EU-Turkey relations but he was also among the first to identify EU studies as an important field of research to asses Turkey's future. He analyses EU-Turkey relations from various angles including foreign and security policy, the EU's enlargement policy and the German-EU-Turkey triangle. He has never hesitated to employ new methodology in his research and is among the very few scholars who have applied narrative analysis to EU-Turkey relations. He aims to educate the younger generation accordingly and gives his best to integrate them into his well-established networks."

Similarly, Prof. Wolfgang Wessels from the Centre for Turkey and European Union Studies at the University of Cologne (Emeritus) and Jean Monnet Chair *ad personam*, also points out to Eralp's pivotal position on Türkiye-EU relations:

> "In several projects - funded especially by the EU Commission, the DAAD and the Mercator Foundation- his highly reflected contributions framed and stimulated our debates- not only about widening but also about deepening the EU. His EU-wide audience has also extended their knowledge and insights into the Turkish Foreign and EU narratives and into concrete policies. His analysis and assessments contribute to understanding the challenges and - as he certainly would agree - the limits of an effective EU-Turkey relationship. His research questions enumerate a multitude of topic for the present and future academic and political agenda. Beyond his direct interventions he also contributed to develop the European network of researchers into a lively academic community. His engagement in the TEPSA board and for viva of

PhD defenses in Cologne led to concrete projects of cooperation and even more to personal links- not at least for younger generations".

European Studies and the Turkish Foreign Policy

Analyses of foreign policy have comprised one of the most prolific pillars of the literature on European Studies scrutinised above. Turkish foreign policy became remarkably active in multiple regions especially after the end of the Cold War and it aligned considerably with the EU's CFSP declarations and positions since 1999. However, the literature on Turkish foreign policy in relation with the EU integration flourished in the 2000s, particularly after the Justice and Development Party came to power. Research pointing out the similarities and differences between Turkish and EU foreign policies benefited from the application of the 'Europeanization' as a concept. As an accession country, Türkiye has to fully align its foreign policy with that of the EU in order to close Chapter 31 on foreign, security, and defence in the accession negotiations. Therefore, the degree of Europeanization of Turkish foreign policy helps determine how close Türkiye is to EU membership. Regardless of membership, Europeanization is also important since it increases the chances of cooperation between Türkiye and the EU in foreign policy. Thus, whether we can speak of Europeanization of foreign policy towards a region or of methods drew attention of many scholars and PhD students alike. Given the difficulties the EU experiences in integrating foreign and security policies of its member states (Eralp, 2018), it was a pleasant outcome when studies identified high degrees of Europeanization of foreign policy and its methods during the period between 2003 and 2010, up to the Arab uprisings. The prevailing ethos of this period's foreign policy, i.e., relying on soft power and cooperating with neighbours, was generally in harmony with the EU's foreign policy approach and Türkiye's rate of alignment with the EU's CFSP declarations was at its highest level. However, on par with the developments in practice, the literature moved towards highlighting selective Europeanization and de-Europeanization in a decade. In this context, Prof. Atila Eralp co-authored one of the early articles arguing that "Europe" has shifted from being a strategic goal to signifying an instrumental partnership for the policy-makers in Türkiye (Eralp and Torun, 2012). He focused his efforts to articulate the reasons why Türkiye has moved away from the European integration, in general and the EU foreign policy, in particular (Eralp, 2011; Eralp and Torun, 2011; Arısan Eralp and Eralp, 2012). Comparing the Turkish foreign policy during the Cold War and the period until the 2010s, Prof. Atila Eralp attributed the growing distance between Turkish and EU foreign policies to Türkiye's soft-balancing strategy as much as its alienation from the European accession process due to the loss of the credibility of

the EU membership perspective (Eralp and Torun, 2021). Recently, divergences between Türkiye and the EU have increased in particular with regard to Syria and Cyprus and Türkiye's rate of alignment with the EU's CFSP significantly decreased. In the absence of a fundamental change in Turkish foreign policy, which prioritizes strategic autonomy more than ever, the future relationship between the EU and Türkiye may continue to take place on a case by case basis on issues such as pandemics, counterterrorism and migration. The literature has also been drawing attention to the ad-hoc and transactional approach to EU-Türkiye cooperation in various dimensions, including foreign policy. In this context, Prof. Atila Eralp has aptly warned both parties to embrace a rules-based, multilateral approach in order to revitalize EU-Türkiye relationship (Eralp, 2019; Eralp and Keyman, 2020). A return to original commitments and an institutional and inclusive process facilitating cooperation and reform in all aspects of the accession process, including foreign policy is indeed what is needed.

In this Issue

This issue of the METU Studies in Development is prepared in honour of Prof. Atila Eralp, as one of the pioneers for the development of the European studies as an interdisciplinary field in Türkiye. The issue includes seven articles by 11 authors, who responded positively to the Call for Papers. Mainly focusing on Türkiye-EU relations, as well as the role of the EU in terms of its integration capacity and actorness, the thematic coverage of the issue can be grouped in three pillars.

In the first pillar, historical development and future prospects of Türkiye-EU relations are examined by two articles. Senem Aydın-Düzgit in her article entitled *"Temporality and Interaction in the EU-Turkey Relationship,"* demonstrates the explanatory power of the "temporality and interaction" conceptual framework of Eralp (2009) not only in understanding the trajectory of EU-Türkiye relations before the opening of accession negotiations in 2005, but also in the post-2005 era, characterised as a period of detachment for the Türkiye-EU relations. Considering the EU perspective, Sanem Baykal in her article entitled *"Turkey-EU relations: Road to nowhere or hope for progress? An analysis in light of the enlargement policy-concepts, tools and prospects"* questions the design and implementation of the enlargement policy by the European Union in light of the concept of EU's "integration capacity" in the context of the intertwined nature of the deepening and widening dilemma of the EU, and puts such a discussion into perspective for the future prospects of Türkiye-EU relations.

The second thematic pillar of this issue focuses on three "living" topics of the Türkiye-EU relations, namely migration, Cyprus problem and public opinion. On the migration issue, in their article entitled *"Barely Alive? The Costs and Benefits of the EU-Turkey Statement on Irregular Migration,"* Başak Kale and Ebru Turhan analytically overview the costs and benefits of implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016, also known as "EU-Turkey Deal," from 2016 to 2024, both for Türkiye and for the EU, and suggest that the advantages of the Statement for the EU (governments) and the Turkish government outweigh its costs. In the second article on the theme of migration entitled *"Artificial Intelligence and Migration Governance: Navigating Cooperation and Complexity in EU-Türkiye Relations"*, Ayselin Yıldız and Arıkan Açar investigates the role of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies in migration governance regarding its potential for revisiting and revitalizing EU-Türkiye cooperation in the field of migration. The authors question whether the AI use in Türkiye's migration policy would offer a renewed impetus for EU-Türkiye migration cooperation or it would merely reinforce Türkiye's alignment with the EU's migration policies, primarily through the securitisation of migration.

Nilgün Öner Tangör and Galip Yalman in their article entitled *"Yet another spatio-temporal turn in the Turkey-EU relations: The continuing saga of the 'Cyprus problem'"* provides a comprehensive account of the multifaceted "Cyprus problem" in the context of the Türkiye-EU relations, by unpacking Eralp's (2009) "temporality" conceptualisation with a critical political economy perspective. The authors argue that although the coupling of geopolitical contestation with the hydrocarbon economy agenda in the context of Cyprus conflict points to a new temporality for the trajectory of the Türkiye-EU relations by adding a new political economy dimension, the main conditions for a possible resolution of the conflict persist. In his article entitled *"Unwavering aspirations: An exploratory analysis of the resilience of Turkish public support for EU membership"*, Özgehan Şenyuva attracts attention to public opinion, particularly the resilience of Turkish public support for the EU membership, despite significant political, economic, and diplomatic challenges in Türkiye-EU relations. Examining three trends and underlying determinants of Turkish public opinion, as public sentiment, namely feasibility, positive historical experience and ideological entrenchment, the author identifies the Turkish public opinion as an internal anchor, for the country's European aspirations, even when political divergence and skepticism from EU member states persist.

In the third pillar of this issue, the focus shifts to the EU's actorness. In their article entitled "What Accounts for the EU's Actorness Within its "Geopolitical Awakening"?: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and Effectiveness and Cohesion of

the European Union", Özlem Tür and Başak Alpan focus on the EU's neighbourhood perspective around the concept of EU's actorness. The authors argue that the EU is constantly facing the dilemma of its self-definition as a humanitarian actor, and its operational conduct, as shown by the key tension between the EU's normative commitments and its recent geopolitical take on in the case the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As the faculty members of the European Studies Programme (EUS) of the Middle East Technical University, the project team of the MEDIATE Jean Monnet Module project and last but not the least, the students of Prof. Atila Eralp, we would like to express our gratitude to all the authors, reviewers and editorial team of the METU Studies in Development for their valuable contributions.

We hope that the articles in this issue will stimulate further research and discussion in the fields of European Studies and Türkiye-EU relations as intended with the MEDIATE "Mending the Gap in Turkey-European Union Relations in the Post-Pandemic Era" Jean Monnet Module project implemented by the European Studies Programme between 2022-2025. We also believe that the open access nature of the journal will help disseminate research widely and inspire particularly the young researchers for future research in these fields.

Başak Alpan, Asuman Göksel, Başak Kale, Özgehan Şenyuva, Zerrin Torun

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Temporality and interaction in the EU-Turkey relationship[*]

Senem Aydın Düzgit

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Sabancı University, İstanbul
e-mail: saduzgit@sabanciuniv.edu
ORCID: 0000-0001-8177-9957

Abstract

This article provides an assessment of the history of the EU-Turkey relationship in the context of temporality and interaction put forward by Atila Eralp in his research on EU-Turkey relations. It argues and demonstrates that the conceptual framework put forward by Eralp at the nexus of temporality, interaction and (de) Europeanisation does not only constitute an exploratory framework in understanding the trajectory of EU-Turkey relations before the opening of accession negotiations in 2005, but that it also sheds light on the period of detachment which characterises the relationship in the post-2005 era.

Key words: Turkey-EU relations, temporality, international order, Turkish foreign policy, (de) Europeanisation.

1. Introduction

Turkey has been an integral part of Europe's centuries-long history and has enjoyed structured relations with the European Union and its predecessor, the European Community, almost since its inception. Both Turkey and the EU have aimed at cultivating a closer relationship. The depth and breadth of the economic, societal, cultural and political connections that the two have been able to establish over the years clearly testify to this. Although both sides have always aimed at deepening relations, the precise interpretation of what this would entail has been

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highly contested. It is this odd mix between a shared commitment to each other and widely varying interpretations within (and between) both sides as to what this should mean that explains Turkey's tortuous path to Europe characterised by various ebbs and flows since the early decades of the Republic.

This article provides an assessment of the history of the EU-Turkey relationship in the context of temporality and interaction put forward by Eralp (2009). In his article, Eralp has argued that there is a close relationship between temporality, interaction and Europeanization in the EU-Turkey relationship. In other words, temporality and interaction (often extending beyond governmental actors) need to be aligned for Europeanisation to occur in Turkey. Eralp (2009: 150) defines temporality as "the levels of convergence and divergence between the dynamics of European integration and Turkish developments over time", whereby interaction refers to the "quality and intensity of the relationship among governmental and non-governmental actors in Europe and Turkey".

While his initial empirical analysis covered the period until the end of the first decade of the 2000nds, this article argues and demonstrates that this conceptual framework is also explanatory in understanding the souring of the EU-Turkey relationship and the ensuing de-Europeanisation of Turkey in the second decade of the 2000nds. The deterioration of the EU-Turkey relationship in the post-2005 period is well known and widely covered in the literature on EU-Turkey relations and Turkish foreign policy at large. Yet, Eralp's (2009) framework provides a unique integrated conceptual approach which connects various drivers of the downturn in the relations. In demonstrating how the dissonance between temporality and interaction contributes to de-Europeanisation in more recent years, the article also builds on Eralp's (2019) recent works on the changes in the international system increasingly from a unipolar to a multipolar order with a corresponding decline in multilateralism. By drawing mainly on secondary sources and the author's own works which employ primary data, the article will first present a brief history of the EU-Turkey relationship from a temporal and interactionist perspective, and then turn to a discussion of the role of temporality and interaction in the deterioration of the EU-Turkey relationship in the post-2005 era characterized by mostly conflictual relations and limited transactional cooperation which lasts up to the present day. This section will also focus on the factors explaining the tumultuous nature of the relationship, which lie both in Turkey and in the EU as well as in the interaction between the two sides. The chapter will conclude by discussing the current state of and the potential future scenarios for EU-Turkey relations.

2. A tumultuous history: Cyclical alternations in temporality and interaction in the EU-Turkey relationship

In the analysis that follows below, I will rely on the temporal categorisation adopted by Eralp (see, among others, 1992, 2009) in his large body of work on the EU-Turkey relationship over the years.

2.1. 1959-1970: Convergence and positive interaction

Turkey applied for associate membership of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1959. The application was mainly driven by Turkey's goal of Westernization, which entailed belonging to all Western institutions in the context of the Cold War, as well as specific political considerations, such as the Greek application to the EEC the same year, which raised Turkish concerns of receiving unequal treatment from the Community. To a lesser extent, economic factors such as the need for foreign economic aid in the face of declining assistance from the US also played a role. The Community welcomed the Turkish application on grounds of the country's strategic significance in Cold War conditions, the Community's competition with European Free Trade Association (EFTA) over new members, and its wish to treat Greece and Turkey on an equal footing. The six founding members of the Community already enjoyed close economic relations with both Greece and Turkey and wanted to ensure their long-term commitment to the Western alliance. It thus took into consideration Turkey's application as an associate of the EEC and official negotiations between the two started on September 29, 1959. The negotiations finally ended in 1963 with the signing of the EC-Turkey Association Agreement, better known as the Ankara Agreement which constitutes the first contractual relationship between the two sides. Hence as argued by Eralp (2009: 151), this was a period in which temporality and interaction worked in tandem to create the dynamics which brought Turkey closer to the EEC. The Cold War context played a key role in the convergence of interests between the two sides, where there was elite consensus among both parties on taking relations forward and the interaction between Turkey and the Community was also free from identity-based objections which were central to the debates in later periods.

The Ankara Agreement envisaged the establishment of a customs union and opened the door to full accession through its Article 28 which stated the following: "As soon as the operation of this Agreement has advanced far enough to justify envisaging full acceptance by Turkey of the obligations arising out of the Treaty establishing the Community, the Contracting Parties shall examine the possibility of the accession of Turkey to the Community" (Official Journal of the European Communities, 1977: 15). Hence, the agreement was very carefully worded in the

sense that it did not foresee full membership, but only the customs union as a definite outcome, while not wholly ruling out the possibility of full accession in the future.

The mechanics of the agreement consisted of a preparatory (five years), a transition (twelve years) and a final stage where a full customs union would be established. The agreement also established an Association Council where top-level official representatives of both sides would regularly meet, an Association Committee to assist the works of the Association Council and a Joint Parliamentary Committee through which Turkish parliamentarians and members of the European Parliament would meet. However, relations did not proceed as smoothly as it was envisaged on paper. The preparatory stage did not come to an end until 1970 due to Turkey's failure to adjust economically in the given period. Nevertheless, this was the least problematic phase of Turkey's association due to the fact that Turkey in this period began to receive economic support and extended trade access from the EU without having to assume heavy obligations.

Following the end of the preparatory stage of the Association Agreement, both sides signed the Additional Protocol on November 1970, which marked the beginning of the transition stage. The Additional Protocol established a program of trade liberalization that was meant to culminate in a customs union by the end of 1994, after which the Community would consider Turkey's full membership.

2.2. 1970-1999: Divergence and negative interaction

Relations between the two sides largely deteriorated in the 1970s due to the political turmoil in Turkey, the 1973 oil crisis which crippled the Turkish economy and had an adverse effect on Turkey-EU relations, and Turkey's July 1974 intervention in Cyprus. Turkey's second offensive in August 1974 was met with severe criticism by EC member states. Furthermore, between the first and the second Turkish attacks, the Greek junta collapsed and the new premier Constantine Karamanlis immediately voiced the intention to apply for EC membership which he did in 1975. Despite the Commission's negative Opinion, the Council overruled the decision in February 1976 and in January 1981 Greece entered the Community. This can be considered as a turning point in the history of EU-Turkey relations since it introduced the much disputed 'Greek factor' into the relationship. The 1980 military coup in Turkey dealt another blow to the relationship, after which the EC maintained the freeze on political dialogue. In 1982, the European Parliament passed a resolution that suspended the joint European Community (EC)-Turkey Parliamentary Committee and the meeting of the Association Council until the country would hold general elections and convene a parliament. Hence by the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s, the divergence between the sides began to significantly grow. Furthermore, interaction at the elite level acquired a contestatory

nature. The elite consensus which defined Turkey's attitude towards the Community in the first decade after its application began to dissipate, with political actors on both the far right and the far left as well as the Turkish business community questioning the value of accession (Eralp, 2009: 156).

Civilian rule was institutionally restored in 1983 and the new government took various steps towards economic and political liberalization. In April 1987, following the gradual political stabilization and economic liberalization after the 1980 military coup, Turkey, under Prime Minister Turgut Özal, submitted a formal request for full EC membership. This second application was mainly driven by the need to revitalize Turkey-EC relations at a time when the economic liberalization program of the Özal government necessitated foreign economic assistance for the much-needed structural reforms of the Turkish economy. Another reason for Turkey's application was the desire to compensate for the strategic disadvantage generated by Greece's membership of the Community, which weakened Turkey in its bilateral disputes with Greece as the Greek governments were constantly using the EC as a platform to pursue national interests and obstruct Turkey's relations with the EC.

Yet, there was now a temporality gap between the Turkey and the EU which led the two actors to diverge further in this period. The Union was now in a rapid period of transformation, which would only accelerate after the end of the Cold War. It committed itself to the establishment of the Single Market, and democracy and human rights became a much more prominent aspect of European identity with the enlargement to Southern Europe in the 1980s. While the Union was in the process of redefining its place in the changing international system, Turkey was struggling with the transition to democracy and the state of its economy. This divergence was reflected in the Community's response to Turkey's application to full membership in 1989, rejecting Turkey's application, while at the same time confirming its eligibility for membership.

With the end of the Cold War, the rift grew further. Turkey's role as western bulwark against Soviet expansionism ended, ushering the way to a new period of mounting instability in the Middle East and Eurasia. Turkey consequently underwent an intense period of soul-searching, assessing alternative geostrategic options such as pan-Turkism or regional leadership in the Middle East and Eurasia. In the meanwhile, Greece continued to obstruct Turkey's relations with the EU well into the 1990s. On top of this, it actively pushed for the Republic of Cyprus' membership of the EU, which could lead to a settlement on the island conducive to Greek interests and safeguard Greek Cypriot security by increasing the costs of Turkish expansionism. In 1993, the Commission recommended to the Council to start accession negotiations with the Republic of Cyprus. Although there was initial reluctance on the part of the member states to conduct accession negotiations with

the Republic of Cyprus without a political settlement on the island, the Greek governments were adamant in this policy, which they used to hold hostage both the Turkey-EU customs union agreement and later, the Eastern enlargement of the EU. Accession negotiations with the Republic of Cyprus were finally opened in 1998 and Cyprus became a member in 2004, which further complicated the dynamics of EU-Turkey relations in the future years.

Despite the problematic nature of the relations, Turkey continued to lobby for its inclusion in the EU customs union in the 1990s. Turkey's pressures were matched by the Clinton administration in the United States, which also pressed member states to deepen ties with Turkey. The Union yielded, and in 1996 the EU-Turkey customs union entered into force, marking the beginning of higher levels of economic integration. The customs union agreement went further than the abolition of tariff and quantitative barriers to trade between the parties, envisaging harmonization with EU policies in virtually every field relating to the internal market (Erdemli, 2003: 5-6). Yet, the positive atmosphere created by the conclusion of the customs union agreement deteriorated rapidly in 1997. Despite strong pressure from Ankara and Washington to upgrade EU-Turkey relations into the accession process, the 1997 European Council in Luxemburg underlined that Turkey did not meet the standards for candidacy and excluded Turkey from the list of prospective members which consisted of the states of Central and Eastern Europe (CEECs) together with Cyprus and Malta. It offered instead a "European strategy" based on the exploitation of the integration prospects foreseen under existing contractual relations – the Association Agreement. For the EU, central and eastern enlargement after the end of the Cold War was perceived as a geopolitical necessity of immediate urgency, excluding Turkey. Unlike 1989, this second rejection, together with the EU's finger pointing at Turkey's democratic deficiencies, was perceived in Ankara as a clear case of discrimination, given the problematic political and economic situation in the Eastern European candidate countries at the time. This was also the first time that opposition to Turkish accession on cultural and religious grounds began to be voiced in the EC. Hence the EU elites were now becomingly increasingly divided on the question of Turkey's EU accession, not just from an economic and human rights point of view, but also on grounds of culture and religion. In response, Turkey froze its political dialogue with the Union, and threatened to withdraw its membership application and integrate with the unrecognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (Tocci, 2004: 65-93).

2.3. 1999-2005: Virtuous cycle of convergence, positive interaction and europeanization

The 1999-2005 period was a rare era in the long history of the EU-Turkey relationship in the sense that not only both sides converged in their interests and intensified not only elite but also societal interaction in the given period, but also that the combination of the two brought forth a considerable degree of Europeanisation in Turkey. Given the downturn in EU-Turkey relations in the 1997-1999 period, the member states acutely felt the need to move forward EU-Turkey relations, and there was a growing sense within the Union of the need not to lose Turkey given the large instability in Southeast Europe. Turkey's efforts in the Balkans have been appreciated as an important contribution to the stabilization of the European continent. They have lent credibility to the arguments of European stakeholders which highlight the assets that Turkey's security and defence capabilities would bring to bear on the fledging CSDP. Alongside and in relation to this, strong pressure was exerted by the Clinton administration to grant Turkey EU candidacy.

There were also significant political changes in the EU in those years, most notably in Germany where the Social Democrat and Green coalition supportive of Turkish accession replaced the Christian Democrats that were largely against Turkish membership. The most notable shift however happened in the case of Greece, which changed its position on Turkish accession in the late 1990s, from being a firm veto player to a more strategic actor who relies on EU conditionality for the solution of its bilateral disputes with Turkey but in principle accepts Turkey's full membership. This change was a result of the profound transformation that Greece underwent as an EU member state, and particularly the Greek socialist party PASOK as a governing party since the late 1990s, with the replacement of late Andreas Papandreou by Costas Simitis in 1996. The transformation of Greece's attitudes towards EU-Turkey relations was also linked to the Greek-Turkish rapprochement since August-September 1999. The seeds of rapprochement were sown during the spring of 1999. Foreign Minister Papandreou in particular increasingly felt the need to engage in constructive dialogue with arch enemy Turkey, following the period of rising brinkmanship in 1996-1999 over the disputed sovereignty over the uninhabited islets of Imia/Kardak, the incident over the Cypriot acquisition of Russian S-300 missiles, the Kosovo War and the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in the Greek embassy in Kenya. The earthquakes in Greece and Turkey in August-September 1999 and the reciprocal support between the two countries in the light of these humanitarian crises, provided the pretext or the trigger for a major policy shift which was ultimately reflected in Greece's support for Turkey's EU candidacy at the Helsinki European Council (Tocci, 2004: 127-128).

As a result, the December 1999 European Council in Helsinki recognized Turkey's candidacy, but stopped short of opening accession negotiations, arguing that the country first had to fulfil the Copenhagen political criteria for membership. In turn, the Commission was given a mandate to monitor progress and to draft a first Accession Partnership for Turkey, recommending areas for Turkish domestic reform. The EU also adapted its financial assistance to Turkey, redirecting aid to provide more explicit support for Turkey's political, social, administrative and economic reforms. In line with the Helsinki decision, in November 2000, the European Commission adopted the first Accession Partnership document for Turkey. It outlined the short- and medium-term measures necessary to ensure that Turkey meet the criteria for membership. The Accession Partnership was followed by the preparation of the National Programme for the Adoption of the *Acquis* by the Turkish authorities in March 2001, setting out the political and economic reforms that Turkey was prepared to pursue. Immediately following the approval of the National Programme, the silence on political reform was broken in Turkey with 34 amendments made to Turkey's constitution in October 2001, to be followed by three "harmonization packages" adopted in the follow-up to the Copenhagen Summit of 2002. The Greek-Turkish rapprochement also continued into the 2000s. Greece and Turkey had signed various bilateral agreements on 'low politics' issues and Joint Task Forces were established to explore how Greek know-how could help Turkey's harmonization with the *acquis*. Both sides had agreed to engage in talks on the continental shelf of the Aegean in March 2002. Greek support for Turkey's EU membership also facilitated the upgrade of EU-Turkey relations at the Copenhagen European Council in December 2002, which concluded that it would determine whether and when to open accession negotiations with Turkey, depending on whether Turkey fulfilled the Copenhagen political criteria, in December 2004 (Müftüler-Baç, 2005; Verney and Ifantis, 2009). The EU also decided to increase the amount of financial and technical assistance to Turkey. The approaching green light for the opening of negotiations set the target and the timeline in the reform programme of the new Justice and Development Party (AKP) government elected in November 2002. Four subsequent democratic reform packages and two sets of constitutional amendments were adopted by the Turkish parliament in this period in addition to institutional efforts undertaken to implement the new regulations.

Turkey's progress in reforms under the first AKP government meant that the Commission's Annual Progress Report in 2004 and the December 2004 European Council concluded that Turkey "sufficiently" fulfilled the political criteria and that accession talks could begin in October 2005. Nonetheless, there were also worrying signs from the EU front as to how sustainable this process would be. The years 2004 and 2005 witnessed intense debates on the issue of Turkey's accession to the Union. Most of the debates centred on whether Turkey should, in principle, become an EU

member. The notions of cultural difference and identity were also a major theme in these heated discussions on Turkish membership. Up until the very last minute, the Austrian presidency stated that the goal of accession negotiations should not be full membership, even though the "possibility" of eventual membership could not be ruled out. A month before winning the German election, Angela Merkel sent a letter to conservative heads of government in the EU, underlining that accession negotiations with Turkey should not lead to membership but should instead lead to a 'privileged partnership' and be 'open ended'. This was in line with the French attempt to introduce the recognition of Cyprus as a novel condition to begin accession negotiations prior to 3 October 2005, in a reversal of its previous stance and commitments. The Conservative and Christian-Democrat factions in the European Parliament lobbied intensively throughout the year to introduce a "privileged partnership" with Turkey, rather than full membership. These attitudes were finally reflected in the negotiating framework with Turkey, which invited reflection on alternative outcomes with Turkey and enabled the introduction of suggesting permanent derogations in the fields of free movement of persons, structural policies or agriculture were Turkey to eventually join the Union (European Council, 2005).

2.4. 2005-2024: Divergence, distance and de-europeanisation

Since the opening of accession talks, Turkey's relations with the EU have been characterised by increasing divergence, both elite-based and public distance, and de-Europeanisation on the part of Turkey. Turkey's accession negotiations have proceeded at a snail's pace, with 16 (out of 35) chapters opened by November 2024 and only one chapter (science and research) provisionally closed. No new chapter has been opened since June 2016. While part of this has to do with the Cypriot vetoes to the opening of six negotiation chapters, the main technical blockage lies in the Union's December 2006 decision to suspend the opening of negotiations with Turkey on eight chapters of the *acquis* and not to provisionally close any of the chapters until Turkey met its obligations towards Cyprus, on the grounds of Turkey's non-implementation of the protocol amending the customs union agreement to allow Greek Cypriot-flagged flights and vessels into Turkish air and seaports. The updating of the customs union agreement which is sorely needed for Turkish economy also remains at a stalemate, with the member states refusing to give the mandate to the European Commission to negotiate a modernised agreement with Turkey, mainly due to the Cyprus problem.

This legal and institutional divergence between the two sides have also been accompanied by a deepening political rift between the EU and Turkey. The political reform momentum within Turkey had already began to wane after 2005. Even

reform initiatives which were applauded by EU actors, such as the 2009 "Kurdish Opening", were initiated and pursued by Turkey largely independently of the EU accession process (Aydın Düzgit and Tocci, 2015). Especially after its second electoral victory in 2007, the AKP became much stronger both in society and also against the secularist establishment, and thus became less dependent on the EU and its democratization agenda (Noutcheva and Aydın Düzgit 2012). The deterioration of Turkish democracy took a rapid turn after the Gezi uprisings in June 2013 when the government harshly clamped down on demonstrators and reached its peak with the failed coup attempt in July 2016. As the transformative impact of the EU membership goal weakened, the process of Europeanization was replaced by a policy of de-Europeanization in Turkey (Aydın Düzgit and Kaliber, 2016). While Turkey's move away from democracy towards a highly authoritarian, hierarchical and centralized regime consolidated the de facto frozen status of its accession negotiations, its waning accession prospects meant that the EU had little leverage left over the trajectory of Turkish democracy. This was coupled by an intensified reluctance to Turkish accession, often expressed through identity-based grounds as European politics began to turn increasingly to the right end of the political spectrum (Özbey, Hague and Eralp, 2022). Public support for Turkey's accession also fell considerably on both sides. This also meant that Turkey-EU relations was now entering an era of interest-based transactional relations that was devoid of a rules-based accession agenda (Eralp, 2018, 2019). The move towards a more transactional relationship also implied that governments and their elites were now the primary interlocutors defining the nature and the tone of the relationship, with diminishing scope for the input of non-governmental actors such as civil society organisations.

This era of transactionalism was best signified in the EU-Turkey Migration deal agreed between the two sides on 18 March 2016. In the summer of 2015, close to one million Syrian refugees transited through Turkey and risked their lives crossing the Aegean Sea in hopes of seeking protection in Europe. The debate over the arrival of refugees in Europe was leading to a political crisis in the EU as no agreement could be reached on how/ where to distribute inflows of refugees within European territory to ease the burden on border countries. Therefore, efforts turned to addressing the issue with countries of transit and origin, most notably Turkey, as the country was facing a huge refugee influx. Formally referred to as the "EU-Turkey Statement", the deal detailed cooperation in supporting Turkey in hosting this vast refugee population, curbing irregular migration flows to Europe, promoting legal channels for protection and resettlement in Europe, accelerating visa liberalization for Turkey, and re-energizing Turkey's EU accession process (Aydın Düzgit, Keyman and Biehl, 2019: 4).

Progress on these different components of the agreement has varied significantly. On the one hand, the Statement had an immediate and rather drastic

impact in terms of reducing the volume of irregular migration flows across the Aegean, as well as the loss of migrant lives at sea (Aydın Düzgit, Keyman and Biehl, 2019: 8). On the matter of visa liberalization, however, progress has been stalled because of five (out of seventy-two) requirements listed in the roadmap that Turkey has been unable to fulfill. Out of this five, those that necessitated amendments to the Anti-Terror Law proved particularly contentious in an era of rising nationalism in Turkey.

Regarding bilateral relations, the migration deal has been heavily criticized for giving the Turkish government leverage for maintaining illiberal and undemocratic internal politics, particularly in the wake of the April 2017 constitutional referendum which abolished the parliamentary system and replaced it with a hyper-centralized presidential system with little regard for checks and balances (Okyay and Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2016; Kfir, 2018). It can be argued that the migration deal also instilled a new source of mistrust into the bilateral relationship where mutual trust has already been low. The Turkish president and ministers have referred to "opening the gate if need be" on various occasions (Aydın Düzgit, Keyman and Biehl, 2019: 14) and briefly did so in February 2020, following the death of 33 Turkish soldiers in Syria.

The increasing conflictual nature of the relationship, despite limited transactional cooperation focused on migration, was also witnessed in the disputes concerning the Eastern Mediterranean. The power vacuum left by the United States by the first Trump administration in Turkey's immediate neighborhood opened a wider space for maneuver for Turkey, along with other regional actors such as Russia. Coupled with rising nationalism at home and having also alienated potential allies in the Mediterranean such as Israel and Egypt—mostly due to domestic political reasons—and thus feeling isolated in the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey increasingly resorted to unilateralism and a militarized foreign policy in its regional operations and actions, creating a deeper rift with the EU (Arısan-Eralp et. al., 2020). Its seismic exploration vessels off the coast of Cyprus and later Castellorizo led the EU to accuse Turkey of illegal actions that ran counter to international law and the sovereign rights of EU member states. Greece and Cyprus had formed closer ties with Egypt and Israel, leaving Turkey feeling increasingly cornered. France, which was on a collision course with Turkey over strategic interests in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as the Libya conflict, supported Cypriot and Greek positions against Turkey, calling for harsh sanctions on Ankara. Germany, on the other hand, adopted a conciliatory position and acted as a facilitator and mediator to start dialogue and reconciliation between the parties. The divergent positions of the member states ultimately led to a compromise, where the EU decided to impose limited sanctions targeting certain individuals and companies involved in gas drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean in a European Council summit in

December 2020. In response to Turkey's withdrawal of the gas exploration vessels and its reconciliatory tone towards the EU, the Union refrained from adopting a more comprehensive sanctions regime towards Turkey in the consecutive Council summits and proposed potential areas of further cooperation consisting of a modernized customs union, a revised migration deal and enhanced people to people contacts. Yet, none of these have translated into concrete action thus far.

3. Conclusion: The path ahead for EU-Turkey relations

A historical survey of Turkey-EU relations since its inception in 1959 demonstrate the continuing relevance of Eralp's (2009) pronounced emphasis on temporality and interaction and how they relate to the process of Europeanisation. Where the two sides possessed convergent interests accompanied by positive interaction, Europeanisation occurred, albeit only for limited periods in the long relationship. At times when priorities and interests diverged, reflecting also in the intensity and nature of interaction over time, de-Europeanisation coupled with interest-based transactionalism have been the end result. Over the past two decades, Turkey's status in relation to the EU has gradually transformed from a candidate country on the path to full accession, to a neighbour, and, finally, to an adversary with pockets of transactional cooperation. Some scholars have referred to the current state of the relationship as a form of "conflictual cooperation", where the parties acknowledge the centrality of conflict to their relationship, yet they choose to cooperate in certain policy areas (Saatçioğlu et al., 2019).

While this may be the dominant mode of the relationship as of writing, history suggests that when a different constellation of actors and factors within the EU and Turkey interlocks and interacts, a virtuous dynamic may well be set in motion again. As Eralp has repeatedly demonstrated through his body of work (for a more recent articulation, see Eralp, 2019), changes in the international system have played a key role in conditioning the interests and identitities of Turkey and the EU in their long trajectory. The international system is once again going through a major shift where the age of unipolarity is increasingly giving way to multipolarity, in a global context marred by regional conflicts and a climate crisis. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has sparked a new era in which European security and defense policy is being revamped to ensure European security without the guarantee of US support. The rise of protectionism, most notably in the US, and the intensifying US-China competition will undoubtedly have profound effects on Europe and its wider neighbourhood. These foster the potential for a deepened cooperation between Turkey and the EU in various policy fields including migration, customs union and the economy, digital society, green transformation, security and energy. Yet, as Eralp (2019) rightly highlights, whether this potential will be realised depends very

much on Turkey's domestic governance as well as the EU's willingness to be "more inclusive" by allowing for meaningful external differentiation of non-members.

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Özet

AB-Türkiye ilişkilerinde zamansallık ve etkileşim

Bu çalışma, AB-Türkiye ilişkilerinin tarihsel gelişimini Atila Eralp'ın Türkiye-AB ilişkileri literatüne yaptığı katkılarda öne sürmüş olduğu zamansallık ve etkileşim çerçevesi kapsamında ele almaktadır. Makale, Eralp'ın zamansallık, etkileşim ve Avrupalılaşma eksenli analitik perspektifinin AB-Türkiye ilişkilerinin 2005 yılı öncesindeki gelişimini açıkladığı gibi, 2005 sonrasında ilişkilerde yaşanan olumsuz seyri de anlamdırmakta önemli bir yer tuttuğunu iddia etmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Türkiye-AB ilişkileri, zamansallık, uluslararası düzen, Türk dış politikası, Avrupalılaşma

Turkey-EU relations: Road to nowhere or hope for progress? An analysis in light of the enlargement policy-concepts, tools and prospects[*]

Sanem Baykal[1]
Law Faculty, TOBB-ETU, Ankara
e-mail: s.baykal@etu.edu.tr
ORCID: 0000-0001-9492-3954

Abstract

This study aims at analysing main approaches, concepts and tools of the recent enlargement wave of the European Union on the basis of the policy documents specific to the design and implementation of such policy. Analysis of the main elements of the enlargement policy and the necessary reforms for preparing the EU for enlargement as per the concept of "integration capacity" pave the way for certain initial assessments regarding the future of EU's deepening and widening and their intertwined nature, as well as putting into perspective the future prospects of Turkey-EU relations.

Key words: European Union, EU enlargement, EU integration capacity, EU-Turkey relations

1. Introduction

This paper aims at contextualising the state of play in Turkey-EU relations by providing a brief outlook from the perspective of widening and deepening debate in the European Union, through focusing on main policy tools and objectives for

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enlargement, their development and connection with the content, process and procedure of reform in the EU as they currently unfold.

The EU enlargement has come to the fore once again due to recent geopolitical and geostrategic turn of events, most significant of which being the Russian aggression on Ukraine. As this new wave of enlargement, its main driving factors and decision making process attest, accession to the Union has always been, and still is, a predominantly political matter, a political decision. The criteria, principles, standards, procedures and processes of enlargement, however, also require a rule-based, normative and legal outlook both for the Union and for the candidate country, in order to attain the desired outcome and benefit the membership entails both for the candidate and for the EU.

In that vein, how those legal and policy instruments and concepts will be construed and implemented in the recent enlargement wave will be adopted as the method to make some basic observations both on the current enlargement process, EU's preparation for this process and moreover, on the current status and the possible direction of both the EU and Turkey-EU relations.

The accession process for Turkey, despite continuing on paper or "de jure", for all intents and purposes, is in a political, practical and "de facto" coma, if not yet called "dead" officially. The pendulum which is one of the most employed metaphors to describe the positive and negative developments following each other in the relations, seems to be mainly stuck on the cold, dark, negative side for almost 20 years now, and it might prove to be too difficult to resuscitate the full-fledged, regular accession process for the foreseeable future. That would be the case, in particular, if the current political and economic climate continues for another decade or so both for the Member States and Turkey alike, and both parties' intentions and attitudes remain stuck accordingly as well. The underlying factors of this negative and seemingly long-lasting turn of events are manifold, and are beyond the confines and objectives of this paper.

Instead, this paper will focus on the so-called "integration capacity" of the EU, that is the 4th Copenhagen criteria regarding its enlargement process, and the meaning of this concept and its evolving nature from mid-2000s till the mid-2020s. In that regard, the enlargement process and its corollary, the concept of "integration capacity" also provide some key elements of the differentiated integration debate both in its internal and external varieties. (Schimmelfennig and Winzen, 2020).

The relationship between the concept of "integration capacity" both in relation to the EU and its necessary reform process to prepare for integrating the new member, and the candidate country's relevant attributes in order to be smoothly integrated into the EU will be examined briefly here. Such examination will be undertaken in order to situate the prospects of Turkey-EU relations with its various contours within the legal, economic, security and political structure of wider Europe,

albeit outside the formal borders of the EU as such, yet within confines of its politically and legally fuzzy borders, processes and structures.

The aim here is neither to discuss the normative desirability or substance of the possible or probable EU reforms to prepare for enlargement and also to function more efficiently, nor their feasibility. The same goes for the recently energised enlargement policy. Rather, the objective of the paper is to provide a perspective on the discussions on both aspects of the development of European integration and their probable impact on the short to medium term prospects of Turkey-EU relations, either as regards the accession, or any rule and procedure based relationship structure, i.e. an external differentiated integration model, and maybe in the direction of a transactional relationship.

Here, the main argument of the paper is that neither the widening, nor the deepening dynamics of the EU will have a significant impact on Turkey-EU relations and that the parties are locked in their own positions, mainly emanating from their irrational, emotions and frustrations based stances towards each other, which reflects upon the enlargement policy and instruments on the part of the EU and are also demonstrated by them. It is also argued that only a shift in dynamics of the international political or economic circumstances and/or in the domestic political and economic circumstances of the parties' might trigger a change of direction.

2. EU enlargement from 2004 onwards: history, policy and its main instruments

2.1. Brief history of enlargement following the Eastern Wave

The EU had previous experience of accession of new members, the 2004-2007 period –starting in mid-1990s- however, witnessed the most ambitious, politically significant and at the same time overstretching enlargement of the EU to date. 12 states, 10 of which were former Eastern Bloc countries became EU members after an arduous, yet retrospectively short enlargement process resulting in profound political, economic and legal transformation, mainly for the newcomers, but also for the Union as well. (Sjursen, 2002; Sjursen, 2006; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2002; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005)

Almost two decades later, the EU is faced with a new wave of enlargement. In fact, there were other candidate countries for EU accession following the big bang enlargement wave, i.e. the Western Balkans and Turkey, yet until the war of aggression by Russia on Ukraine, only one candidate country had become a member from that group, Croatia in July 2013, and since then there were no candidate countries that came even close.

In fact for the Union, enlargement was an item not on top of the agenda for almost a decade. The shift of focus on the part of the EU from enlargement to other more pressing matters and policies, together with the so-called enlargement fatigue are considered as the factors behind such ambivalence of the EU towards enlargement. This is also demonstrated for instance by the policy of the Juncker Commission announcing that no new members will accede to the Union in their 5 year term of office. The multifaceted hardships faced by the EU, starting with the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty to the financial crisis of 2007-2008, from the rise of radicalism, populism and almost the collapse of the centre of the political spectrum, or in other words the mainstream political parties in a significant number of Member States to problems with managing migration and the migration averse public opinions, from Brexit to the difficulties in the Transatlantic relations-in particular during the Trump administration era-, and the rule of law -or in other words values- crisis mainly in some of the newcomers, but not only specific to them, dampened the mood, curbed the enthusiasm towards further enlargement to be put on the agenda.

Admittedly, the new bout of candidate countries also presented formidable challenges towards the EU, comparable to the Eastern Enlargement countries if not even more so. The Western Balkans with their individual political, economic and legal difficulties aside, also required special attention towards their relations with each other, and also some of the existing member states for the EU as well.

And then there was Turkey…Turkey had acquired the candidate status on December 1999, at the end of the first stage of the so-called "long and winding road" which took almost 40 years, if one starts counting from the first application of Turkey in July 1959. The following few years witnessing Turkey sufficiently fulfilling the Copenhagen Political Criteria and starting the accession negotiations in October 2005, greatly helped by the overall enabling economic and political conditions in the international climate, as well as the country itself. Yet, from that achievement onwards, the parties, i.e. Turkey and the EU, almost seem to have started to build together some sort of an insurmountable stumbling block, brick by brick, in way of the smooth progress of the bilateral relations, let alone the accession process.

Democratic backsliding on the part of Turkey, its newly discovered passion for a so-called diversified foreign policy, somewhat distancing itself from the institutions, mechanisms and principles of not only the West, but also the founding tenets of the Republic to some extent, frustration with EU's ambivalence and the Cyprus issue all played their part in the deterioration of the relations with the EU. The problems of the Union, briefly mentioned above all fed into the perception of Turkey, as a problem to be managed, instead of a candidate to be transformed for EU membership.

The growing tension in the relations resulted in a mutual dissatisfaction and frustration in the parties to such a degree that even the transactional moves, such as the migration cooperation and refugee deal of 2015-2016 managed to pave the way for a functioning, interest-based, mutually satisfactory relationship model, let alone any principled, rules-based structured model, such as the revision or modernisation of the Customs Union between the parties, and obviously the accession prospects became more and more distant.

The Western Balkans, on the other hand, despite following a different trajectory, faced similar difficulties with their accession processes, which resulted in frustration both in the political elites and more significantly in the public opinion of those countries.

Then the Russian war on Ukraine as of February 2022 and Ukraine's membership application immediately afterwards, forced the EU to change its ambivalent attitude towards enlargement and brought into limelight once again its most effective and successful foreign policy tool to date (Anghel and Džankić, 2023; Börzel, 2023; Laffan, 2022).

This eventuality also brought forward the need to putting its own house in order to prepare for this new and challenging enlargement wave and increase its "integration capacity" as we will discuss below.

2.2. Enlargement policy: instruments and their consequences

As is well known, the Copenhagen criteria, which were adopted in June 1993 Copenhagen European Council Conclusions in order to prescribe the political, economic and legal prerequisites for EU accession in the aftermath of the Cold War, set down the following requirements for membership:

-the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;

-the existence of a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union;

-the ability to take on the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union and the administrative capacity to effectively apply and implement the acquis. (European Council, 1993).

There is, however, one last Copenhagen criterion and as the Copenhagen Summit Conclusions declare: "The Union's capacity to absorb new members, while maintaining the momentum of European integration, is also an important consideration in the general interest of both the Union and the candidate countries".

The concepts, methods and tools of enlargement employed by EU's enlargement strategies and negotiating frameworks in the aftermath of the big bang enlargement of 2004-2007 differed from the previous bout in many ways.

The reasons for that include, *inter alia*, the enlargement fatigue as a result and the lessons learned because of the big bang enlargement, the long EU reform process which took almost the best part of a decade, the political and financial hardships faced by the Union with the sovereign debt crisis, migration crisis, rise of the populism crisis, values crisis, but also from the particulars of the candidate countries, and in particular one of them, i.e. Turkey.

Indeed, Turkey provided such a challenge to the EU as an accession country that the already existing 4th and last Copenhagen criteria, "the absorption capacity" had to be remembered and reminded by the Member States while the decision to open accession negotiations with that candidate country was taken in 2004-2005 (European Council, 2004 and Council of the EU, 2005).

The conditions and procedures of the EU's enlargement policy for the Western Balkans and Turkey as a new group, or wave, of enlargement were designed around 2004-2005, i.e. during the time when the decision about Turkey's starting the accession negotiations was being taken, together with Croatia. That methodology was then extended to all candidate and potential candidate countries with the 2006 Enlargement Strategy and their respective Negotiating Frameworks.

The main elements of 2006 Enlargement Strategy continue to be implemented today in principle (See Commission Enlargement Strategy 2006). There are some significant aspects of the wording and methodology that have been adapted to the necessities that emerged, in particular regarding the Western Balkans (See Commission's Revised Enlargement Methodology, 2020). The most significant of such novelties of wording, approach or methodology which were introduced over the years will be examined briefly, following the discussion on the 2006 Strategy below.

Under the 2006 Enlargement Strategy, three concepts or principles were to be taken into consideration for further enlargement of the Union: "consolidation", "conditionality" and "communication".[2]

According to the 2006 Enlargement Strategy, "consolidation" of the EU enlargement agenda meant that the Union would from then on be cautious about assuming any new commitments, but would honour its existing commitments towards countries already in the enlargement process.[3] Those would be the countries the accession negotiations had commenced with, i.e. Turkey and Croatia, as well as

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[2]   See in general, Blockmans 2007, Amtenbrink, 2007, Stubb, 2006, House of Lords, 2013.

[3]   Obviously that position needed a well justified revision or adaptation to the new circumstances due to the unfolding events from February 2022 onwards, namely the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

the Western Balkans countries to which a European perspective had already been offered.

"Conditionality", which had been a crucial element of the enlargement to the East[4], was being underlined by the Union as well as being somewhat redefined as "rigorous but fair conditionality". Thus, "strict" or in other words "rigorous but fair" conditionality was to be applied to all candidate and potential candidate countries. In the words of the 2006 Enlargement Strategy, "[e]very step forward depends on each country's own progress in meeting the necessary conditions at each stage of the accession process. This approach helps to consolidate reforms and to prepare new Member States to fulfil their obligations upon accession." (Commission, 2006)

Moreover, the significance of the democratic legitimacy of the enlargement process, arguably for the citizens of the Member States and the candidate countries was highlighted by the new enlargement strategy. As far as the EU was concerned, "[f]or enlargement to be a success, the EU must ensure the support of its citizens. Member States need to take the lead in communicating effectively the enlargement process and in particular the benefits that it offers for EU citizens." (See Commission's Enlargement Strategy, 2006). Hence, the popular support of the citizens had to be ensured through several mechanisms including civil society dialogue, which would culminate in better "communication", and thus understanding, trust and solidarity in order to make the enlargement a success.

Here, it needs to be pointed out that there was a strong emphasis on the absorption capacity of the Union in the Negotiating Framework for Turkey, which arguably also had an impact on the framing of the new Enlargement Strategy. As stated in the Negotiating Framework for Turkey:

> "Enlargement should strengthen the process of continuous creation and integration in which the Union and its Member States are engaged. Every effort should be made to protect the cohesion and effectiveness of the Union. In accordance with the conclusions of the Copenhagen European Council in 1993, the Union's capacity to absorb Turkey, while maintaining the momentum of European integration is an important consideration in the general interest of both the Union and Turkey […] While having full regard to all Copenhagen criteria, including the absorption capacity of the Union, if Turkey is not in a position to assume in full all the obligations of membership it must be ensured that Turkey is fully anchored in the European structures through the strongest possible bond." (Council of the EU, 2005).

On the call of the European Parliament for this concept to be examined and explained further, the European Commission prepared a Report on the absorption capacity of the EU in the Annex to its 2006 Enlargement Strategy and renamed the

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[4]   See in general Inglis, 2006, Kochenov, 2008.

concept as "integration capacity" (Commission, 2006; Amtenbrink, 2007). According to this study, entitled as "Special report on the EU's capacity to integrate new members", the Commission stated that "[t]he EU's absorption capacity, or rather integration capacity, is determined by the development of the EU's policies and institutions, and by the transformation of applicants into well-prepared Member States" (Commission's Enlargement Strategy and Special Report on Integration Capacity 2006). Therefore, as mentioned above, the capacity of would-be members to accede to the Union was to be rigorously assessed by the Commission on the basis of strict conditionality.

In the words of the Commission:

"Integration capacity is about whether the EU can take in new members at a given moment or in a given period, without jeopardizing the political and policy objectives established by the Treaties. Hence, it is first and foremost a functional concept. The Commission will in the future prepare impact assessments at all key stages of the accession process. Where such assessments are made, the specific characteristics of each country will be taken into account." (Commission, 2006)

According to the Special Report, the capacity of the Union to maintain the momentum of European integration as it enlarged had three main components: institutions, common policies, and budget. The Union needed to ensure that its institutions continued to act effectively, that its policies met their goals, and that its budget was commensurate with its objectives and with its financial resources after the accession of new Member States. Therefore, the size and the attributes of a candidate country would also be taken into account while making the final decision about its accession.

Moreover, also in accordance with the elements of the new Enlargement Strategy, communication amongst the citizens of the existing Member States and candidate countries was deemed as essential within context of the determination of the integration capacity. In that vein, the Commission stated that:

"The EU can successfully welcome new countries provided its own development has progressed and candidate countries can fulfil their responsibilities as Member States. EU citizens also need to be ready for further enlargement, with a better understanding of the issues at stake. This will enhance the democratic legitimacy of the process in terms of public perception." (Commission, 2006).

Other elements of Turkey's Negotiating Framework such as the possibility to bring "opening and closing benchmarks", the possibility of "suspension in the case

of a serious and persistent breach of EU's values", the adoption of an "Intergovernmental Conference format" for the accession negotiations were also identified as elements increasing the role of the Member States in the EU's enlargement process. (Hillion, 2010)

Moreover, it was stated in Turkey's Negotiating Framework that there would be a possibility of long transition periods, special arrangements and permanent safeguard measures to be included in the Accession Treaty for Turkey. In the words of the Negotiating Framework for Turkey:

> "Long transitional periods, derogations, specific arrangements or permanent safeguard clauses, i.e. clauses which are permanently available as a basis for safeguard measures, may be considered. The Commission will include these, as appropriate, in its proposals in areas such as freedom of movement of persons, structural policies or agriculture. Furthermore, the decision-taking process regarding the eventual establishment of freedom of movement of persons should allow for a maximum role of individual Member States. Transitional arrangements or safeguards should be reviewed regarding their impact on competition or the functioning of the internal market."[5]

Those elements were already arguably developed with the "integration capacity" of the Union in mind, as well as the specific attributes of the candidate country in that regard. The Union was trying to be careful with those policy and budgetary areas that would be mostly effected by the accession of Turkey, taking into account also the public opinion in the Member States, their perceptions and anxieties.

Moreover, such a model of membership, if materialised, would have already presented an exercise of the differentiated integration designs, almost even before such concept was developed.

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[5]   For an extensive analysis of such provisions possibility of being incorporated into the Accession Treaty of Turkey and their legal effects and compatibility with the basic tenets of the European Union legal order see Hillion, 2007, Hillion, 2010.
Whereas the Negotiating Framework for Ukraine has a different approach for such precautions in the future accession treaty and states "Transitional measures may also be agreed in the interest of the Union. Appropriate transition periods, derogations, specific arrangements or safeguard clauses may be considered. The Commission will include these, as appropriate, in its draft EU Common Positions to close the relevant chapters for areas such as freedom of movement of workers, structural policies and/or agriculture. Transitional arrangements or safeguards should be reviewed regarding their impact on competition or the functioning of the internal market." (Council of the EU, 2024) The striking difference here is that there is no mention of permanent safeguard measures as was the case of Turkey's Negotiating Framework. (Council of the EU, 2024)

2.3. Consequences for enlargement

In the Commission Report of 2006, prepared in accordance with the request from the European Parliament, in order to explain the meaning of this concept, to a certain extent due to repeated significance being given to the term in December 2004 European Council Conclusions and also in particular in Turkey's Negotiating Framework, we saw that the "absorption capacity" was to be renamed as the "integration capacity".[6] Hence, the "absorption" or "integration" "capacity", whose meaning and various components have been elaborated by the European Commission, albeit arguably not commensurate to the significance of the concept. In the last decade, and in particular now in the verge of a new challenging enlargement, with challenging candidate countries such debate seem to be intensifying to a certain extent.

When we delve into the exploration on the legal and political meaning and consequences of the concept of "integration capacity", the initial approach would be to identify this concept as concerning the capacity of the EU in its various forms and manifestations to "integrate" the new member state. In fact, as the Commission points out, the integration capacity is usually referred to as having evolved into the condition for the Union to function properly and efficiently politically, financially and institutionally before enlargement takes place (Commission, 2006).

The strength, the resilience and the flexibility of the EU in its governance (institutions, decision making practice and processes, objectives and values, judicial structures etc.), its policies (policy shaping, policy prioritisation, policy instruments, policy impact analysis, policy balancing etc.) and its budget (budgetary revenues and expenditures, funds and their allocation principles and procedures, budgetary contributions and allocations etc.) would all be favourably or adversely effected by the accession of a new member. Hence, the need for the EU to prepare for all those positive and negative consequences of the accession of the new member "while maintaining the momentum of European integration", since this "is also an important consideration in the general interest of both the Union and the candidate countries." (Commission, 2006)

The other and equally significant aspect of the "integration capacity", though only implicitly mentioned and would need to be inferred from the analysis of the meaning and implications of the concept, emerges as the so-called "capacity" of the candidate country or the new member state to be "integrated" into the Union. Despite the wording of the Copenhagen Summit Conclusions pointing solely to the attributes of the Union to prepare to integrate the new countries, it needs to be

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[6] Commission Report on Integration Capacity 2006. See further on the term Börzel, Dimitrova and Schimmelfennig, 2017.

underlined that one of the components of the "integration capacity" is inevitably the attributes of the candidate.

First, in the 2006 Report, the Commission, after stating that it will "[…]prepare impact assessments at all key stages of the accession process.", underlines also that [w]here such assessments are made, the specific characteristics of each country will be taken into account". (Commission, 2006)

Arguably, the timing of the preparation of the focus on the concept of the "absorption" or "integration" capacity coinciding with the start of accession negotiations with Turkey appearing in the horizon at the end of 2004, and becoming a reality by the beginning of October 2005, a candidate country with a plethora of challenging and promising attributes also attests to this contention. Moreover, Turkey's being an especially challenging candidate country for the EU was already confirmed by a similar Report prepared by the Commission on Turkey, included in its Enlargement Package of 2004 (See Commission Report on Issues Arising from Turkey's Membership, 2004).

Yet, it also needs to be pointed out that the most apparent and legally significant aspect of the "integration capacity" of the Union for any candidate country remains the capacity of the candidate country to assume all the obligations of EU membership.

With the 2006 Report of the European Commission on the integration capacity, a significant element was underlined once again, albeit in different terminology, in EU enlargement policy documents, namely that enlargement also requires a broad and sustained public support in EU and acceding Member States.[7] This element was also to be found in the December 2004 European Council Conclusions and Turkey's Negotiating Framework, stating that the negotiations would be premised on three pillars comprising the efforts to keep up with complying with the Copenhagen Political Criteria, alignment with the EU Acquis and strengthening the civil society dialogue between EU and Turkish peoples. This last element resonates with the public support for accession of a particular country, both in the EU Member States and the accession country. As Andrea Ott remarks "[t]his hybrid and fluid condition questions legal certainty and predictability but the enlargement policy remains a hybrid process – political and intergovernmental at the same time." (Ott, 2024)

This examination needs to be linked with the analysis on the enlargement strategies and the negotiating frameworks in order to highlight, and critically explore some of the recent terminology on staged/gradual integration/accession which can be regarded to a certain extent as related to the concept of integration capacity both from the EU, but also from the candidate country perspective. We will

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[7]   See European Council Conclusions, 14– 15 December 2006 and Buras and Morina, 2023.

touch upon the matter below, while analysing the recent Enlargement Strategies' wording and methodology since the beginning of the 2020s.

3. Revised enlargement principles and methodology for Today's challenges

From European Commission's 2006 Enlargement Strategy onwards, the rules, principles and procedures developed for Turkey and the Western Balkans were all prepared and implemented with such over cautious, almost delaying manner that, save for Croatia, not only Turkey, but also none of the Western Balkans managed to satisfy the requirements of these new strategies (Börzel and Schimmelfennig, 2017).

It needs to be pointed out, however, that despite the accession conditions becoming ever more difficult to comply with for the new group of candidates, their efforts for legal alignment had to be also more vigorous, in particular in the area of democracy, human rights and rule of law too.

The reasons for this were twofold. The Union felt the urgent need for developing a fast evolving acquis in the political criteria area and an approach of "lessons learned" from the Eastern enlargement was being adopted. The Union was gaining ground in common rules and procedures in the area of democracy, human rights and rule of law since the early 2000s, so the relevant acquis was expanding, and secondly because the Union had experienced the adverse effects of expediting the accession process, especially as regards the independence and impartiality of the judiciary, the separation of powers, the public administration reform and all other governance issues in general, transparency and accountability for all relevant public administration actors, the anti-discrimination legislation, practice and institutionalisation etc. In that sense, delays in the accession process might be agonising and infuriating, yet to a certain extent understandable from the perspective of the EU side: the Union's political and legal system required and justified such caution, hence no accession since 2013.

Yet, today's international geopolitical climate attests to a somewhat different enlargement process (Petrov and Hillion, 2022). The geopolitical climate changed drastically from that of the aftermath of the collapse of the Iron Curtain's liberal economic and political values and approaches to the circumstances created by a war of aggression just outside the borders of the Union. This change in a nutshell has already had, and probably will continue to have, some dramatic impact on the liberal order and also the European integration regarding its political, economic and legal system as well as its policies. It needs to be pointed out that, not only the Russian aggression on Ukraine, but a plethora of reasons from the economic, social and political discontent with the consequences of the global liberal order that emerged

in the aftermath of the collapse of the Iron Curtain created the dynamics of this geopolitical turn of events for Europe. Hence, the enlargement climate this time, in 2020s, is very different from that of the second half of 1990s and the first half of the 2000s.

There is one strong similarity, however, between the Eastern enlargement of the early 2000s and the enlargement of 2020s: enlargement proves to be the best and most powerful response and most effective foreign policy tool for the Union once again. In that vein, on 6 October 2023, at the informal meeting of heads of state or government in Granada, EU leaders reconfirmed enlargement as "a geo-strategic investment in peace, security, stability and prosperity" (Heads of State and Government of EU Member States, 2023).

As stated in the Enlargement Strategy of 2022, "Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has fundamentally changed the geopolitical landscape and is putting the rules-based order to the test. In this context, the EU's enlargement policy is more than ever a geostrategic investment in long term peace, stability, and security of the whole of our continent and is consequently featuring high on the EU's political agenda" and that "[t]he Russian aggression has demonstrated more clearly than ever that the perspective of membership of the European Union is a strong anchor not only for prosperity, but also for peace and security." (Commission, 2022)

With this backdrop in mind, we will look into the enlargement strategies, tools and methods to ascertain whether there are any significant changes in the design and implementation of the enlargement policy in this time span of almost 20 years.

3.1. New elements of the EU enlargement strategies

The first significant change, heralding also what would follow, came much earlier with the 2011 Strategy (Commission, 2011-2012) and was reflected in Montenegro's Negotiating Framework of 2012 (Council, 2012). Here, the Chapters 23 and 24, comprising the EU Acquis on "Judiciary and Fundamental Rights" and "Freedom, Security and Justice" were given a specific status as the first chapters to be opened and last to be closed in accession negotiations of the candidate country. It was stated in the Enlargement Strategy of 2011 that "[d]ifficult negotiating chapters such as those on the judiciary and fundamental rights and on justice, freedom and security should be tackled as early as possible to allow adequate time for the candidate country to build the necessary track record of reform" (Commission, 2011-2012). This was a clear reflection of lessons learned from the previous enlargement wave.[8]

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[8] This is also underlined in the Negotiating Framework of Ukraine as "Given the crucial importance throughout the process of the underlying reforms, negotiations on the fundamentals' cluster will be

Then following a considerable amount of time without any development in enlargement policy, including the 2014-2019 Juncker Commission's stance that there would not be any new accessions to the Union till the end of 2019-inarguably as a reflection of the policies of most of the Member States-, the French government came up with a proposal for the revival of the enlargement for the Western Balkans in November 2019 (French Government, 2019). The French proposal was answered by a counter proposal at the time by a group of Member States (Politico, 2019).

The French proposal underlined the principles which were to be reflected, a few months later, in the Commission study on the Revised Methodology for Enlargement announced in February 2020 (Commission, 2020).[9] The "gradual association", "stringent conditions", "tangible benefits" and "reversibility" and replacing the chapters with successive stages where the completion of each stage would be rewarded by "the possibility to participate in EU programmes, to be involved in certain sectoral policies and, where appropriate, to benefit from certain targeted finance where the final objective would still remain "full and complete accession." This approach could also be seen as an example of differentiated integration designs.[10]

The Commission presented its new enlargement methodology in February 2020 (Commission, 2020; Mirel, 2019; Mirel, 2022), where the main claim was to have a "more credible, dynamic, and predictable" process and the main novelties were on grouping the negotiating chapters in six thematic clusters: fundamentals; internal market; competitiveness and inclusive growth; green agenda and sustainable connectivity; resources, agriculture and cohesion; external relations; envisaging more credibility by greater involvement of member states; and lastly, greater predictability though the clusters design, which should result in the gradual "phasing in" of candidates in EU policies and increased access to funding throughout the process, but would also include rolling back in the case of stagnation or backsliding in prospective members. The so-called Revised Enlargement Methodology was to be premised on four principles: "enhancing credibility", "providing a more robust political direction", "injecting dynamism", and "ensuring predictability".

"Injecting dynamism", in close connection with "enhancing credibility" necessitated from 2020 onwards that the candidate countries would be expected to deliver on commitments, and the Member States would respond by moving forward

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opened first and closed last. This will allow sufficient time to establish the necessary legislation, institutions, and solid track records of implementation before the negotiations are closed. Progress under the fundamentals' cluster will determine the overall pace of negotiations and will be taken into account for the decision to open or close new clusters or chapters." (Council, 2024)

[9]   On a comparison of the proposals see Eisl, 2020.

[10]   For detailed analysis of the French proposals see, Milenković, 2020, Tcherneva, 2019, Eisl, 2019.

to the next stage of the process, reflecting a "merits-based" approach, whereas "strong political direction" was to be realised by engaging with the candidates at the highest political level, through regular EU-Western Balkans summits and regular ministerial meetings. Moreover, the Member States will be involved more systematically in monitoring and reviewing the accession process and steering the negotiations.

A "more dynamic process" meant a new terminology of groups of chapters called "clusters", where a specific related number of Acquis Chapters would be grouped together, and the first group or cluster would be named as the "fundamentals" comprising rule of law and fundamental rights, economic governance and improving economic competitiveness, and strengthening democratic institutions. This cluster would be prioritised and would also continue to be the prerequisite and significant point of focus for the progress in other areas under the motto of "fundamentals first". Moreover, this approach would allow for identifying opportunities for early alignment and integration into EU policies. Negotiations on each cluster will be opened as a whole, rather than chapter by chapter, though each chapter will be dealt with individually with respect to its provisional closure. In line with the motto of "more predictability", the EU was providing for both incentives and negative consequences: options like 'accelerated integration' and 'phasing-in' to specific EU policies, programmes, funding opportunities etc., or negative consequences for lack of progress, such as re-opening of previously closed chapters or reversibility.[11]

For the first time mentioned in the EU's revised negotiating position on Montenegro and Serbia in 2021, then with Albania in 2022, and repeated with Ukraine in 2024, the Union employs phrases such as accelerated integration and

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[11] For instance under the Ukranian Negotiating Framework such negative consequences were stated as follows: "In case of i) any serious or prolonged stagnation or backsliding in reform implementation in the fundamentals' cluster, or ii) a situation where progress under the fundamentals cluster significantly lags behind progress in other areas and this leads to an overall imbalance of the enlargement negotiations, and after having exhausted all other available measures, the Commission can on its own initiative or at the duly motivated request of a Member State propose to withhold its recommendations to open and/or close other negotiating clusters and chapters, and adapt the associated preparatory work, as appropriate, until this stagnation, backsliding or imbalance is addressed. The decision thereon, shall be deemed to be adopted by the Council, unless, after having heard Ukraine, it decides by a qualified majority to reject the Commission's proposal within 90 days. The Member States will act in the Intergovernmental Conference in accordance with this Council decision. Once the Commission assesses that the stagnation, backsliding or imbalance is addressed, it will recommend to the Council to open and/or close the negotiating clusters and chapters concerned. The decision thereon shall be deemed to be adopted by the Council, unless it decides by a qualified majority to reject the Commission's recommendation within 90 days."

"phasing in" to individual EU policies, the EU market and EU programmes in a merit-based and reversible manner. In the Negotiating Framework of Ukraine, the elements of the new methodology were employed as followed: "If Ukraine makes sufficient progress on reform priorities agreed in the negotiations, this should lead to closer integration with the European Union, through accelerated integration and "phasing in" to individual EU policies, the EU market and EU programmes, in a merit-based and reversible manner, in order to unleash the potential of such integration, in particular by removing technical barriers to trade, while ensuring a level playing field and safeguarding the internal market's integrity; primary focus should be given to areas where the candidate country already has the capacity and expertise for exports to the EU, and to areas of mutual strategic interest where the candidate country has significant production but needs to meet EU norms and standards, and to other areas where there is a vast untapped potential." (Council, 2024)

As remarked by Ott, "Unfortunately, this remains vague and resonates with what the EU also indicated to Turkey in the early 2000s, namely an associated status. However, this association to EU policies and even extending the internal market to third countries, the participation in EU programmes and agencies has been always enabled and therefore states the obvious. At the end, closer integration has its limits, it has to respect the red lines of a level playing field and integrity of the internal market which are mentioned in the official documents but also the autonomy of the EU legal order which is not mentioned in the document". (Ott, 2024)

The EU was reiterating its commitment to the Western Balkans, emphasising that the region remained a "top priority" (Commission, 2020). The Commission proposals made on the 5th of February, were adopted by the Council in March 2020 (Council of the EU, 2020).

Lastly, in that vein, the 2024 Enlargement Strategy underlined the approach of coupling the enlargement momentum "with a reinvigorated engagement with the relevant partners, particularly through their progressive integration into the EU single market. This integration is a facilitator (and not an alternative) to accession, by bringing even before accession the tangible socio-economic benefits of EU membership to the enlargement countries that are ready in specific areas. To show its commitment to above mentioned engagement, the EU has significantly boosted its financial support to partner countries." (Commission, 2024(b))

3.2. Deepening-enlargement tandem

In 2023 Enlargement Strategy the relationship between the internal reforms for the EU and enlargement were highlighted once again by the statement that "[i]n parallel, the Union needs to lay the necessary internal groundwork and reforms for

further enlargement, to complete the European Union. As a concrete expression of EU support for the enlargement partners, it is crucial to mobilise the corresponding funding, including in the context of the mid-term revision of the current multiannual financial framework." (Commission, 2023). The 2024 Strategy repeated this link by underlining that "enlargement requires an internal reflection in the EU and the preparation of its bodies. On 20 March, the European Commission adopted a Communication on preenlargement reforms and policy reviews, which contributes to the ongoing discussion on the internal reforms the EU will need to make. It looks at the implications of a larger EU in four key areas – values, policies, budget and governance – and lays the ground for the pre-enlargement policy reviews. Last but not least, enlargement should be accompanied by targeted communication actions aimed at informing the public opinion about the process, both in the EU and in the candidate countries." (Commission, 2024(a))

The French and German Working Group Report which focuses on certain policy recommendations on institutional change, in particular following the next wave of enlargement was a significant initiative for mobilising the efforts and intensifying the debate on reform for the EU (See Report of the Franco-German Working Group on EU Institutional Reform, 2023). European Commission's new endeavour of pre-enlargement reform preparations might in fact be seen from the perspective of strengthening the integration capacity of the EU as well. A policy review process is already initiated by the Commission with a Communication in March 2024 (Commission, 2024(a)).

The discussions on the "values", "policies", "budget" and the "governance" underlined by the Commission in this study constitute the significant aspects of those reform aspirations and consequently their impact on the Union's integration capacity, including some of the problems they may raise for the proper functioning of the EU integration, will continue to have a prominent place in the future of the EU discussions for the next decade. The main problem remains the willingness and the capacity of the whole structure, with its Member States, their peoples and the EU institutions to rise to the ocassion to have an efficient, democratic, focused and result oriented debate and process to achieve the necessary transformation of EU with its direction, priorities, policies, institutions and all other tools to achieve its objectives. Whether or not this is accomplished will be determine the future prospects of not only the next enlargement, but also the European integration project.

4. Conclusion

In the current enlargement wave, the candidates consist of the Western Balkans-together with Turkey-, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, and the accession

process is predicted to take a considerable amount of time due to the specific circumstances of the candidates and their need of a long and demanding acquis, public administration structures and policy alignment processes.

Moreover, the EU itself would require a long, and again demanding period of reforms to prepare for such enlargement in order to fulfil the requirements of "integration capacity" from the view point of the Union. Commission's new endeavour of pre-enlargement reform preparations might be seen from a similar perspective. The discussions on the governance and policy aspects of those reform aspirations and consequently their impact on the Union's integration capacity merits a specific mention, without of course forgetting the budgetary implications.

Similarly, discussion on various designs on staged/gradual integration/accession can be seen to a certain extent as related to the concept of integration capacity from the candidate country perspective. As mentioned above, since 2020 onwards, the EU's enlargement policy tentatively started to revolve around such new designs on accession and membership. It is very often argued that a multi-speed construct, where a new understanding of membership due to accession prospects, where membership cannot be all or nothing, would have to be explored in regard to its various components and consequences.

Whether such designs, which might be identified conceptually as "differentiated integration" designs–albeit a debate might be in order on whether they should be considered as "internal" or "external" differentiated integration, depending on a temporal element whether such staged or gradual "membership" is to take place before or after accession- are capable of being reconciled, how and to what extent, with the fundamental principles and foundations of EU law and institutional structure and thus might have any practical traction and/or normative appeal will also have to be explored. In that context, the significant principles or concepts of European legal and political order such as European citizenship, mutual trust, sincere cooperation, single market and beyond, as well as their compatibility with such differentiated integration designs require careful analysis from different perspectives.

At this conjuncture, we need to draw attention to the fact that whether such designs could have normative appeal as well as practical desirability would need to be examined and assessed from both the institutional, legal, policy, financial requirements and feasibility, but also from a political perspective as well.

Such analysis would pave the way to make certain conclusions about the future of the EU enlargement process and its relations with Turkey, since the overall consequence of such designs would arguably be to build- or strengthen- a sui generis structure of differentiated integration, internally and externally.

Here only three remarks will be made on the impact of this broad framework regarding EU enlargement on Turkey-EU relations, in order to make some predictions for the short to medium term prospects of such relations.

First, geopolitics emerges as the main motive and impetus behind this new enlargement stage. Yet, Turkey, whose main attributes include its strong presence in NATO, its experienced and versatile army, its developing defence industry, its prominent position for the supply chains and the economic security at large, hence its contribution to the overall security and defence of Europe, as well as its geopolitical significance not only under the new set of circumstances, but throughout history, and most probably for the future, is not even mentioned or included in enlargement designs of the EU.

Secondly, even the fact that the EU regards enlargement once again as its main foreign policy tool, such urgency or priority does not extend to re-energising Turkey's accession or even a structured and principled relationship model beyond a transactional issue-based model.

And thirdly that the EU will be preoccupied with this new and very challenging enlargement wave and the necessary internal reforms as a response to the current geopolitical climate in Europe and beyond, hence the concerns about Turkey's relationship with this recently emerging policy and structure, seemingly prioritising geopolitics and security over values and norms for the foreseeable future, will be at the slow-burner and transactional at best.

Arguably, this also says a lot about the credibility of the contention regarding the geopolitical and geostrategic EU, not considering the attributes and consequently the possible contributions of Turkey to the Union in this juncture, but also about Turkey's position regarding its alignment with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, which was in high 90% in the mid-2000s, and declining in a steady manner ever since (Commission, 2024(b)). Moreover, the current state of play, which can only be described as stalemate at best, even under the conditions which might have proved to be conducive to rethinking the possible areas of progress for mutual interests, attest to the fact that the time for a deep transformation in the mentality of the parties might be inevitable. Such deep transformation will hardly be in the direction of accession for the foreseeable future.

The EU and Turkey are bound by geography, history, trade, common security architecture, common rules and procedures and beyond. Whether they have the political will for any functioning integration model based on common institutions, norms and values, albeit a model that does not immediately result in membership, remains to be seen. Here, it is argued that to pave the way for a relationship model that is conducive to reinforce stability, security and mutual interests the consent of the peoples on both sides; a perception and an existence of mutual interests and

concrete results; a functioning institutional set up, rules and procedures, and minimum basis of shared values and processes to strengthen them are essential.

Whether the parties manage to find such an alternative model, which might or might not end in Turkey's membership as a final destination, one prerequisite is imperative: "fundamentals first" should also remain the premise of a relationship model that is fit for purpose. Hence democracy, human rights and rule of law should remain the core principles of any functioning, beneficial and worth having design for the future of Turkey-EU relations.

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Özet

Türkiye - AB ilişkileri: Çıkmaz yol ya da ilerleme umudu? Genişleme politikası çerçevesinde bir analiz-kavramlar, araçlar, ihtimaller

Bu çalışma Avrupa Birliğinin son genişleme dalgasının, söz konusu politikanın oluşturulması ve uygulanmasında temel teşkil eden politika belgeleri çerçevesinde temel yaklaşımları, kavramları ve araçları incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Genişleme politikasının temel unsurları ve AB'yi "entegrasyon kapasitesi" kavramının gerektirdiği reformlar yoluyla genişlemeye hazırlama çabalarının analizi, bir yandan Birliğin derinleşme ve genişlemesinin geleceği ve birbiri içine geçmiş niteliğine dair bazı ön değerlendirmeler yapmaya, öte yandan da Türkiye-AB ilişkilerinin geleceğini bir perspektife oturtmaya yardımcı olabilecektir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Avrupa Birliği, AB'nin genişlemesi, AB'nin entegrasyon kapasitesi, Türkiye-AB ilişkileri.

Barely Alive? The Costs and Benefits of the EU-Turkey Statement on Irregular Migration[*]

Basak Kale
Department of International Relations, METU, Ankara
e-mail: bkale@metu.edu.tr
ORCID: 0000-0003-1760-3716

Ebru Turhan
Department of Political Science and International Relations, Turkish-German University, Istanbul
e-mail: turhan@tau.edu.tr
ORCID: 0000-0002-8064-4927

Abstract

The EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016 - also known as the EU-Turkey deal or the refugee deal - had strong underlying motivations both for the European Union (EU) and Turkey. For the EU, the EU-Turkey Statement aimed to limit if not, end irregular migration from Turkey and its immediate neighbourhood. For Turkey, the Statement provided financial support and strategic diplomatic engagement, putting Turkey back on the EU's political map. With Ankara frequently threatening to withdraw from the deal and with the EU institutions responsible for the deal having been criticized for not taking a "humane" stand toward migration management and for increasing the EU's dependence on the Turkish government, it remains somewhat unclear why the EU-Turkey Statement still perseveres. Taking into consideration both parties' rationalist calculations, this paper offers an analytical overview of the costs and benefits of the implementation of the deal from 2016 to 2024. The findings show that the advantages of the Statement for the EU (governments) and the Turkish government outweigh its costs. Unable to engage in concerted actions and to strengthen the internal dimension of its migration governance, the Statement helped the EU utilize Turkey both as a buffer zone between countries

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of origin and its member states and as a geopolitical space where the refugee Other can reside. The Statement also created a blueprint for similar arrangements of the EU with other neighbouring countries. As far as Turkey is concerned, the Statement specifically equipped the Turkish government with unparalleled leverage in its relations with the EU which remains incapable of instrumentalizing its normative conditionality vis-à-vis Turkey. Thus, at the intergovernmental level, the benefits of the Statement outweigh its costs. How much this satisfactory cost-benefit ratio translates into the public domain remains unclear and is subject to further scholarly investigation.

1. Introduction

The March 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, (also known as the EU-Turkey deal or the refugee deal), remains a cornerstone of European migration management despite ongoing political tensions and challenges between the European Union (EU) and Turkey. The EU-Turkey Statement was a response developed by EU member states under the former German Chancellor Angela Merkel's leadership to the sharp increase in irregular migrants crossing the Aegean Sea from Turkey to Greece. The summer of 2015 tested the limits of the EU's border control mechanisms as well as the capacity of the EU member states to handle asylum applications.

In the summer of 2015, almost 1 million refugees arrived in EU territories uprooted not only from the Syrian conflict but from regions with ongoing conflicts such as Afghanistan and Iraq. It was also the summer when more than 3,700 lost their lives while trying to cross the Aegean Sea (IOM, 2016). Frontex reported that in 2015 EU member states had more than 1,820,000 irregular border crossings along their external borders which was more than six times higher than the previous year (Frontex, 2016). The majority of these irregular detections occurred in the Eastern Mediterranean route with almost 890,000 irregular crossings between Turkey and the Greek islands. Among these irregular migrants, very few applied for asylum in Greece and continued to reach other EU member states as their final destination.

Both the EU and Turkey had reasons to accept the Statement's scope and contents. The EU was motivated to limit the number of irregular crossings, reduce the deaths at the Aegean Sea, and ease the burden on its frontline member states. Turkey aimed to get the EU committed to burden sharing at least through financial mechanisms while revitalizing its fading EU membership prospects and gaining strategic benefits. With different motivations and aims in mind, both the EU and Turkey engaged in this process that created blueprints for the EU's future migration management while impacting its accession process-related engagements and policies as well.

Looking from the accession perspective, it is possible to argue that during the last eight years of the Statement, Turkey's membership prospects diminished even more, to a mere strategic partnership with financial incentives on the sidelines (Pierini, 2023). The deal has also impacted the EU's global ambitions as a normative actor in a negative way while causing legitimacy issues and undermining its normative norms, values and standards. The deal was also a product of the externalization of the EU's migration policies (Cassarino, 2021). At the same time, both the EU and Turkey have a vested interest in maintaining this arrangement, as it offers mutual benefits: Turkey gains financial support and geopolitical leverage, while the EU enhances its border security and political stability. Despite its criticisms and shortcomings, the lack of viable alternatives and shared concerns over migration control and regional stability keep the EU-Turkey Statement in place as a key diplomatic tool in managing the complex relationship between the two "difficult" partners. During the negotiation process and the implementation of the Statement, issues related to conditionality (Börzel and Soyaltin-Colella, 2020), EU's and Turkey's geopolitical strategies (Kirişci, 2016) as well as the accession negotiation items became further impactful in achieving political stability for Turkey (Niemann and Zaun, 2018).

This paper aims to analyse the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement through the lenses of costs and benefits. We argue that the EU-Turkey Statement provided strong motivations for both the EU and Turkey. For Turkey, the Statement provided financial support and strategic diplomatic engagement, putting Turkey back on the EU's political map. The EU delivered the financial promises with some delay while its diplomatic engagement with Turkey gradually dwindled to a minimum. With Ankara frequently threatening to withdraw from the deal due to the EU's unwillingness to deliver certain incentives and with the EU institutions responsible for the deal having been criticized for not taking a "humane" stand toward migration management and for increasing the EU's dependence on the Turkish government, it remains somewhat unclear why the EU-Turkey Statement still perseveres. Taking into consideration both parties' rationalist calculations, this paper offers an analytical overview of the costs and benefits of the implementation of the deal from 2016 to 2024. The findings show that the EU-Turkey Statement created a blueprint for similar arrangements of the EU with other neighbouring countries while diminishing its perception as a global "normative" actor. On the Turkish side, the Statement reduced Turkey's membership prospects to a conflictual partnership with limited financial incentives on the sidelines. At the same time, Turkey was able to reduce the number of irregular crossings and deaths at its sea borders while making changes in its management of migration specifically in the legal and operational domains, while gaining considerable political leverage vis-à-vis the EU and its member states.

Overall, our findings indicate that the EU's and Turkey's commitment to the maintenance of the EU-Turkey Statement perseveres since its benefits – especially for the Turkish government and the governments of EU member states – outweigh its costs. This article will first look at both Turkey's and the EU's motivations to pursue the Statement. After analysing Turkey's gains and losses from the deal, the following section will examine the costs and benefits of the deal for the EU. The concluding section will summarize the key findings and offer an overarching assessment of the Statement's future prospects.

2. The benefits and costs of the 2016 statement on irregular migration for Turkey

2.1. Benefits for Turkey

One of the strongest benefits of the Statement for Ankara has been the financial support it received for the refugees residing in Turkey. The international burden sharing has been very minimal until 2016 with Turkey bearing the financial cost of hosting nearly three million refugees. In the initial stages of the Syrian conflict, the Turkish government did not seek international burden-sharing (T24, 2013). The reasons for not accepting international support were due to two main reasons. Firstly, Turkey assumed that the situation would be temporary and that seeking international assistance or cooperation would not be necessary. Secondly, receiving financial or other forms of international aid would require sharing information, opening refugee camps to international organizations, and ensuring financial transparency (Kale, 2016). With these factors in mind, Turkey aimed to address the crisis independently. The deal provided Turkey with financial support of €6 billion to manage the world's largest refugee population. This EU funding focused on improvements in housing, healthcare, education, and basic services for refugees, easing the strain on Turkey's domestic resources.

The initial financial support was to be €3 billion and was then increased to a total amount of €6 billion through the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT). The Facility was set up based on full cooperation with the European Parliament (EP) to provide grants and other financial support to ensure that the needs of the refugees and host communities are addressed in a comprehensive and coordinated manner (European Commission, 2015). Financial contribution efforts started in January 2016 and continued for the next couple of years with increased intensity. This financial assistance has also helped Turkey build respective infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, health and community centres, not just for the Syrians under Temporary Protection (SuTPS), but also for the local Turkish population. Currently, the initial funds have been spent, but there is continued interest in renewing or

expanding this financial support. It is possible to see that both the EU and Turkey benefit from this financial arrangement, which helps stabilize the refugee situation in Turkey while preventing more people from irregularly reaching EU member states.

The financial contribution has improved the living conditions of not only SuTPs but also of the asylum seekers and refugees. It supported the persons needing protection through direct ways such as cash support mechanisms. At the centre of this cash support system lies the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) programme, run by the IFRC and the Turkish Red Crescent Society and funded by the EU. This programme provided regular cash assistance to more than 1.5 million refugees living in Turkey (IFRC, 2024). This was a cash assistance system via prepaid debit cards for the most vulnerable SuTPs in need of protection. The amount was calculated based on the family size and gave the flexibility to each family to decide for themselves how to cover essential needs like rent, transport, bills, and food. In the beginning, it provided the much-needed financial support directly to the persons in need, however over time this direct cash support mechanism was criticized as it was restricting the SuTPs to be self-sufficient and independent. Overall, the ESSN has been the largest humanitarian programme in the history of the EU and the largest programme ever implemented by the IFRC (Cash Hub, 2020).

Turkey also benefited from the Statement by obtaining political leverage in its relations with the EU. By controlling the flow of irregular crossings to EU member states and territories, Turkey gained significant leverage in its political interactions with the EU. It used migration policy as a political tool for issue linkage to integrate other topics of strategic importance for Turkey into the political agenda of the EU, such as trade, the modernization of the Customs Union, visa liberalization, and EU membership talks. Especially the visa liberalization issue has been one of the major points of discussion for the Turkish side, as well as for domestic electoral gains. Turkey aimed at achieving visa liberalization by June 2016 and this date was later postponed to September 2016. After the failed coup attempt of 15 July, visa liberalization has been postponed indefinitely, with six benchmarks remaining to be fulfilled by Turkish authorities. If achieved, visa-free travel to the EU for Turkish citizens would have been a historic diplomatic success (The Guardian, 2016).

Turkey acknowledged the Statement as a further opportunity to enhance its dialogue with the EU with regard to the revitalization of the EU accession process as well as to update its Customs Union with the EU. One of the major political motivations for Turkey to engage in the Statement was to revitalize its accession process, which stagnated over the freezing of various accession negotiations chapters. After Turkey's EU membership talks began in 2005, only one of the 35 Chapters was provisionally closed for negotiations. Several chapters are still

blocked either by the EU Council due to the Cyprus issue or by individual EU member states like Cyprus (UK Parliament, 2012). In the history of the EU enlargement, the blocking of negotiation chapters by the EU and/or its Member States once accession negotiations have been opened has been never heard of (Ibid) until the kick-off of the accession negotiations with the Western Balkans.

The Statement increased Turkey's critical role and leadership in managing a large-scale international (protection) crisis. Additionally, it amplified its international standing and recognition as a key actor in regional security and migration management. The global recognition of Turkey as a key player elevated its global interactions with international organizations such as the UN. In 2019, Turkey was one of the co-convenors of the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) which was co-hosted by the UNHCR and Switzerland (UNHCR, 2019). The GRF aimed at producing the Global Compact for Refugees and the Global Compact for Migration.

The Statement also supported Turkey's maritime and land border control mechanisms, and the number of irregular crossings dropped radically by the end of 2016 (ESI, 2023). In 2015, the number of irregular crossings was 885,386 and in 2017 this number significantly dropped to 182,227. The following years showed a declining trend with 43,319 and 56,561 crossings in 2017 and 2018, respectively (Frontex, 2022). This was due to increased patrolling on both sides as well as the deal's impact on the smuggling business. The reduction of human smuggling in the Aegean Sea has limited organized criminal networks' extensive activities while reducing deaths at the sea. This has also contributed to the prevention of future humanitarian crises in the Greek islands in terms of prospective pushbacks, backlog of asylum applications, and poor refugee protection conditions while reducing social challenges and security issues in the refugee camps. The Statement also included a so-called 1-to-1 principle. According to this principle, all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands as of 20 March 2016 would be returned to Turkey and for every Syrian being returned to Turkey from the Greek islands, another Syrian was planned to be settled in EU member states (EC, 2016). This meant further discouragement for irregular migrants, thus contributing to Turkey's maritime border security and control. The Statement thus helped Turkey maintain control over migration in its region and neighbourhood.

2.2. Costs for Turkey

The EU-Turkey Statement, while beneficial in many ways, has at the same time imposed several economic, political, social, security and governance-related costs on Turkey. Over time, the costs became humanitarian in nature reinforcing xenophobia in the host community. This section will analyse the economic, political,

diplomatic, security-related costs of the deal for Turkey and its humanitarian strain on the host community.

As explained in the earlier section, the EU supported Turkey with a financial aid of €6 billion allocated under the Statement. The allocation and the delivery of this financial support did not arrive swiftly and created tensions between the EU and Turkey. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan accused the EU of not delivering its financial promise, as there have been delays in the initial transfer of the funds in 2016 (Politico, 2016). The funds were allocated through various mechanisms such as infrastructure projects, direct cash assistance programmes like Kizilay card and cooperation with INGOs or NGOs. Turkey also argued that this amount was beneficial initially, but became insufficient to fully address the long-term economic costs of hosting nearly 4 million refugees. President Erdogan continuously criticized the amount of this financial aid and the speed of its delivery. In one of his speeches, he argued that "the EU granted Greece 3 billion Euros of support for 100,000 migrants, but it has made no such move for the 4 million refugees in Turkey" (Daily Sabah, 2021).

It was clear that as time passed, the humanitarian aid needs of the SuTPs transformed into integration needs (Kale and Erdogan, 2019). The real cost of the social and political integration of such a large population concerns providing services such as education, healthcare, and legal employment opportunities. These integration costs can far exceed the financial assistance that has been provided by the EU. One has to take into consideration that the pressure on Turkey's public services in healthcare, education, housing, and municipal work has significantly increased over time. The rapid population increase through the mass movement of refugees also had an impact on Turkey's governance structures. With increased pressure on public services, the perceptions of the host population changed. Many Turkish citizens started to feel that their access to these services has diminished and that limited resources are stretched thin through the new refugee population.

Another economic impact of the refugee population was its effect on the labour market. The Statement encouraged the Turkish state to prepare bylaws to regulate the integration of refugees into the labour market. While Turkey accepted two bylaws for the employment of refugees and temporary protection holders, the number of refugees or SuTPs formally employed in Turkey stayed relatively low. The Turkey country chapter of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) 2020-2021 reported that many Syrian refugees have gradually been able to access work opportunities, however, "only 3 percent of working refugees were doing so formally, and 71 percent of households were unable to access skilled or reliable work" (ILO, 2020: 1). As the majority of the refugee population stayed in the informal labour market, increased competition drove down wages, particularly in low-skilled sectors. Over time, this has caused frustration among Turkish citizens,

especially in areas or sectors where unemployment was already high. With the COVID-19 pandemic followed by the February 2023 earthquake, the economic conditions of both the host population and refugee population got worse. The scale of the earthquake's devastation resulted in millions of Turkish citizens and refugees becoming IPDs within and outside the earthquake zone, which persisted until 2024 (Canlar and Kale, 2024).

As far as the overarching path of EU-Turkey relations is concerned, Turkey's central role in managing the refugee crisis has transformed its relationship with the EU from a long-term focus on accession negotiations to a more transactional, issue-based cooperation (Turhan and Wessels, 2021). The reasons for this transformation were multifaceted. On the one hand, the political turmoil following the failed coup attempt in 2016 severely impacted Turkey's political and governance structures while the domestic response to the failed coup propelled Turkey's democratic backsliding and its de-Europeanization in various policy areas. On the other hand, the Statement contributed to the rise of a "transactional conditionality" in EU-Turkey relations (Turhan and Yıldız, 2022: 512), which foresaw the issue-specific strengthening of EU-Turkey relations and the dispersal of material rewards and incentives (e.g.; visa liberalization, modernization of the Customs Union) to Turkey by the EU, in exchange for the former's cooperation with the latter in the management of irregular migration. In this, the EU became progressively oblivious to its traditional normative conditionality. Similarly, the reliance on EU funding to manage refugee-related policies has made Turkey further vulnerable to EU political pressure. While the financial aid supported to mitigate domestic costs, it has at the same time tied Turkey's refugee and migration policies closely to its relations with the EU, reducing its autonomy and independence in this policy area.

Hosting the largest refugee population with limited international financial support has put significant pressure on the country's infrastructure, public services (healthcare, education, housing), and social cohesion, especially in areas with high refugee populations. In certain areas, compliance with international refugee protection laws has raised concerns. This was particularly evident in cases where Turkey was criticized to be returning SuTPs to Syria. After February 2023, it is estimated that due to the dire conditions in the earthquake regions and the housing shortage 60.000 Syrians returned to Syria in March 2023 (Canlar and Kale, 2024). The EU-Turkey Statement already had drawn criticism from international human rights organizations in the sense that its essence did concern the protection of human rights. These returns in March 2023 - although voluntary - did indeed damage Turkey's international reputation.

Another major cost for Turkey has been increased border security risks that involve combatting international terrorism. In the last decade, managing Turkey's southern borders, especially with Syria, has become a significant security challenge.

Turkey had to place additional security measures and practices to patrol these borders to manage further refugee flows while combatting terrorist infiltration. This requires significant military and security resources that were placed on both sides of the border. It became clear that Syria's security and stability Syria were going to be a long-term concern for Turkey. Similarly, the intensification of the conflict in Syria or any other country in the southern borders of Turkey was going to create further trans-border population movements toward Turkey. The Statement was initially formulated by focusing and covering only the 2015 crisis, whilst not providing any plans or tactics for prospective refugee movements and a potential escalation of new regional conflicts and crises.

Finally, the humanitarian strain has been an important cost for Turkey. As Turkey continued to keep the Syrian refugee population in its terrain with very limited prospects of resettlement to EU member states, the large refugee presence has exacerbated social tensions between refugees and the local Turkish population. This has led to increased xenophobia and anti-refugee sentiment (Aljazeera, 2022). This has certainly strained Turkey's domestic social fabric, particularly in economically struggling regions. The perceived and most of the time politically securitized notion of hosting refugee populations has fuelled nationalism and anti-immigrant rhetoric in Turkish politics. Especially, during the national and municipal election campaigns, refugees discursively became targets of scapegoating when it came to the drivers of domestic challenges. The shift in refugees' projected perception from "Muslim guests (ensar)" to "danger" has developed rapidly and it has been effectively exploited by political parties, leading to further polarization and increasing public pressure on the government to take tougher stances on its refugee policy. President Erdoğan's government has faced criticism for agreeing to host such a large number of refugees, with opposition parties frequently using this issue to challenge the government's policies (Tol, 2018).

3. The benefits and costs of the 2016 statement on irregular migration for the EU

3.1. Benefits for the EU

The EU-Turkey Statement helped the EU find a solution to the so-called refugee "crisis" that had gradually transformed from an external crisis to a litmus test for the European integration, in general, and the Schengen system, in particular, outside the EU's borders. In the initial stages of the refugee crisis, and especially in the summer of 2015, the EU aimed at engaging in "concerted" joint actions and collective measures to find internal solutions to ease the burden placed on frontline member states like Greece and Italy. It was in this context that the June 2015

European Council conclusions endorsed 'temporary and exceptional relocation over two years from […] Italy and Greece to other Member States' (European Council, 2015: 2). This temporary relocation initiative anticipated the re-distribution of the refugees among EU member states taking into consideration their GDPs, domestic unemployment rates and their population. Notwithstanding such concerted plans, only a few member states like Finland, Sweden, and Germany had implemented the conclusions of the June 2015 European Council by taking in a limited number of Syrian refugees, whereas the other member states even refrained from such restrained actions (Carrera et al., 2015). In an effort to provide an example for other EU members to accept refugees (Niemann and Zaun, 2018), the German federal government unilaterally and temporarily suspended its implementation of the Dublin Regulation of the EU which legally provided Germany with the right to deport the irregular migrants back to the initial EU member state they entered. While the German initiative did not culminate in effective burden sharing within the EU with the majority of the member states having refrained from following in Germany's footsteps, it contrarily enhanced anti-migrant sentiments in key member states like Germany and strengthened the voter base of Germany's (then) new right-wing, populist party Alternative for Germany (AfD) ahead of important local and federal elections (Turhan, 2018).

The EU's externalization of its migration management in March 2016 to Turkey with the EU-Turkey Statement emerged at the time as the only viable option to ease the immense and unmanageable burden placed on frontline member states, without finding an internal solution to relocation and without instantaneously reforming the EU's asylum and migration policies at the supranational level. The intergovernmental negotiations and decision-making processes leading up to the formulation of the EU-Turkey deal provided the EU member states with a swift and effective solution outside the supranational boundaries and restraints of the Union. That the EU-Turkey Statement did not enter the ratification process of the European Parliament and remained a merely joint declaration by the governments of the EU member states and the Turkish government signifies the then eagerness of EU member states to surpass the EU's supranational channels and find an immediate solution to a growing crisis. The European Parliament was indeed critical of the way the EU collaborated with third countries on the management of irregular migration flows as it deemed the externalization of migration management rather a short-term solution to a persistent situation and as it was against forced returns on moral grounds (Gürkan and Roman, 2021). As such, it was more convenient for the EU member states to surpass the supranational control channels and formulate the scope and conditions of the EU-Turkey deal by means of intergovernmental procedures. The deal was indeed the outcome of numerous bilateral and minilateral

intergovernmental negotiations between Turkey and some key member states spearheaded by Germany's Angela Merkel (Turhan, 2016).

Another indirect yet major benefit of the EU-Turkey Statement for the EU has been – as already indicated in the previous part – that the Statement functioned as a major driver of the formulation of a transactional relationship between the EU and Turkey outside the accession framework and its normative conditionality. The growing trend towards transactionalism in EU-Turkey relations has been an opportune development for the majority of EU member states, which had become increasingly sceptical about Turkey's EU bid. Indeed, between 2013 and 2016, only one chapter in Turkey's accession talks with the EU was opened, while negotiations in 14 chapters remained blocked either by the Council of the EU or Cyprus. "Transactionalism" is a foreign policy approach that is based on short-term and interest-oriented exchanges between countries and does not prioritize deep and long-term strategic infrastructures, common values or the functioning of an international order based on rules. In a transactional relationship, if the reciprocity mechanism works well with bilateral interactions and transactions, sectoral policy coordination can be achieved, and negative externalities can be reduced (Bashirov and Yılmaz, 2020). The EU-Turkey summits of 29 November 2015 and 18 March 2016 did not only define the scope, conditions, and content of EU-Turkey cooperation on the management of irregular migration. They also pawed the way for the strengthening and facilitation of transactional traits in the EU's relations with Turkey. The decisions taken at the relevant summits did not include a normative conditionality based on the Copenhagen political criteria. On the contrary, the leaders of the member states provided Turkey with a package of rewards in return for its commitment to stop irregular migration. These concerned financial incentives, the revival of accession negotiations, regular thematic high-level dialogues, the launch of negotiations on the modernization of the Customs Union and the acceleration of the visa liberalization process (European Council, 2015; European Council, 2016). This transactional formulation was later again and again utilized by the EU in other moments of crisis requiring policy coordination between Turkey and the EU such as the Eastern Mediterranean crisis (Turhan, 2021). With the gradual evanescence of the EU's normative conditionality in its relations with Turkey, Turkey's EU accession process was naturally and conveniently pushed outside the accession framework.

Last, but certainly not least, the EU-Turkey Statement created a blueprint for similar arrangements of the EU and its member states with other neighbouring countries and firmly expanded the EU's geographical sphere of influence when it comes to the external governance of migration. As a case in point, in 2021 the Greek government declared its intention and readiness to utilize the Statement as a blueprint for its policies vis-à-vis refugees from other nationalities such as

Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, which meant that "this procedure would not only apply to those entering after the enacted date, but for those who had already applied before the implementation of the law as well" (Demirbaş and Miliou, 2024: 24). The deal also helped reinvigorate Spain's similar arrangement with Morocco with Spain convincing the EU to provide Morocco with financial aid to strengthen its border controls (Terry, 2021).

3.2. Costs for the EU

While the benefits of the EU-Turkey Statement seemingly outweigh its costs and its negative externalities for the EU, thereby motivating the Union to utilize the Statement as a blueprint for similar arrangements with other third countries, the refugee deal certainly comes with a set of drawbacks. One of the biggest disadvantages of the deal for the EU, in general, and its key member states, in particular, has been its strengthening of various issue-specific asymmetrical interdependencies between Turkey and the EU in favour of the former (Turhan and Yıldız, 2022). The dependence of the EU on Turkey for the maintenance of the order and stability of European integration in general, and the Schengen system, in particular, weakened the EU's overarching leverage over Turkey, which is a unique situation when it comes to the EU's dialogue with individual third countries and especially with EU candidate countries. Turkey's discursive threats and statements signalling the possibility of its unilateral suspension of the deal (BBC, 2017) coupled with its de facto, temporary withdrawal from the deal in February 2020 when it provisionally opened its Western borders compelled the EU to "review the terms of the 2016 deal, signalling that [it] will capitulate on some of Ankara's demands for more money and other forms of assistance" (McDonald-Gibson, 2020). This issue-specific interdependence in favour of Ankara also weakened the EU's and its member states' discursive criticism of Turkey's democratic and human rights track record. This became especially noticeable during the bilateral and minilateral meetings between the leading representatives of the EU governments and President Erdoğan. As a case in point, when German Chancellor Angela Merkel held a meeting with President Erdoğan in January 2024, just a few days prior to Turkey's temporary opening of its borders to Greece amidst its growing dissatisfaction with the (limited) incentives it receives as part of the deal, she did not put specific emphasis on issues related to Turkey's democratic backsliding. The German Chancellor's self-restrained stance on Turkey's democratic track record transpired despite calls by leading human rights organizations like Amnesty International to place human rights issues at the epicentre of her talk with Erdoğan (Duvar English, 2020). Likewise, current Chancellor Olaf Scholz's latest visit to Turkey in October 2024 and his joint press conference with President Erdoğan did not spotlight normative issues while discursively acknowledging and highlighting Turkey's

cooperation with the EU in the area of irregular migration (Die Bundesregierung, 2024).

Another drawback of the Statement and its continuing implementation for the EU has been the Statement's negative impact on the EU's perception as a "normative" global actor. The securitization of the Syrian refugees in European political discourses in the sense that the EU's key interest in mitigating the refugee crisis had been in the safeguarding of its stability and internal order from the external risks posed by the refugee Other (Gürkan and Coman, 2021) severely damaged the EU's international normative identity and its perception as a normative power by external actors. Similarly, the EU's insistence on the usage of the crisis vocabulary for immigration-related actions helped legitimize its policies which would have been recognized as unethical otherwise (MAGYC, 2020). The representation of the EU as a normative power in international relations was based on the premise and idea that the EU put notions such as democracy, human rights, peace, rule of law and liberty at the epicentre of its external relations (Jenichen, 2022) without engaging in discriminatory practices based on "any ground such as sex, race, colour, *ethnic or social origin*, genetic features, language, *religion or belief*, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation" (EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2024). The double standards and different framings employed by European political and media circles with regard to the Syrian and Ukrainian refugee dramas and the legitimization of political actions in favour of welcoming Ukrainian refugees as those who were "Europeans, behaved like Europeans, and had cultural and democratic values close to those of Europeans" (Ibanez Sales, 2023: 2), severely disrupted the EU's already contested image as a normative global power by external actors, especially those from the Global South.

Finally, the Statement's strengthening of the external dimension of the EU's asylum and migration policies obscured the further advancement of the EU integration in migration and asylum affairs. By externalizing migration management, the EU has prevented itself from tackling the absence of internal solidarity concerning burden sharing, while also failing to address the lack of policy harmonization and the absence of centralized institutions within the EU that would deal with the internal dimension of its migration governance (Scipioni, 2018). The New EU Pact on Migration and Asylum aims to provide further harmonization without major success with missing components (Conte and Yavcan, 2024). As such, the Statement has transpired as an important brake on European integration.

4. Concluding remarks

The March 2016 EU-Turkey Statement rests on thin ice with Turkey habitually threatening the EU about cancelling the deal and with the EU failing to deliver promised incentives like the launch of talks on the modernization of the Customs Union and the regular arrangement of high-level dialogues and joint summits. Still, our analysis demonstrates that the advantages of the Statement for the EU (governments) and the Turkish government outweigh its costs. Unable to engage in concerted actions and to strengthen the internal dimension of its migration governance, the Statement helps the EU utilize Turkey both as a buffer zone between countries of origin and its member states and as a geopolitical space where the refugee Other can reside. The significance of the Statement for EU member states is likely to increase even more given the surge in anti-migrant sentiments and the mainstreaming of right-wing populism in Europe. That the EU uses the Statement as a blueprint for its relations with other third countries, substantiates this trend as well. As far as Turkey is concerned, the Statement specifically equips the Turkish government with an unparalleled leverage in its relations with the EU which remains incapable of instrumentalizing its normative conditionality vis-à-vis Turkey. The EU's deteriorating function as a normative foreign policy actor in Turkey becomes specifically visible during the bilateral and minilateral meetings between the leading representatives of the EU and Turkish governments. Thus, while at the intergovernmental level, the benefits of the Statement may outweigh its costs, how much this satisfactory cost-benefit ratio translates into the public domain remains unclear and is subject to further scholarly investigation.

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Özet

Güçlükle ayakta? Düzensiz göç temalı AB-Türkiye Ortak Bildirisi'nin maliyetleri ve faydaları

Mart 2016'da ilan edilen ve Mülteci Mutabakatı olarak da telaffuz edilen AB-Türkiye Ortak Bildirisi, hem Avrupa Birliği (AB) hem de Türkiye için önemli motivasyonlar içermekteydi. AB açısından bakıldığında, AB-Türkiye Bildirisi, Türkiye ve yakın çevresinden düzensiz göçü sınırlamayı, hatta durdurmayı amaçlamaktaydı. Türkiye için ise Mutabakat, finansal destek ve stratejik diplomatik ilişkiler sağlayarak Türkiye'yi yeniden AB'nin siyasi gündemine taşıyacaktı. Bir yandan, Ankara'nın sıklıkla anlaşmadan çekilme tehdidinde bulunması, öte yandansa, mutabakattan sorumlu AB kurumlarının göç yönetiminde "insancıl" bir duruş sergilemediği ve AB'nin Türkiye hükümetine bağımlılığını artırdığı gerekçesiyle eleştirilmesi nedeniyle, AB-Türkiye Mutabakatının neden hâlâ devam ettiği sorusu akıllara gelebilmektedir. Bu makale, her iki tarafın da rasyonalist hesaplamalarını dikkate alarak, mutabakatın uygulanma sürecinde iki tarafa yansıyan maliyetlerini ve katkılarını analitik bir değerlendirmeye (2016-2024) tabi tutmaktadır. Bulgular, Mutabakatın AB'ye üye devletlerin hükümetleri ve Türkiye hükümeti açısından faydalarının maliyetlerini aştığını göstermektedir. Birlik içinde uyumlu hareketlerde bulunamayan ve göç yönetişiminin iç boyutunu güçlendiremeyen AB, mülteci mutabakatı sayesinde, Türkiye'yi hem menşei ülkeler ile AB'ye üye ülkeler arasında bir tampon bölge olarak, hem de sığınmacı "Öteki"nin ikamet edebileceği bir jeopolitik alan olarak kullanabilmiştir. Mutabakat, AB'nin diğer komşu ülkelerle benzer düzenlemeler yapması için de bir ana model oluşturmuştur. Türkiye açısından bakıldığında ise, mutabakat, Türkiye hükümetine AB ile ilişkilerinde benzersiz bir manevra alanı sunmuştur ve AB'nin Türkiye'ye yönelik geleneksel normatif koşulluluğunu kullanmasını engellemiştir. Bu bağlamda, hükümetlerarası düzeyde mutabakatın faydalarının maliyetlerini aştığı gözlemlenmektedir. Ancak, bu olumlu maliyet-fayda oranının kamuya ve toplumlara ne kadar yansıdığı belirsizliğini korumakta ve bu noktada daha fazla akademik araştırmaya ihtiyaç duyulmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: AB-Türkiye ilişkileri, AB-Türkiye bildirisi, düzensiz göç, mülteci mutabakatı, sığınmacı politikası, işlemsellik.

Artificial intelligence and migration governance: Navigating cooperation and complexity in European Union-Türkiye relations[*]

Ayselin Yıldız

Department of International Relations, İstinye University, İstanbul
Migration Research Center, Koç University, İstanbul
e-mail: ayselin94@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0001-8845-2367

Dilaver Arıkan Açar

Department of International Relations, Yaşar University, İzmir
e-mail: arikan.acar@yasar.edu.tr
ORCID: 0000-0001-8582-329X

Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) and emerging technologies are becoming significant in migration governance by introducing innovative tools for governing and estimating mobility, enabling data-driven analysis, and improving policy efficiency. This article investigates how specific dynamic developments in AI technologies shape the European Union (EU)-Türkiye relations within the realm of migration governance. It explores the EU's strategies for AI integration, Türkiye's evolving practices, and the opportunities for collaboration, emphasizing shared interests while addressing the geopolitical complexities involved in these processes. Drawing on selected case studies and policy frameworks, the article argues that the adoption of new technologies in migration governance necessitates the EU-Türkiye cooperation, transcending the conventional framework of the EU accession. The discussion highlights potential areas of collaboration, the anticipated benefits, and the challenges, including the security concerns and the ethical dilemmas

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surrounding human rights and privacy. By emphasizing shared interests, this study highlights the critical role of joint efforts in navigating the complexities of AI-driven migration governance while fostering more effective and equitable policy outcomes.

Key words: EU-Türkiye relations, migration governance, artificial intelligence, AI, AI-driven technologies, border surveillance, securitization,

1. Introduction

Despite years marked by stagnation, slow progress, and oscillations between advances and setbacks in EU-Türkiye relations, migration governance remains a pivotal and strategic domain of cooperation. Accession negotiations have been stalled since 2018 however beyond the scope of membership quest, the EU addresses Türkiye as a key strategic partner on issues such as climate, migration, security, counterterrorism, and economy (European Commission, 2024a). Notably, Chapter 24, "Justice, Freedom and Security," of accession negotiations is featured among few areas under the "fundamentals of the accession process" in the European Union's 2024 Türkiye Report (European Commission, 2024b: 35). Whether framed as "enhanced cooperation" (European Council, 2021), "transactional operational cooperation" (Dimitriadi et al., 2018) or "differentiated integration" (Müftüler-Baç, 2017; Turhan and Yıldız, 2022), migration governance remains a vital and prominent area of shared interest in the EU-Türkiye relations. Policy convergence and strategic collaboration in this domain aim to encompass all facets of migration governance, including combatting irregular migration, reinforcing the resilience of refugees and host communities in Türkiye, concentrating joint efforts on durable solutions, fostering dialogue and cooperation on regional challenges, and leveraging positive momentum to strengthen overall the EU-Türkiye relations.

Looking closer to the migration domain, the EU-Türkiye migration cooperation exemplifies the EU's broader strategy of externalizing migration governance (Yıldız, 2016; Üstübici, 2019), a framework primarily centered on containing irregular migration at the EU's periphery (Dimitriadi et al., 2018) and ensuring Europe's internal security (European Commission, 2020a). The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into migration governance frameworks introduces an additional, yet complementary, dynamic to this relationship. AI is increasingly employed in both the EU and Türkiye, particularly in critical areas such as border surveillance and identity verification. Current practices reflect a shared reliance on AI-driven tools to reinforce migration control mechanisms, further aligning the approaches of both actors in migration governance while concurrently addressing overarching security concerns.

This article explores whether the integration of AI technologies into Türkiye's migration policy offers renewed impetus for the EU-Türkiye migration cooperation or merely reinforces Türkiye's alignment with the EU's migration policies—

primarily through the securitization of migration. The study also explores the potential for revisiting and revitalizing the EU-Türkiye cooperation by fostering more evidence-based approaches to migration governance. Methodologically, the article draws on an analysis of current trends in technological advancements, legal and political frameworks, and technology-oriented academic literature to examine the deployment of AI in migration governance. By focusing on practices in both the EU and Türkiye, the study sheds light on the convergence of policies, the role of technology in shaping migration governance priorities, and the opportunities for reconfiguring cooperation considering emerging AI-driven tools.

The article unfolds in four sections exploring the use of digital technologies across several dimensions of both the EU and Türkiye's migration, asylum and border policies. The first section provides a concise overview of the role of AI and emerging technologies in migration governance, offering background on AI systems and highlighting key areas where these technologies are commonly applied. The second section examines current trends in the European Union's approaches and practices concerning the use and deployment of AI within the migration domain. The third section shifts focus to Türkiye, analyzing how AI technologies are integrated into migration governance and assessing, through a comparative and critical lens, whether Türkiye's practices align with the EU's security-driven priorities, thereby contributing to policy convergence. The final section concludes with a discussion on the broader implications of these developments for EU-Türkiye relations, particularly considering the stalled accession process.

2. The role of AI and new technologies in migration governance

AI technologies have gained remarkable momentum in recent years, becoming an integral part of people's daily lives by performing tasks traditionally associated with human intelligence. Among the numerous definitions of AI, it is broadly characterized as a technology that enables machines to replicate various human skills or as the simulation of human intelligence by computers (Sheikh et al., 2023:15). It can be addressed as learning from data through algorithms. However, it is crucial to avoid reducing AI to a narrow, task-based framework that oversimplifies the complexity of human intelligence by equating it solely with software, algorithms or the latest technological advancements. Building upon significant milestones in the evolution of machine learning and the subsequent advancements in deep learning, AI today transcends the scope of self-learning algorithms designed to recognize patterns in data or solve specific problems. In this regard, while the definition of AI is expected to evolve over time, the High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence of the European Commission offers a comprehensive perspective, defining AI as "systems that display intelligent

behaviour by analysing their environment and taking actions – with some degree of autonomy – to achieve specific goals" (High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence, 2018:1).

Contrary to the widespread perception that AI is a novel concept, its origins trace back to the 1950s when Alan Turing (1950), known as the father of modern computer science, asked whether the machines could think. Pamela McCorduck, a pioneering figure in the AI industry, aptly highlights that foundational research conducted in the early and mid-1980s laid the groundwork for future AI applications, however, at the time, this research did not immediately translate into obvious commercial use (Gutierrez, 2020). Thus, she uses the term "AI effect" wherein much of AI technology remained largely unnoticed or not explicitly recognized as AI, despite its extensive integration into software applications years before.

The same applies to migration governance; it is a pivotal but not a new domain for the utilization of AI technologies and its foundations can be traced back to the 1990s. The early adoption of AI technologies in migration governance was primarily driven by substantial and sustained increases in international air travel, the advent of online visa application systems, and the growing capacity to collect and analyze international border-crossing data (McAuliffe, 2023). The pioneering countries of early adopters, equipped with advanced data infrastructures and the necessary financial and technical resources, today are more able to capitalize on their existing administrative data systems for development and implementation of more sophisticated, AI-supported migration management systems (McAuliffe, 2023).

In recent years, the prominence of AI-driven systems in the migration domain has been increasingly reflected in the growing attention within academic studies, international reports, and policy frameworks on the use of AI in this field. The "World Migration Report" of International Organization for Migration (IOM) devoted an entire chapter to "Artificial Intelligence, Migration, and Mobility: Implications for Policy and Practice" highlighting the transformative role of AI in shaping migration dynamics and its far-reaching implications for governance and policy-making (IOM, 2021). Similarly, UNHCR's Innovation Service highlights the ways AI can enhance refugee data collection and humanitarian responses, while also emphasizing ethical concerns, such as bias, discrimination, and privacy breaches (Baker et. al, 2024). The European Commission's report, "Opportunities and Challenges for the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Border Control, Migration and Security" (European Commission, 2020b), further explores the opportunities and risks of AI integration in migration governance, with a particular focus on border control, travel authorization and asylum processing.

Today, the early adopters utilize AI primarily in enhancing governments' capacities to monitor migration flows, strengthening border security (Molnar, 2020),

processing visa applications (Chui et al., 2018), issuing/extending residence or work permits, streamlining asylum processing (Hildebrandt, 2022), supporting refugee status determination (Kinchin and Mougouei, 2022), identification of fraudulent claims (Özkul, 2023) , and natural language processing for speech recognition and analysis (Nilsson, 2014). Additionally, AI is employed to analyze integration and social cohesion metrics and assess policy effectiveness These innovations are reinforced by advancements in automation and biometric systems, which have solidified AI's indispensable role in migration governance (Molnar, 2020). Some of the prominent examples include Canada's use of algorithmic decision-making for immigration and asylum determinations (Molnar and Gill, 2018), Norway's processing of residency and citizenship applications (Özkul, 2023), Germany's pilot initiatives employing facial and dialect recognition to assist asylum case evaluations (Beduschi, 2021), and Switzerland's experimental algorithms aimed at improving refugee integration outcomes (Bansak et al., 2018).

Among the various applications of AI-driven technologies, border surveillance emerges as a particularly dominant and rapidly expanding area within migration governance. Advanced technologies are increasingly employed to fortify security and control entry at the EU's external borders, reflecting a securitized approach to migration management (Lang, 2024). Over the years, the increasing use of AI in border surveillance governance has sparked significant debates surrounding militarization and securitization of border management (Ceyhan and Tsoukala, 2002). Some of the selected practices of high-tech border control mechanisms include deployment of border patrol drones, thermal cameras, advanced sensors, and high-resolution cameras, which collectively enhance monitoring capabilities.

Additionally, biometric technologies are widely utilized for identity verification and border management (Abomhara et al., 2021) particularly in selective visa-granting systems and the profiling of immigrants. As Molnar (2024:2) underlines, "The color of your skin, the accent in your voice, and even your body become a passport read by an increasingly automated border regime that excludes some while welcoming others".

Another notable area is the use of predictive analytics to forecast migratory flows. By processing and analyzing vast datasets at unprecedented speeds, AI enables authorities to detect patterns, assess risks, and anticipate migration trends, exceeding human analytical capabilities (Spyratos et al., 2018). Real-time data transmission and integration with AI algorithms could further amplify these systems, allowing for threat detection and evidence-based decision-making.

While these advancements enhance operational efficiency, they also raise critical concerns regarding transparency, accountability, and protection of fundamental human rights. The intersection of AI and migration governance underscores the tension between technological innovation and ethical, legal, and

societal implications of its application. It is argued that governments often utilize migrants and asylum seekers as subjects for testing experimental technologies and further entrenching their authority and control in governing migration (Sadık and Kaya, 2020: 148). By default, some AI systems perceive migrants as inherent risks or threats, reflecting deeply rooted biases in their algorithm design and implementation (Leese et al., 2021). In this context, human rights advocates and civil society organizations have raised serious concerns, emphasizing that such technologies risk undermining fundamental rights, including the right to asylum, the principle of *non-refoulement*, and the rights to privacy and liberty (EDRI, 2024; Nalbandian, 2022; Euromed Rights, 2023; Statewatch, 2022).

On the other hand, from a more constructive and forward-looking perspective, evolution and responsible integration of AI technologies hold potential for producing greater standardization in improving service delivery (Kinchin and Mougouei, 2022), enhancing efficiency, accuracy, and innovation in migration governance (Beduschi, 2021). When embedded within comprehensive, rights-based frameworks, AI can serve as a powerful tool for facilitating evidence-based decision-making in key areas such as asylum status determination, detecting human trafficking victims, service delivery, and the prevention of human rights violations. AI might foster the efficiency of migration governance by promoting data-driven, transparent, and equitable practices (Beduschi, 2021). It also streamlines administrative processes and reduces bureaucratic workloads. For example, the Hong Kong Immigration Department implemented its AI-driven *e-Brain* system to streamline application processing and develop procedural knowledge through machine learning which has minimized the need for case officer involvement, resulting in faster and more efficient application processing (McAuliffe, 2023).

3. The EU's approach and practices on integrating AI in migration governance

As migration remains a central political and societal issue across the EU, its Member States have increasingly embraced digital technologies in the migration and asylum domains in recent years (European Commission, 2022). A growing trend in leveraging digital tools—such as online case management systems, biometric data collection, and machine learning algorithms—has significantly shaped European migration and asylum systems (Salgado and Beirens, 2023).

AI-supported technologies are now being deployed in critical areas, including European border surveillance, automated asylum processing, biometric data collection, facial and voice recognition, and integration service delivery. At the national level, the EU Member States have tailored AI-based tools to fit into their specific migration management needs. For instance, Germany's Federal Office for

Migration and Refugees (BAMF) employs AI-powered speech recognition software to analyze asylum seekers' dialects, thereby verifying their claimed countries of origin (Bellanova and Duez, 2020). This system, trained on extensive linguistic datasets, offers efficiency and objectivity but has faced criticism regarding its accuracy, particularly in cases involving rare dialects or multilingual speakers. Similarly, France and the Netherlands have invested in AI-enhanced biometric systems to expedite and improve the precision of identity verification during asylum registration processes. Portugal introduced an online platform designed to streamline the residence permit application process, while Ireland has similarly digitized significant aspects of its migration system, including identity management and decision-making processes (OECD, 2024: 9). In response to the arrival of displaced persons from Ukraine, Lithuania implemented its MIGRIS platform to issue digital temporary residence permits, effectively eliminating the need for in-person visits and physical ID cards. Poland has also embraced digital identity documents, optimizing processes to enhance both security and user convenience.

At the institutional level, the EU-LISA agency—responsible for managing the EU's large-scale IT systems—and European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR) play critical roles in integrating AI into migration governance. Systems like the Schengen Information System (SIS) and the Visa Information System (VIS) have been modernized with AI tools, enhancing data processing capabilities and interoperability across member states. Eurodac (European Asylum Dactyloscopy Database), the EU's digitalized fingerprint database of asylum seekers and irregular migrants, incorporates AI-driven algorithms for more accurate biometric matching. These advancements facilitate information-sharing between national authorities, enabling improved coordination in managing visa applications, identifying irregular migrants, and processing asylum claims. The use of AI allows these systems to perform tasks, such as biometric matching, with unprecedented speed, strengthening the decision-making processes of migration authorities.

In the legislative context, the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum adopted in 2024, introduces an expanded framework for the digital surveillance of migrants. This includes extensive data collection and automated information exchange, particularly through proposed revisions to the Eurodac Regulation (Official Journal of the EU, 2024a). Newly introduced screening and border procedures—mandated under the Screening Regulation (Official Journal of the EU, 2024b)—require security checks and risk assessments for individuals entering the EU irregularly. The Asylum Procedure Regulation also enables intrusive technological practices, such as the extraction and analysis of mobile phone data (Official Journal of the EU, 2024c). Furthermore, the revised Schengen Information System incorporates facial recognition and biometric data to enhance the efficiency of return operations for irregular migrants (Official Journal of the EU, 2024d).

The EU AI Act categorizes the AI systems that are used in migration governance as "high-risk," reflecting the need for rigorous oversight and accountability (Official Journal of the EU, 2024e). As the cornerstone of the EU's digital strategy, the AI Act reinforces the Union's commitment to fostering trustworthy AI systems. At the same time, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) remains central in regulating the collection, processing, and storage of personal data in AI-driven systems. However, tensions persist between data protection requirements and the operational demands of migration governance, particularly in areas such as biometric registration and automated decision-making.

A closer examination of these legislative and operational developments reveals that the practical deployment of AI in the EU migration governance spans multiple domains, with border management emerging as a focal point. Surveillance technologies, facilitated by AI, are now integral to the EU's migration control strategy, enabling real-time monitoring, risk assessment, and identity verification at external borders (Bellanova and Duez, 2020). This evolution occurs within a broader framework that prioritizes the securitization of migration. The EU's *"A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence"* (Council of the EU, 2022:15) identifies irregular migration as one of the most significant challenges facing both shores of the Mediterranean. This strategic focus culminates in the EU's adoption of AI technologies within migration governance, which shaped primarily by security imperatives. A key player in this framework is the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, FRONTEX, exemplifies the integration of AI into border control operations. FRONTEX coordinates joint surveillance missions, border control operations, and return procedures, and deployment of advanced military-grade technologies. AI-powered predictive analytics enable the agency to forecast migration flows and identify irregular patterns. Drones equipped with AI-enhanced software are used to monitor vast stretches of the Mediterranean, delivering real-time surveillance data to detect unauthorized crossings. While these tools enhance situational awareness and operational efficiency, concerns remain about their compliance with international human rights laws (Tazzioli, 2023).

The EU-funded *iBorderCtrl* project, another notable example, illustrates the interplay between technological innovation and controversy. Implemented under the Horizon 2020 research framework, the initiative introduced AI-powered virtual lie detection systems at border crossings. During automated interviews, AI algorithms analyzed travelers' micro-expressions to determine the veracity of their statements. Despite its promise to streamline border procedures, *iBorderCtrl* faced substantial criticism over its scientific reliability, algorithmic biases, and the risk of discriminatory outcomes (Beduschi, 2021).

The European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS) harnesses new technologies and AI to enhance security and streamline pre-travel

screening as an extra mandatory travel authorization layer for the Schengen States. ETIAS, set to become operational as part of the EU's broader smart border strategy, uses advanced data analytics and AI algorithms to assess risks associated with visa-exempt travelers entering the Schengen Area (European Union, 2024). By automating the analysis of traveler information, including biometric and biographical data, ETIAS enables real-time risk assessment, thereby improving detection of potential security threats, irregular migration patterns, and public health risks. The integration of AI in ETIAS highlights the EU's commitment to leveraging digital innovation for more efficient and data-driven migration governance while prioritizing security concerns with the facilitation of legitimate mobility. However, it also raises critical questions regarding data privacy, algorithmic accountability, and ethical implications of AI-driven decision-making in migration control.

The dual nature of AI deployment is thus evident: while it enhances evidence-based migration governance and operational efficiency, it simultaneously raises critical ethical and legal concerns. Two reports, namely "Europe's Techno-Borders" (Jones et al., 2023) and "Artificial Intelligence: The New Frontier of the EU's Border Externalisation Strategy" (Napolitano, 2023), underscore the human and financial costs of AI-driven migration policies. Both reports argue that while AI technologies aim to strengthen control and security, they often perpetuate discriminatory practices and erode human rights.

Another debate concerns the inherent limitations of AI systems. Critics point to the risk of amplifying existing biases when algorithms are trained on incomplete. The opacity of AI decision-making—often referred to as the *"black-box problem"*—poses further challenges to accountability and the ability of individuals to contest adverse outcomes. The "black box problem" refers to the fact of how AI systems learn and make decisions. In essence, AI involves a machine learning process where the system is trained using accurate examples of what we want it to recognize. However, the system also develops a "neural network" that enables it to categorize and interpret things it has not encountered before. The mechanisms behind how AI arrives at certain unexpected or unwanted conclusions remain unclear, giving rise to the black box dilemma (Rawashdeh, 2023). This issue of robustness has significant ethical implications, as these learning systems are increasingly being used to make judgments about humans, often with profound consequences for fairness, accountability, and transparency.

In summary, while AI offers innovative tools to strengthen migration governance in the EU, its deployment raises significant ethical, operational, and legal challenges. The evolving regulatory framework, led by the AI Act and the GDPR, attempts to balance the dual priorities of security and human rights. However, the broader debate persists over the potential erosion of fundamental

rights due to the design, implementation, and expansion of AI technologies within the EU's migration governance framework.

4. Convergence of security interests in data-driven migration cooperation between EU and Türkiye

Despite being a candidate country, the accession negotiations between the EU and Türkiye have remained at a standstill for nearly two decades primarily due to the Cyprus issue and backsliding in key reform areas. Despite the stalled accession process, migration cooperation continues to function as a strategic key area of collaboration. Türkiye has been hosting approximately 2.9 million Syrian refugees—amid ongoing voluntary return processes since the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024—as well as around 200,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers, primarily from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran (PMM, 2024; UNHCR, 2024).

Combatting irregular migration and reinforcing resilience of refugees and host communities emerge as two primary areas of strategic cooperation between the EU and Türkiye. For the EU, irregular migration represents a security issue—a perceived "threat" that must be addressed ideally before migrants reach the EU borders, in countries of origin or transit (Dimitriadi et al., 2018). The Mediterranean region remains a critical area for mixed migratory flows in the forthcoming decades. For Türkiye, in its 2021-2025 Strategy Document on Irregular Migration, key priorities are identified as including strengthening cooperation mechanisms to address migration at its source, enhancing border security, supporting return mechanisms in line with human rights standards, and developing evidence-based policies for managing irregular migration (PMM, 2024).

Situated at a critical crossroads in global migration governance, Türkiye presents a distinctly compelling case for the integration of AI and data-driven migration management, particularly in areas of border surveillance, identity verification, and potential refugee status determination (RSD). Several initiatives highlight Türkiye's technological advancements in migration governance, including advanced border security technologies, ongoing biometric registration systems and evolving digital platforms supporting service provision for foreigners. These areas of technological advancement are also priorities for the EU, offering a shared basis for further collaboration.

One of the primary domains where AI technologies are increasingly utilized is border surveillance. Türkiye continues to make substantial investments in modernizing its border security infrastructure, particularly along its southern and southeastern land borders. Advanced AI-powered surveillance technologies, including drones, thermal imaging cameras, and automated monitoring systems, are

extensively deployed along the eastern and southern borders to detect unauthorized crossings and irregular movements (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Interior, 2024). Following the construction of a security wall, panel/barbed wire fences, patrol roads, lighting systems, and installation of thermal cameras along the Syrian border, similar technologies, including modern electro-optical communication and surveillance masts, have been placed along the Iranian and western borders (European Commission, 2024b:42). The EU provides significant financial and technical support to Türkiye in modernizing its border surveillance infrastructure, although such actions further contribute to the securitization of migration, rendering policy convergence with the EU somewhat ambivalent.

Within the EU accession perspective, technological advancements in border management are closely tied to Turkiye's commitments to the EU on developing and implementing Integrated Border Management (IBM). IBM encompasses two primary aspects: enhancing coordination between border authorities and improving data sharing mechanisms. However, Turkiye's convergence with the EU in the field of IBM remains limited due to the anticipated repercussions and Turkiye's justified concerns over the potential domestic adaptation costs of compliance (Turhan and Yıldız, 2022). Despite this, the increasing deployment of technological advancements in border controls continues to evolve within this contested area of IBM. In this context, although Turkiye has yet to update and implement its National Action Plan on IBM, initially adopted in 2006, it has established the National Coordination and Joint Risk Analysis Centre (NACORAC). NACORAC serves as a risk assessment center tasked with collecting border management-related data from all relevant national authorities, producing risk analyses, similar to FRONTEX. As the focal institution where AI technologies are most likely to be utilized, NACORAC remains only partially operational due to the need for further legislative actions and persistent challenges in data sharing (European Commission, 2024b).

Registration of biometric data constitutes another prominent area where Türkiye has progressed. In 2021, Türkiye integrated the National Biometric Fingerprint Database with the Migration Registration System. This integration facilitated the transfer of data pertaining to 5.5 million foreigners, the majority of whom are Syrian refugees, into the system. The system is operated by the Presidency of Migration Management.

Another noteworthy example is the Foreigner Communication Center (*Yabancılar İletişim Merkezi,* YIMER), which exemplifies Türkiye's integration of AI and digital tools to streamline migration governance. YIMER operates as a centralized call center providing 24/7 multilingual assistance to migrants and asylum seekers who dial 157 by phone. The platform offers information on residency procedures, asylum applications, and legal rights while enabling rapid

intervention in emergencies such as human trafficking or exploitation cases. AI tools within YIMER enhance efficiency through automated systems capable of categorizing inquiries, directing calls to relevant personnel, and analyzing data patterns to improve decision-making processes. AI-powered chatbots and natural language processing technologies help streamline communication, enabling migrants to access essential information quickly and reducing administrative burdens on migration authorities.

The potential of AI technologies in processing asylum applications is another critical potential area of development. Türkiye's asylum system faces immense pressure, necessitating improvements in efficiency and fairness, particularly concerning credibility of assessments. Furthermore, the processes of nationality identification and status determination represent a highly challenging and dynamic domain. This complexity is marked by an overwhelming volume of information, frequent legislative changes that are not only challenging to interpret but also difficult to monitor consistently, thereby imposing a substantial additional burden on migration officials. Additionally, asylum processes entail the challenging tasks of gathering evidence and supporting documents, where the verification of such materials is both highly complex and necessitates specialized expertise that often surpasses the skill set of migration officials. Last but not least, language barriers pose a significant challenge for migration experts, hindering their ability to conduct thorough and effective interviews that accurately document the details of an asylum seeker's migration journey. Theoretically, AI can enhance decision-making processes by ensuring greater consistency, reducing delays, and examining large volumes of information to corroborate claims.

However, the inherent complexity of refugee status determination (RSD) processes—centered around the "well-founded fear of persecution," which involves both subjective fear and objective risk—raises significant concerns. RSD is not a purely technical process but takes place within a humanitarian context. In Türkiye, credibility assessments are further complicated by the diverse experiences of refugees, shaped by trauma, memory loss, and cultural particularities. While AI may streamline processes and mitigate overt biases, there remains a risk of reproducing human assumptions embedded in algorithmic training data. To address this, the learning process must incorporate a nuanced and sensitive analysis of diverse and accurate decision-making examples. This includes not only RSD decision but also deportation decisions and the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights, which provide critical insights into the accurate practices and the protection of fundamental rights.

Otherwise, the growing reliance on automated systems for corroborating facts or predicting risks could not only result in biased decisions, jeopardizing the

safety and security of refugees and potentially leading to unlawful deportations, but also inadvertently shift the burden of proof disproportionately onto asylum seekers.

Türkiye's evolving data protection framework and international legal commitments present further considerations for ethical AI integration in migration governance. Safeguarding sensitive personal data is critical to ensuring that AI tools do not infringe on asylum seekers' rights. Türkiye's 2021 Artificial Intelligence Strategy, followed by its 2024-2025 action plan, demonstrates a willingness to engage with AI technologies (Presidency of Turkish Republic Digital Transformation Office, 2024). However, any integration of AI into Türkiye's RSD system must be approached cautiously to avoid undermining refugees' access to protection. AI-driven efficiencies and standardization must be balanced with safeguards against bias and a commitment to transparency in decision-making processes. By aligning technological advancements with humanitarian and legal standards, Türkiye could set a precedent for ethical AI integration in refugee governance, offering a model for other countries facing similar challenges.

Another emerging area for AI integration is alternatives to detention (ATD), for example the electronic monitoring systems. While ATDs such as return counseling and family-based returns have been implemented, alternatives requiring advanced electronic infrastructure—such as voice recognition software and electronic bracelets—remain underdeveloped so far. Addressing these gaps represents a significant opportunity for technological intervention.

Despite the potential benefits of AI in migration governance, Türkiye faces infrastructural and technical challenges, including insufficient information and communication technologies (ICT) capabilities, limited access to skilled staff, and gaps in critical infrastructure. Interoperability between EU and Turkish AI systems further complicates efforts toward cooperation. Moreover, resource disparities in funding, expertise, and infrastructure between early AI adopters in the EU and Türkiye continue to hinder progress. Such challenges are not unique to Türkiye and reflect broader disparities in global digital capabilities. Ethical concerns surrounding data privacy, surveillance, and compliance with data protection laws—including alignment with the EU's GDPR—remain significant obstacles. Data sharing and analysis remain challenging areas requiring further progress and alignment between the EU and Türkiye (European Commission, 2024b). However, it is important to recognize that data sharing is inherently contested and politically sensitive, particularly concerning asylum and migration data. Cooperation in this domain is difficult to sustain across national systems due to concerns over privacy, ethics, and liability. Given these complexities, Türkiye is unlikely to take further steps toward deeper data-sharing collaboration with the EU without addressing key issues of reciprocity and conditionalities, especially within the broader context of Türkiye's EU accession process.

These shared challenges and mutual interests necessitate closer cooperation between the EU and Türkiye. Joint research and development efforts could lead to the co-creation of AI tools tailored to deal with specific regional migration dynamics. Capacity-building initiatives leveraging the EU expertise could strengthen Türkiye's AI infrastructure, while securing the GDPR-compliant data-sharing frameworks could facilitate interoperability. However, aligning Turkish data protection legislation with the EU standards remains essential, as the completion of an international agreement on data exchange with Europol is still pending (European Commission, 2024).

In conclusion, while the integration of AI into migration governance offers opportunities for efficiency, innovation, and improved decision-making; ethical risks, technical constraints, and geopolitical complexities remain significant areas of concern. Türkiye's strategic position in the global migration governance migration hub, coupled with its growing AI capabilities, underscores the potential for enhanced cooperation with the EU. Addressing shared challenges through joint research, capacity building, and development and harmonization of data governance frameworks could pave the way for a more resilient, ethical, and evidence-based migration governance system.

5. Conclusion

AI presents transformative possibilities for migration governance, offering tools for efficiency, security, and foresight. Accordingly, the integration of artificial intelligence into migration governance represents both an opportunity and a challenge for the EU-Türkiye relations. While the stalled accession process continues to cast a shadow over broader political cooperation, migration governance remains a cornerstone of strategic engagement between the EU and Türkiye. AI-driven tools, particularly in the domains of border surveillance, identity verification, and asylum, highlight the convergence of security interests between the two. This policy alignment, however, underscores a broader securitized framework wherein migration is often approached through the lenses of containment, control, and risk management.

The EU's migration governance practices reflect a dual priority: enhancing operational efficiency through AI technologies while balancing concerns around ethics, accountability, and human rights. Tools such as biometric systems, predictive analytics, and automated decision-making have streamlined border and asylum management but have also drawn criticism for their opacity, algorithmic bias, and potential to infringe on fundamental rights. The regulatory architecture, particularly the EU AI Act and GDPR, attempts to address these tensions, yet challenges remain in ensuring harmonized implementation across the Member States. The

securitization of migration governance—as embodied by initiatives like the Eurodac modernization, FRONTEX operations, and the ETIAS system—demonstrates a preference for control-oriented AI applications, reinforcing the EU's externalization strategy.

In Türkiye, the adoption of AI technologies in migration governance mirrors the EU's emphasis on security and efficiency. Advanced border surveillance systems, biometric registration tools, and digital platforms like YIMER exemplify Türkiye's commitment to modernizing its migration governance infrastructure. These developments, supported in part by the EU financial and technical assistance, signal growing technological and operational alignment. However, they also raise critical questions about the implications of AI adoption within Türkiye's migration governance framework, particularly in terms of safeguarding human rights, ensuring fairness in asylum procedures, and addressing the humanitarian dimensions of migration governance.

This article highlights that while AI technologies offer the potential to enhance evidence-based decision-making and operational capacities, they simultaneously risk entrenching a security-centric approach to migration governance. In the EU- Türkiye context, this dynamic creates both opportunities for deeper cooperation and challenges for reconfiguring relations beyond a transactional paradigm. The deployment of AI can foster greater collaboration by enhancing data-sharing mechanisms, improving interoperability, and addressing shared migration challenges through innovative technological solutions. Yet, this cooperation must be situated within a framework that prioritizes ethical AI deployment, transparency, and respect for the rights of migrants and refugees beyond complementing securitization of migration as serving a case for externalization of the EU's migration policies as well.

In rethinking the EU-Türkiye migration governance, the integration of AI should serve not merely as a tool for containment but as a catalyst for more sustainable, humane, and evidence-based policies. Leveraging AI's capabilities to support refugee integration, strengthen protection systems, and facilitate durable solutions can contribute to building trust and fostering renewed momentum in the EU-Türkiye cooperation. Such an approach requires a commitment to addressing the ethical, legal, and operational challenges associated with AI, ensuring that technological advancements do not come at the expense of migrants' dignity and rights. Ultimately, the convergence of AI and migration governance presents an opportunity for both actors to reshape their partnership in ways that balance security imperatives with humanitarian principles, offering a path forward for revitalizing EU- Türkiye relations amidst broader geopolitical complexities.

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Özet

Avrupa Birliği-Türkiye ilişkilerinde yapay zeka ve göç yönetişimi

Yapay zeka (YZ) ve gelişen yeni teknolojiler, veri odaklı analizlere olanak sağlamak ve politika verimliliğini artırma bağlamında göç yönetişiminde önemli bir rol üstlenmektedir. Bu makale, YZ teknolojilerindeki dinamik gelişmelerin göç yönetişimi bağlamında Avrupa Birliği (AB)-Türkiye ilişkilerini nasıl şekillendirdiğini/etkilediğini incelemektedir. Makale, AB'nin yapay zekanın entegrasyonuna yönelik stratejilerini, Türkiye'nin gelişen uygulamalarını ve iş birliği fırsatlarını ele almakta; bu süreçlerdeki jeopolitik karmaşıklıkları vurgularken aynı zamanda ortak çıkarları ön plana çıkarmaktadır. Seçili vaka çalışmaları ve uygulamalara dayanarak, makale göç yönetişiminde yeni teknolojilerin benimsenmesinin, AB-Türkiye iş birliğini gerektirdiğini ve bu iş birliğinin AB üyelik sürecinin geleneksel çerçevesinin ötesinde geliştiğini savunmaktadır. Makalede, iş birliği için potansiyel alanların yanı sıra, güvenlik kaygıları, insan hakları ve kişisel verilerin korunması konusundaki etik ikilemler dahil olmak üzere zorluklar da ele alınmaktadır. Ortak çıkarları vurgulayan bu çalışma, yapay zeka destekli göç yönetişimi karmaşıklıklarını yönetmede ortak çabaların kritik rolüne dikkat çekerken, daha etkili ve adil politika sonuçlarının geliştirilmesini teşvik etmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Türkiye-Avrupa Birliği ilişkileri, göç yönetişimi, yapay zeka, sınır yönetimi, güvenlikleştirme.

Yet another spatio-temporal turn in the Turkey-EU relations: The continuing saga of the "Cyprus problem" [*]

N. Nilgün Öner Tangör
Corporate Communications Office, METU, Ankara
e-mail: oner@metu.edu.tr
ORCID: 0000-0002-0984-4555

Galip L. Yalman
Department of Political Science and Public Administration, METU, Ankara
e-mail: yalman@metu.edu.tr
ORCID: 0000-0002-6144-5666

Abstract

The temporality of the Turkey-EU relations, coupled with the "state of affairs" of the Cyprus problem, reflected the "linkage politics" as initially opposed by Turkey. 2024 was the 30th anniversary of the so-called "Europeanisation of the Cyprus Problem" when the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) was included in the EU enlargement process in the 1994 Corfu Summit without the resolution of the problem. Cyprus became an EU member state as a divided island on May 1st 2004 whilst RoC was considered as the sole representative of the island on behalf of both the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot communities despite the lack of the latter's representation. The current political stalemate on the island and the lack of a constructive dialogue between Turkey and EU unveiled the linkage between Turkey's prospective EU membership and the solution of the Cyprus problem. In this regard, the trajectory of the Turkey-EU relations evolved into a new temporality under geopolitical contestation in which Cyprus conflict is coupled by the hydrocarbon economy developing in the Southeastern Mediterranean. Although a new political economy dimension has been added with the rise and fall of the hydrocarbon agenda, the whole process can be best summed as "*plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*".

Key words: Cyprus problem, temporality, Europeanisation, carbonization, linkage politics.

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1. Introduction

The Cyprus problem still remains as one of the stumbling blocks for the future of Turkey-European Union (EU) relations. The never-ending, self-repeating process of bilateral negotiations created both an attraction as well as a disdain towards the problem for the researchers from different backgrounds. Professor Atila Eralp had been one of the key observers of the Cyprus problem, who studied it not only from the perspective of the international relations discipline in a historical perspective (Eralp, 1997, 2009, 2010; Arısan and Eralp, 2016) but also as the chairperson of the METU Center for European Studies which had conducted a series of research projects in the North Cyprus from the late 1990s onwards[1]. This study will purport that the "temporality and interaction" perspective Atila Eralp put forward for "understanding the process of Europeanisation in Turkey and explaining the ups and downs in the long-lasting relationship" (Eralp, 2009) is no less salient for the analysis of the Cyprus problem. For this perspective pointed to the importance of the "time" as a key component for the analysis of the consequences of the interaction between the agencies in a temporal, contextual comparison. Therefore, it is pertinent to underline the saliency of temporality as a key concept. For temporality should be understood not as a 'linear progressive conception of time' but rather in terms of 'multiple temporal levels' which, in turn, allows to take into account 'the plurality of conflicting times'. In this regard, it is also helpful to make a distinction between 'duration' and 'epoch' as two types of temporality (cf. Filippini, 2017: 105-107).

From this perspective, the "ups and downs" in the Turkey-EU relationship could not be posited in a linear trajectory. Rather, they should better be analysed as manifestations of plural temporalities, notwithstanding attempts to interrupt the continuity of the duration by constituting it as an epoch, that is, entailing new transformative changes in the relationship concerned. While the intensity of the interaction between Turkey and the EU changed over time, duration can serve as a key *explanan* for the volatile trajectory of the Turkey-EU relationship as well as for the continuing saga of the Cyprus question which would be entangled with it. Put differently, "temporality politics" can be instrumental to account why the interrelated sequences of cooperation (convergence) and conflict (divergence) in the protracted saga of Turkey's quest for the EU membership could not be surmised as an epoch. It will also help to grasp the alternative modes of association for the future of the aforementioned relationship that are foreboded by uncertainty since 2005, i.e., privileged partnership, strategic partnership, and/or transactionalism.

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[1]   A series of research projects, including a longitudinal study- Avrupalılaşma Sürecinde Kıbrıs'ta Değişim-, TÜBİTAK, Proje No. 105K263., were conducted by the members of the Centre for European Studies in the Middle East Technical University, Prof. Dr. Ali Gitmez, Prof. Dr. Atila Eralp and Assoc. Prof. Dr. Galip Yalman between 1999-2016, joined by N. Nilgün Öner Tangör in 2012.

By the same token, the cyclical sequence of the negotiation process between the representatives of Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities creates an illusion of linear progression of time and the "state of affairs" on the island. This is partly because the Cyprus problem has long been under the scrutiny of the international relations discipline, mainly under the domain of the security and international law studies on the one hand, and to the extent that it has been perceived as an ethnic and religious conflict by the identity-focused studies on the other. The security perspective focused on the spatial dimension of the Cyprus problem, the territory issues, statehood and the guarantees, as they had been the critical topics since the onset of the conflict. No doubt, it is also important to take into account institutionalist approaches with their emphasis on path dependencies and concern for institutional change as a potential way out of the predicament that the prolonged nature of the Cyprus conflict seems to signify.

In the post-cold war context of the 1990s, there had emerged an increasing focus on the capacity of the institutions to determine the behaviour of the actors as the agencies of change and transformation, as part of the debate between rival schools of historical/sociological institutionalism on the one hand, and rational choice institutionalism, on the other. In particular, the neo-institutionalist conceptualisation of "Europeanisation" gained significance to account for the ways in which European integration process leads to domestic change or lack of it. It was in this sense that Eralp (2009) underlined the importance of "temporality and interaction". As there has also been an emphasis on "discursive institutionalism" to understand the transformative power of discourse in the context of EU policy-making agenda (Schmidt and Radaelli 2004), "Europeanisation" discourse dominated the majority of the mainstream academic output regarding the European Integration process between 1999-2004, ignited by the political momentum and enthusiasm to extend the western type of liberal order to the Eastern European countries.

However, as it has been noted by a seasoned observer of the process in question, "in the academic literature …. Europeanisation has been typically analysed in its EUisation form" (Tocci, 2004b). Put differently, Europeanisation and "EU-isation" has been dealt with as complementary processes and/or synonyms (Flenley and Mannin, 2018). This meant that 'EUisation as a particular brand of Europeanisation' entailed a 'binding baggage of the EU acquis' in the form of conditionalities as reflected in the political and economic criteria adopted in the Copenhagen Summit of 1993 for the prospective members of the EU. Yet, the so-called fifth enlargement in 2004, encompassing 10 countries mostly from Eastern Europe plus Malta and Cyprus did not necessarily reflect full compliance with the *acquis* (cf. Tocci, 2004b).

The present study would try to convey a critical reading of the temporal dimension of the EU-Turkey relationship from a historical perspective since 1994, that was, at least partly, conditioned by the changing "state of affairs" regarding the Cyprus problem. Yet, it is no less salient to contemplate the changing states of affairs in different periods in terms of multiple temporalities so as to alleviate the challenging task of contextualizing the patterns of change and continuity in this protracted problem.

Moreover, the notion of multiple temporalities is also illuminating from a critical political economy perspective so as to come to terms with what has been dubbed as 'spatio-temporal fixes' (Harvey, 2003). That is to say, the ways in which the expanded reproduction of capitalist relations of production being experienced on 'multiple temporal levels', give rise to institutional and spatio-temporal fixes that could have provided it with some partial, provisional, and albeit temporary, stability (Jessop, 2014). More pertinently, as it was already noted, there has been a lacuna in the related literature on the nature of relationships between Turkey and the EU from a critical political economy perspective that focuses on the linkages between Turkey's EU accession process and the Turkish experience of neoliberal restructuring (Yalman and Göksel, 2017). Concomitantly, the Cyprus problem demonstrates that it is impossible to isolate the political/security dimension of this protracted conflict from the economic interests of the agencies involved, hence temporality gains significance once again for undertaking a political economic analysis of the changing states of affairs in different periods on the island.

2. "Europeanisation" of the Cyprus problem: From 1994 Corfu Summit to the EU membership of the Republic of Cyprus in 2004

Whether or not "Europeanisation" had a transformative impact on the domestic institutions of the prospective members, it has been attributed yet another role as a catalyst of conflict settlement and/or conflict resolution (Tocci, 2004a). This perception was prominent due to rising expectations for a federal solution in the wake of the announcement of the Annan Plan in Cyprus in the early 2000s. This had already gained critical importance with the granting of candidate status to Turkey at the Helsinki summit in December 1999, as part of the "linkage politics" upon the resolution of the Cyprus problem, notwithstanding the official rejection of such a linkage on the part of the Turkish foreign policymakers. Yet, it has also been acknowledged that there were limits of the EU's role in conflict resolution. That is to say, as it has been manifested in the case of Cyprus, it has not always paved the way towards the resolution of the dispute and/or compliance with the EU conditionality (Kyris, 2013; Tocci, 2004a). Rather 'the Europeanisation of conflict resolution' turned out to be a short-lived perception which demised in less than a decade as the EU lost its impartiality in this particular dispute once the Republic of

Cyprus (RoC) became a member state. Indeed, it has been contended that the accession of Cyprus into the EU not only failed to become a catalyst for the resolution of the island's dispute, but it has also pinpointed the reinforcement of partition, and institutionalized the already existing domestic asymmetry of power between the two sides of the conflict (cf. Kyris, 2013; Lefteratos, 2024).

It is worth reminding that "the Europeanization of the Cyprus question" was a joint political strategy on the part of the Greek and RoC governments which led the RoC government to apply for full membership in the European Community on July 3, 1990 in the name of the entire Cyprus (Zervakis, 2002). While some European leaders stated at the time that they would not accept Cyprus's membership without a resolution of the conflict, a critical shift in the EU's stance would become apparent at the Corfu Summit in June 1994 when the European Council noted that 'the next phase of enlargement of the Union will involve Cyprus and Malta'. It would also reaffirm the Council's position that 'any solution of the Cyprus problem must respect the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and unity of the country, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and high-level agreements.' [2]

The summer of 1994 would also witness another path breaking development in terms of EU's approach to Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in particular. A decision of the European Court of Justice on 5 July 1994, which declared direct imports from the TRNC to the EU to be illegal, would be consequential. For it had a devastating effect on the local economy in general, and export-oriented food and textile industries in particular, thereby deepening the isolation of the TRNC economy, thus making Turkey its dominant trading partner (Balkır and Yalman 2009; Öner-Tangör, 2021: 153).

Meanwhile, as it would be indicated in the same the European Council statement, the post-Maastricht EU was, in fact, proposing a new relationship with Turkey with no prospect of full membership in the form of a customs union relationship. The Custom Union (CU) that would come into effect from 1996 onwards was decided by the EC-Turkey Association Council on the 6th of March 1995 in accordance with 1963 Ankara Agreement and Additional Protocols.[3] President Denktaş of TRNC had opposed and harshly criticized that decision, as it would mean further economic isolation of his country, by putting TRNC to the third country position in terms of the CU agreement. In fact, the CU was seen as a tool to accelerate the radical economic changes that Turkey had been experiencing since the early 1980s. Thus, it was intended that CU could be instrumental in enhancing the competitiveness of the Turkish economy. Nonetheless, and curiously, as Eralp (2000) put it, "the Turkish governing élite are geared to a close linkage between the

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[2]   https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/cor1_en.htm
[3]   Decision No 1/95 of the EC- Turkey Association Council of 22 December 1995.

customs union relationship and full membership". Hence, the Turkish policymakers continued to perceive the CU as a step toward full membership to the EU as well as 'an opportunity for Turkey to utmost benefit from advantages of globalisation' (Yalman and Göksel, 2017).

The Luxembourg European Council (12–13 December 1997) confirmed "Turkey's eligibility for accession to the European Union", yet Turkey was excluded from the next round of enlargement. It was clear by then that Cyprus would become a member state with or without the solution of the Cyprus problem as the accession negotiations started between the EU and RoC in 1997. The Commission's opinion in the Presidency's conclusions pointed to the "hope" that "the accession of Cyprus should benefit all communities and help to bring about civil peace and reconciliation"[4]. Turkey on the other hand, was advised to support "a political settlement in Cyprus on the basis of the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions"[5] if it wants to strengthen its "links" with the EU. This opinion marked the beginning of the linkage politics that determined the critical instances shaping the EU-Turkey relationship in the forthcoming years. Ironically, the relations between Turkey and RoC would further deteriorate by the late 1990s due to the attempt of the RoC government to deploy the Russian S-300 missiles in the south of the island.

Granting of candidate country status at the December 1999 Helsinki Summit not only raised hopes for Turkey's eventual full membership, but the Turkish government would also aspire to fulfil the Maastricht criteria, while it had been diligently implementing the three-year IMF stand-by agreement, it had signed in December 1999. Ironically, Turkish economy would experience a typical case of "twin crises" during November 2000-February 2001, in which a balance of payment crisis triggered by capital outflows takes place simultaneously with the crisis of the banking sector, while it undertook the three-year IMF stand-by agreement. It turned out that the 2001 crisis was going to be celebrated for paving the way for a new phase of neoliberalism in Turkey with the adoption of a new three-year IMF stand-by agreement in the wake of the crisis. Through the implementation of 'regulatory reforms' in the wake of a severe and prolonged crisis, a restructuring of the state in line with the requirements of a globalized market economy was finally considered within reach of a 'pro-reform' constituency emboldened by the promise of an accession to the European Union (Bedirhanoğlu and Yalman, 2010).

In that context, the protracted saga of Turkey's quest for the European Union (EU) membership provides a highly illuminative case to articulate the ways in which the EU emerges as a key player which changes the rules and the structures of policy-making for the member states as well as for others aspiring to be full members

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[4]   Luxembourg European Council 12 and 13 December 1997 Presidency Conclusions.
       https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lux1_en.htm, (retrieved on 07.07.2024).
[5]   Ibid., "A European strategy for Turkey".

(Yalman, 2016a). Indeed, the EU's Accession Partnership for Turkey, which is said to clarify "a road map", would circumscribe its "economic criteria" with the implementation of the structural reform programme agreed with the IMF and the World Bank. In that sense, the crisis management strategies of the Bretton Woods institutions implemented in the first half of the 2000s, were also considered as being functional for enabling Turkey to fulfil the Copenhagen economic criteria (Yalman and Göksel, 2017).

While Turkey was eventually granted the candidate country status, TRNC had already been living through its own banking crisis that broke out during the winter of 1999/2000. The imposition of a stabilisation package by the Turkish government on its Turkish-Cypriot counterpart in the autumn of 2000, similar to the one imposed on itself by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) a year earlier, had left a bitter taste for the Turkish Cypriot community, thereby galvanizing an opposition to the Denktaş regime (Balkır and Yalman, 2009). This provides a clue to understand why the prospective EU membership for the whole island, as envisaged by the Annan Plan, was considered as an opportunity on the part of the Turkish Cypriot opposition for a new 'state of affairs' that would put an end to the seemingly incontractible nature of the conflict. However, as one senior member of the opposition had contended when the Annan Plan was put forward, Turkey would not be prepared to accept such an eventuality, unless and until Turkey itself would become a full member.[6] In fact, as stated by the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, this was the official position of both the TRNC and Turkish governments that 'the accession of Cyprus to the European Union was illegal, as long as Turkey was not a member and as long as the Turkish Cypriots had not consented to it'. This was, however, duly 'rejected by the EU'.[7] While the Denktaş regime was opposed to the Annan Plan, the Turkish Cypriot opposition was equally adamant to avoid the "velvet divorce" as an alternative to the Annan Plan.[8]

Yet the solution of the Cyprus problem would gradually become a *sine qua non* for Turkey's full membership. The "linkage politics" discourse established a kind of conditionality between Turkey's EU membership and the solution of the problem. Until the referenda on the Annan Plan on both sides of the island in 2004, there had been a disavowal of any linkage politics on the part of the Turkish foreign policymakers. However, the rejection of the Annan Plan by the Greek Cypriots, whilst the Turkish Cypriot community voted for it, maintained the *status quo ante*, albeit invoking a new 'state of affairs'. That is, RoC became one of the ten new EU members, despite the fact that the Greek Cypriots rejected the Annan Plan. This

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[6]   Mr. Özker Özgür, former chairman of the Republican Turkish Party (CTP), Interview with the members of the METU Center of European Studies Cyprus research project, 30 November 2002.

[7]   Report of the Secretary General on his mission of good offices in Cyprus, 1 April 2003, S/2003/398.

[8]   Kutlay Erk, (Mayor of Lefkoşa) Interview with the members of the METU Center of European Studies Cyprus research project, 30 November 2002.

seemed to have happened to the chagrin of the European Commission, since those in charge of the EU enlargement policy felt 'cheated' by the Greek Cypriot side whom they believed would be in favour of the resolution strategy entailed in the Annan Plan (Balkır and Yalman, 2009).

3. The EUization of the Cyprus problem: From 2004 Annan Referenda to 2011 hydrocarbon discoveries in the Southeastern Mediterranean

Having initially supported the Annan Plan at the expense of the tension thus created with the Denktaş Presidency in the TRNC, the newly elected Justice and Development Party (AKP) government had continued to take steps towards reconciliation with the EU. In fact, in December 2003, AKP government had announced that Turkey would abide the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR)'s ruling in the Loizidou case to pay damages to the Greek Cypriot owner. Turkey's maneuver raised the hopes that the property issue would eventually be resolved by providing direct compensations to the first owners. In 2006, the Turkish Cypriot Immovable Property Commission (IPC) was established to broker practical solutions for property claims in the north[9], and to stop the influx of thousands of Greek Cypriot claimers to the ECHR. This positive atmosphere gave the newly elected TRNC government and the TRNC President the much-needed time to recover from disappointment of the post-referenda process and consolidate its new leadership role during the upcoming bilateral negotiations. However, the downslide in the Turkey-EU relations and the suspension of the *acquis* in the north caused the slowdown of the bicommunal talks. The EU gradually lost its credibility as a "catalyzer" in the north, and in terms of financial sustenance EU funds fell short to establish the EU as a key financial actor in the north *vis-à-vis* Turkey, due to the complex bureaucratic process to attain them and mistrust towards the EU after 2004.

After 2004, Cyprus Problem became an integral part of the tailspin in the Turkey-EU relationship. The 2004 EU Council Progress Report on Turkey was a blow to the fledgling relations and what deepened the rift between Brussels and Ankara was the fact that the report came despite the Turkish government's support for the Annan plan. Although the report praised the macroeconomic stability and the disinflation goal of the Turkish government, it underlined Turkey's obligation to extend the terms of the Customs Union to the RoC and other new members. In response, the Turkish governments repeatedly stated in the following years that "the Additional Protocol would not be implemented as long as the isolation of the

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[9]   Immovable Property Law (No. 67/2005), in accordance with the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights, to "establish an effective domestic remedy for claims relating to abandoned properties in Northern Cyprus", https://tamk.gov.ct.tr/en-us/.

Turkish Cypriot community continued"[10]. The accession negotiations were opened with Turkey in October 2005, yet this deadlock manifested the beginning of a new era in which the Cyprus issue would be instrumental to block Turkey's steps towards membership, hence our emphasis on duration as a key *explanan* of the protracted nature of the conflict.

EU's aid to the TRNC was introduced by the promulgation of the Green Line Regulation of the Council in 2004 (866/2004) in an attempt to enhance trade, which remained modest in the long term. The EU became the new financial actor on the island as both the Greek Cypriot and the Turkish Cypriot communities were expecting that the EU funds would finally bring some relief to the economic stagnation caused by 40 years of political conflict. Yet the funds were largely destined to flow to the south[11], and although by the end of 2023 a generous 688 million Euro were allocated by the Commission to the north[12], the impact of the funds were limited when compared in terms of the economic benefits they ignited in the south. The Commission avoided the TRNC Government as a correspondent for the management of the EU funds as the north of the island was considered by the Commission in 2003 as the "the occupied area of the island, in the areas in which the Government of the Republic of Cyprus does not exercise effective control"[13]. Since the north was the so-called "non-governmental" part of the island, the implementation and the control mechanisms of the funds were more complicated for the TRNC due to the lack of expertise on how to use them as well as to channel them to be used pertinently. The complicated bureaucracy for the use of funds in the north discouraged the potential beneficiaries to apply for the projects in the first place. Although a major goal of the assistance was to enhance bicommunal relations, regarding the fact that the north's economy was already in a disadvantaged position prior to the EU involvement, it widened the gap in terms of economic development. The Council's decision to bypass the TRNC government by suspending the *acquis*, also suspended the Europeanisation as a "process" in the north, hence the prospects for the convergence of the national structures and policies with the EU ended simultaneously in TRNC (Öner-Tangör, 2021: 184).

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[10] Republic of Türkiye, MFA, No:123-July 29th, 2005, Press Statement Regarding the Additional Protocol to Extend the Ankara Agreement to All EU Members (Unofficial Translation), https://www.mfa.gov.tr/_p_no_123---july-29th_-2005_-press-statement-regarding-the-additional-protocol-to-extend-the-ankara-agreement-to-all-eu-members-_unofficial-translation___p_.en.mfa.

[11] "Until the end of 2021, Cyprus is a net recipient of approximately 461 million euro", https://knews.kathimerini.com.cy/en/news/cyprus-received-%E2%82%AC461-million-euros-in-eu-funding-since-accession-used-80.

[12] Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support, 4 July 2024. https://commission.europa.eu/news/eu-assistance-increases-trade-and-free-movement-cyprus-supporting-islands-reunification-2024-07-04_en.

[13] EU legislation is suspended in the North, in line with Protocol 10 of the Accession Treaty 2003 (OJ L 236 – 23.9.2003).

The EU funds as well as the Green Line regulation brought some relief to the north by the movement of persons, goods and services across the Green Line and brought two communities closer. More importantly, the number of Turkish Cypriot workers commuting to south have been on the rise, mainly thanks to the fact that the Denktaş administration had lifted in April 2003 entry restrictions on Greek Cypriots to the north for the first time since the division of the island. However, the Turkish Cypriots were disappointed by the fact that they were being left outside of the EU's customs and fiscal territory despite voting in majority (%65) for a federal solution. Although the Turkish Cypriots became EU citizens, it came with some restrictions. RoC citizenship would be obtained if their residence dates back to 1974, and nationality of both parents are Turkish Cypriot. Moreover, while the EU funds came with bureaucratic hassles, Turkey's financial support was "unconditional" in the sense that the shrinking of the public sector in the north was still not the precondition for the direct aid to the TRNC[14]. After 2004, the EU gradually lost its popularity in the north and in Turkey. According to Eralp (2009: 168), "Turkish political elites became less and less sensitive about the reform process and the relevant commitments and deadlines". He also pointed out that the membership of the Republic of Cyprus without a solution of the problem contributed to the downturn in the Turkey-EU relationship.

Initially, Justice and Development Party (AKP) government had taken decisive steps towards the shrinking of the public sector, kicking-off the privatizations, fostering foreign direct investment, broadening the civil society dialogue and speeding up the political reform process in line with its commitment to the EU accession process. All these steps and economic recovery were appreciated by the Commissions yet, "better exploitation of the potential of the Custom Union", "normalization of bilateral relations with Cyprus" would be pinned to the opening of every progress report after 2004. In the 2006 Council decision, it was made clear that negotiations will not be opened on eight chapters due to Turkey's refusal to extend the additional protocol to Republic of Cyprus, and no chapter will be provisionally closed until Turkey implements the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement.

In 2006, the AKP government initiated a restructuring program for the TRNC economy for the 2006-2009 Economic Association Protocol to be signed with the TRNC government. This protocol enforced structural reforms in the north for the shrinking of the public sector, social security system, local administrations. The Turkish Cypriot economy was introduced to the transnational capital via the privatizations: The privatization of the Turkish Cypriot State Economic Enterprises (SEEs) included the KTHY (the Turkish Cypriot Airlines) and the TEKEL (General

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[14] The 2007-2009 financial protocol signed between TRNC and Turkey tied the use of financial aid to the shrinking of the public sector.

directorate of Tobacco, Tobacco Products, Salt and Alcohol Enterprises) followed by many others which were sold gradually to joint venture partnerships such as British American Tobacco (BAT) which had taken over the TEKEL in Turkey so as to dismantle its cigarette factories.

The 2006-2009 Economic Association Protocol highlighted the criteria for the release of the aid from Turkey to TRNC, that was underlined in a similar way in the European Commission's Turkey 2005 Progress Report under the heading "progress in privatizations" for "the block sale of TEKEL's alcohol production facilities and the public offerings of Turkish airlines"[15]. The TRNC Government under Republican Turkish Party (CTP) refused to sign it initially due to pressure from the trade unions, however it was later signed which led to the resigning of the government in 2008. The opposition, National Unity Party (UBP), eventually won the 2009 general elections followed by the victory of its candidate Derviş Eroğlu in the 2010 presidential elections. After the 2006-2009 financial protocol signed with TRNC government the major steps for privatization of the Turkish Cypriot SEEs were taken, and Turkey gradually became the neoliberal anchor of the TRNC economy. Turkey's widening current account deficit despite the structural reform packages was followed by the current account deficit in the TRNC's economy.

While Turkey's rejection to extend the additional protocol to RoC increased the Greek Cypriot government's unease towards Turkey's membership, the bicommunal relations were flourishing considerably especially in terms of trade and border mobility. In February 2008, Demetris Christofias of AKEL (the Progressive Party of the Working People) won the presidential elections, which reignited the hopes for a federal solution on the island. Demetris Christofias was a pro-federation president, yet his term was marked by a series of national/international level socio-economic downturns. On 1 January 2008 the RoC had joined the Eurozone, which coincided with the onset of the 2007-2009 global financial crisis. Between 2004-2008, the Greek Cypriot economy was bolstered by generous amounts of household lending and spending; average real wage remaining constant, the private consumption was approximately 20 percent higher when compared to the 2004 level (Trimikliniotis, 2013). Despite the positive atmosphere after the EU membership, the Greek Cypriot economy was already under pressure to cope with the adjustment policies even before joining the Eurozone in 2008.

In parallel to the positive political atmosphere, the expansion of credits supported by capital inflows resulted in large household and business indebtedness. As the public debt rose sharply from 48% to 75% of GDP 8% to 75%. "By 2012, Cyprus was deep into the trap of mutually reinforcing sovereign and banking risks" (Sarris, 2015: p. x). The financial crisis which augmented from 2007 to 2012,

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[15]   European Commission, Brussels, 9 November 2005, SEC (2005) 1426. "Turkey 2005 Progress Report". p. 49.

involved the exposure of Cypriot banks to the Greek debt crisis, the downgrading of the Cypriot economy to junk status by international rating agencies and the loss of access to international credit markets (Iordanidou and Athanassios 2014). There would be a bailout for RoC later in 2013, involving the international lenders so as to avert Cyprus's exit from the Eurozone. The terms of the deal, required the country's second largest bank, The People's Bank of Cyprus, to be closed down, and turned out to be rather costly for the Greek Cypriot community because of the austerity policies it imposed upon them. When the economic crisis hit the Greek Cypriot economy, the hopes of the Turkish Cypriots for a solution under EU aegis dimmed furthermore as this crisis eventually faded the pro-EU narratives and weakened the class alliances that were established for bringing "change" to the political and economic structures in the north.

4.   Carbonization: from the financial crisis in the RoC to the 2017 Crans Montana Meeting and Beyond

The discovery of vast amount of natural gas in the basin of the Southeastern Mediterranean (SEM) resulted in the development of a series of accounts on the economic "benefits" of a political settlement (Faustmann, Gürel and Reichberg, 2012; Gürel, Mullen and Tzimitras, 2013; Faustmann, 2015)**.** The entry of major oil/gas companies to the region, whose CEOs are members of the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT) such as French-Italian consortium Total/Eni, later joined by Shell and BP, raised hopes for providing economic incentives for brokering a European solution under the mediation of the transnational elite. However, in less than a decade, the hydrocarbon discoveries was ensued by the proliferation of militarization in the SEM, resulting in a "war of navtexes", followed by the "carbonization" of the Cyprus problem i.e., solidification of the conflict rather than its resolution (Öner-Tangör, 2021: 259). In this regard, the limits of "Europeanisation" as a transformative process for conflict resolution, and the impact of economic incentives without a political solution were tested in the case of Cyprus. "EU as a catalyst" discourse for existing/potential political conflicts bring forward this transformation capacity as one of the merits of the EU, yet the Cyprus case illustrated that without associating effective conditionality in the process, it had a counter-effect on the peace building efforts (Ker-Lindsay 2007). The critics pointed to EU's diplomatic failures for conflict resolution (Kyris 2015) and rather reckoned EU as a "perilous catalyst", specifically in regard to the impact of the accession of Cyprus without reaching a solution (Richmond 2001), and others had warned about not only the deadlock it would bring to the Turkey-EU relationship but to the future of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) (Yiangou, 2002).

The RoC government had been signing maritime exclusive economic zone (EEZ) agreements with its neighbors since the early 2000s, with Egypt on 17

February 2003 and with Lebanon on 17 January 2007 and with Israel in 2010. Turkey, not a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), rejected these bilateral agreements signed by RoC government concerning maritime jurisdiction areas with the neighbours in the SEM, on the grounds that they neglect the rights of the Turkish Cypriot community. Moreover, the RoC-Israel rapprochement came at a time when the Turkey-Israel relations were at loggerheads due to the Mavi Marmara incident in 2011, causing further disdain from Turkey towards the bilateral talks. These developments left President Christofias little room for approximation with the TRNC side and restart the bicommunal talks for unification, and the bilateral talks were overshadowed by the developments in the SEM and the financial crisis in the south.

Although there were efforts under UN auspices to bring the leaders together between 2011 and 2013, the soaring public debt and the bail-out proposal of the Troika was the priority of the RoC government, and the bicommunal relations were halted in due course. The RoC government had signed a licensing agreement with the US contractor company Noble Energy back in 2008 for the exploration of natural gas reserves in the SEM. In December 2011, the company finally announced that it discovered a large reserve of natural gas in Block 12, estimated around 5 trillion to 8 trillion cubic feet, in the area covering the south east of Cyprus to Israel. In the midst of the scandalous outbreak of the financial crisis, the RoC government was relieved hoping that the off-shore resources would remedy the bail-in emergencies, and leverage Cyprus as a key actor in the regional and global markets. The RoC government gave impetus to the exploration activities by signing drilling agreements with other companies. The Turkish government reacted by issuing a warning Navtex and sending warships to follow the on-going activities. The RoC government soon announced that it would block Turkey's membership talks with the EU in retaliation and the resulting tension between Turkey and RoC halted the bicommunal talks.

The TRNC government's initiatives to be included in the process for the exploration activities was rejected by the RoC government who announced that it would launch a second round of licenses for off-shore explorations. The economic crisis as well as the hydrocarbons agenda resulted in the increase in Greek Cypriot nationalism which widened the gap between two communities that tended to close after the opening of the Green Line in 2003. Despite the hydrocarbons' boosting effect, the financial crisis deepened by 2013, making the economy the primary concern of the Greek Cypriots. The unification of the island was no longer the priority for the election campaigns of the presidential candidates in 2013, which resulted in DISY's Anastasiades' victory against pro-federation AKEL's Christofias. The number of Turkish Cypriots passing the Green Line to work in the south gradually decreased, signaling the weakening of bicommunalism on the island, which had made a promising start during the Annan Plan process.

Consequently, the hydrocarbon discoveries changed the direction of the negotiations from substantial issues, such as guarantees, to a discussion on delimiting the EEZs and sharing the energy revenues in collaboration with the global capital (Öner-Tangör, 2021: 280-295).

Turkey continued to issue statements against the drilling operations carried out by the oil companies that would participate in the exploration activities without Turkey's and TRNC's consent. The tension accelerated when it became public in 2013 that Turkey was excluded from regional plans for "sharing the revenues" via the EastMed pipeline, that was to connect Greece, the RoC, and Israel. The tension expanded towards the north and Navtexes were began to be issued in the Mediterranean between Turkey-Greece after 2011. Under these circumstances, President Anastasiades and President Eroğlu made a joint declaration on 11 February 2014, agreeing on seven principles for the continuation of the negotiation process, albeit without any reference to the surmounting hydrocarbons issue. However, later in October 2014, President Anastasiades decided to halt the talks, accusing Turkey for aggression and for starting its test-drilling activities off-coast in SEM, where Cyprus had licensed Italy's Eni and South Korea's Kogas on blocks 2 and 3, followed by France's Total in block 9.

The intercommunal talks, that were expected to revive after the discovery of the hydrocarbon resources in the SEM in the early 2010s, came to an impasse in 2014, and the hydrocarbons issue counteracted the negotiation process despite the initial optimism for its potential to act as a "catalyser" for unification. After Mustafa Akıncı, who pledged to reunite the island, won the Presidential elections in 2015 in TRNC, the optimism in the north for the unification of Cyprus increased. However, Turkey-EU relations were turning to negative due to the developments in SEM. Although the hydrocarbons were never officially on the negotiation table, Akıncı, who was skeptical of the "hydrocarbons as a catalyzer" discourse, made several attempts to establish a joint committee for the exploration activities with the Greek Cypriots, which was always rejected by the RoC government.

The idea that a "functionalist approach" towards the hydrocarbons would expand "opportunities" and bring the sides closer to a solution was prevalent until 2017. In late 2015, leaders from both the Greek Cypriot Community and the Turkish Cypriot Community, as well as the United Nations, requested World Bank technical assistance on the economic aspects of the ongoing reunification negotiations. The contributions made by the World Bank to the Northern Cyprus consist of guidelines and detailed reports about its economy[16]. SABER report (Systems Approach for Better Educational Results) was prepared, an EU-funded survey was carried out in

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[16]   Dirk Reinermann, "On the Economic Impacts of Reunification in Cyprus". World Bank opinion, June 23, 2017, https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2017/06/23/qa-analysis-of-economic-impacts-of-reunification-in-cyprus. Retrieved on 17.09.2024.

December 2018 by the World Bank. In parallel to this, in 2015, a delegation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) visited the island for the preparation of cost and sustainability of the solution of the Cyprus problem. The delegation under the presidency of IMF Mission Chief Rachel Van Elkan was received by the TRNC Minister of Tourism Faiz Sucuoğlu, announcing that they have decided to work together on ways in which IMF might contribute to country's tourism sector[17]. However, the attempts to raise the visibility of the TRNC economy in regards of the global financial authority were ineffective without a comprehensive settlement. The IMF reports were only available for the years 2015 and 2016 with the specific agenda on the financial aspects of reunification and growing tension in the SEM after 2017 rendered the inscription of future reports futile.

Accordingly, the 2016-2018 Structural Reform Program was signed between Turkey and the TRNC that aimed to shrink the public sector, and strengthen the financial sector. The "Structural Transformation Plan", was a comprehensive privatization program including the harbors, telecommunication, electric sector as well as the re-structuring of the judiciary and the central planning organization and the shrinking of the public sector in the north. The Structural Reform Program was in line with the 2014 "Indicative Strategy Paper" for Turkey prepared by the Commission for the period 2014-2020, to help Turkey meet the accession criteria.[18] The Commission urged Turkey to "accelerate the implementation of its comprehensive structural reform program", to be able to "cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU in the medium term"[19].

Meanwhile, the hydrocarbon drillings of the Total–ENI consortium in Block 11 continued despite TRNC government's and Turkey's opposition. On February 2018, the tension escalated when the Turkish navy stopped Italian energy company Eni's Saipem 12000 drilling ship, *en route* to the southeast of Cyprus, where Turkey was conducting a military exercise. Anastasiades reacted promptly, accusing Brussels for "silence" towards Turkey in order not to jeopardize the migration agreement and blaming the Turkish side for the escalation of the tension in the SEM. The President of the European Council, Donald Tusk urged Turkey to end its drilling activities in the "EEZ of Cyprus", arguing that these activities were harming the negotiation process between the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots, however

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[17] https://pio.mfa.gov.ct.tr/en/sucuoglu-received-imf-delegation/

[18] European Commission Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, "Indicative Strategy Paper for Turkey (2014-2020)" Adopted on 26/08/2014. p. 7.

[19] European Commission Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, Indicative Strategy Paper for Turkey (2014-2020) Adopted on 26/08/2014. P. 7.

Anastasiades put pressure for specific and effective sanctions from the EU over the ships in the disputed exploration areas[20].

President Anastasiades openly targeted the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan that was signed in 2015 between Turkey and the EU in order to stop the flow of irregular migration via Turkey to Europe. The Commission had proposed a voluntary humanitarian admission scheme for Syrian Refugees in Turkey and in 2016, EU-Turkey statement was announced according to which all new irregular migrants and asylum seekers arriving from Turkey to the Greek islands and whose applications for asylum have been declared inadmissible should be returned to Turkey. This agreement once again signalled the fact that Turkey-EU relations were gradually and decisively evolving towards a policy-based partnership. This agreement, which assigns Turkey as the border keeper of the EU, sparked a heated debate in Turkey as well as in the EU. Facing the backlash, the EU Parliament also "recalled that outsourcing was not a credible long-term solution to the problem and called the Members States for more solidarity in welcoming refugees"[21]. However, the call of the Parliament for more solidarity was particularly difficult as the exclusionary policies and perspectives in Europe was on the rise since the financial crisis, which weakened the inclusionary federalism principle that inspired the European cooperation in the 1950s and 1960s.

Despite the tenacity of Greek Cypriot position on the issue, President Akıncı's repeated calls for the establishment of a joint committee for the exploration of the hydrocarbons gets rejected by President Anastasiades, which made it clear that the RoC President would keep the issue off the table. However, the growing discontent between two sides resulted in a surprising outcome in the 2017 Crans-Montana meetings in Switzerland, during which the issue of hydrocarbons was not officially a part of the negotiation agenda. President Anastasiades left the talks unexpectedly for an unbeknown reason at the time and it was revealed only later that he hastened to leave the room when he learned that Turkey agreed to revise the guarantees and security issues, that were long anticipated by the Greek Cypriot side (Grigoriadis, 2017). Shortly after 2017, he announced his version of a two-state solution in 2018, and called it "decentralized federation" as an alternative to the federal solution, yet its substance was not provided to the public. The vagueness of President Anastasiades's alternative proposal made it crystal clear that the Greek Cypriot side would not agree with the political equality principle under a federal model, even if Turkey was ready for revising the *status quo* (Drousiotis, 2020). In response, TRNC Prime Minister Tatar declared in 2019 that preferred option is "velvet divorce". The

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[20]   On 11 November 2019, the Council adopted Decision (CFSP) 2019/1894 for restrictive measures regarding Turkey's "unauthorized" drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, consisting of asset freeze and travel ban for the involved people and companies.

[21]   EU-Turkey Statement & Action Plan, 2015, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-towards-a-new-policy-on-migration/file-eu-turkey-statement-action-plan.

two-state propositions, which would receive a backlash from the Turkish Cypriot opposition two decades ago, would become the new political agenda once Tatar won the presidential elections in the TRNC in 2020. The opposition in the north, the societal forces, trade unions and the business groups, who played a critical role for initiating "change" of the *status quo* on the island under a federal solution in the early 2000s, had gradually lost their momentum to propel unification after the privatizations weakened the trade unions in the north *vis-à-vis* the forces of the transnational capital.

After 2017, the federal solution was off the table and the bilateral relations were frozen. The three major issues between Ankara and Brussels were stopping the flow of irregular *migration* via *Turkey to Europe* from war zones, the Visa Liberalization Dialogue and the containment of the tension in the Mediterranean. The hydrocarbon reserves created a lucrative opportunity for the gas/oil companies and resulting competition in the region was intensified by the RoC Government's unilateral action to sign agreements with the companies for the exploration activities around SEM. As members of ERT, Total, Eni, Shell and BP were among the companies that were engaged in for the extraction and the exportation of the offshore resources of SEM. This process was in tandem to the ongoing privatizations on both sides of the island, that lured the global capital for having a share from the hydrocarbon resources. The financial-political crises on the island were instrumental for the "carbonization" of the Cyprus problem in parallel to the restructuring of the capital accumulation strategies in the region after the discovery of the hydrocarbons in the SEM.

5. In lieu of a conclusion

With the onset of the neoliberal agenda, the neo-institutionalist conceptualisation of "Europeanisation" has enticed considerable attention, purportedly, with strong implications for the candidate countries as well. We problematized it as a "process" (Radaelli, 2004) rather than a "solution" or an "end-state" within the context of the Turkey-EU relations, from the Corfu Summit of 1994 to the carbonization of the Cyprus problem during the last decade. Since the RoC government is being recognized as the representative of the whole island and has acquired the full support of the EU, the "EU as a catalyst" myth is over. Nonetheless the linkage politics is still determining the Turkey-EU relations, which deepened the distrust between the EU and Turkey. As Eralp (2009) had pointed out, "Temporality Politics" is determinant over the Turkey-EU relations in the case of Cyprus i.e., the rise and the fall of the Europeanisation and the hydrocarbon agenda together with the prospects of full membership. Coupled with the neoliberal reform process after 2004, the hydrocarbon economy determines the "state of affairs" of the Cyprus problem rather than the substantive issues such as power-sharing and guarantees,

which are subsided by the destructive process of "carbonization" and the rise of new imperialism in the region. The bicommunal struggle over statehood was devised into a new scheme over the exploitation of the off-shore resources in the SEM. The contemporary wars in the region alert us that Cyprus Problem is the "weakest link", not only playing part for the atomization of the Turkey-EU relations, but also for the expansion of the hydrocarbon economy via new imperialism in the SEM region.

The sudden entry of the transnational hydrocarbon capital and incremental developments in the SEM after 2011 simultaneously reduced the significance of geopolitics (state) and "space" i.e., the national borders/interest, as well as the role of the local agency i.e., the societal forces, *vis-à-vis* the reconstruction of time and space by the forces of global capitalism. In other words, new temporalities are poised through the deconstruction of embedded power relations/capital and their reconstruction by the external forces and their network of globalist capitalist relations. After the RoC government practically abandoned the UN's federal solution, the TRNC decided to react by opening Varosha gradually, the city that was once the pearl of the Cypriot tourism industry, but was closed since Turkey's 1974 military intervention. This maneuver demonstrated that the TRNC side was getting ready for a velvet divorce by omitting the UN Resolution 789/1992, regarding opening of the gated city as one of the "confidence building measures" on the island. Now that a federal solution appears not to be the main concern of the parties concerned, unilateralism seems to be on the rise.

With the developments since October 7, 2023 from Palestine to Syria, the strategic significance of Cyprus may be on the agenda again. The mind-boggling speed of military conflagration with political consequences yet to be manifested, might imply, in fact, a shift from a duration to an epoch for the region as a whole. It is worth noting that the RoC Government stated that it had no control over the British bases and their use in the airstrikes against Gaza in response to the criticisms that it was "allowing Israel to use the sovereign British bases for military exercises". More pertinently, the Biden administration has in fact adopted a new foreign policy towards RoC which entailed a partial lifting of the US arms embargo that had been in effect since 1987.[22] This would set a precedent for the signing of a bilateral defence cooperation roadmap with RoC government in September 2024. And this was followed by joint military exercises in the SEM and the deployment of US troops launching of the new Barak MX air defense system in the south, signalling the escalation of tension and the rise of militarization in the region.[23] Consequently,

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[22]   W. Munchau, "Cyprus - the US gun against Turkey", https://www.eurointelligence.com/, 20.9.2022.

[23]   CNN, Natasha Bertrand and Alex Marquardt, September 25, 2024, "US troops deployed to Cyprus as fears of wider Middle East war intensify", https://edition.cnn.com/2024/09/25/politics/us-troops-cyprus/index.html.
        Haaretz, Avi Scharf, Dec. 5, 2024, "Cyprus Buys Israeli-made Advanced Barak-MX Air Defense System", https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/security-aviation/2024-12-05/ty-

there is mounting speculation that the NATO membership of Cyprus is on the agenda.

Despite the rising tensions, "the hydrocarbons as a catalyst for peace" discourse is still used as a shield for the deconstruction/reconstruction of the new temporalities that are "work in progress" in order to ensure the transnational capital that the opportunities are greater than risks in the region. Indeed, when the RoC President Christodoulides addressed the 79th UN General Assembly on September 25, he argued that the recent developments should be regarded as an "opportunity rather than a threat" for the peoples of the region.[24] As Arrighi (2003) had observed "*the states have been key protagonists of the struggles through which old spatial-temporal fixes are destroyed and fixes of greater geographical scope are attained*".

This new emerging spatio-temporal fix makes it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to contextualize the future of the Turkey-EU relations and the solution of the Cyprus problem within the "Europeanisation" agenda. Although it has gained a new dimension with the rise and fall of the hydrocarbons, the whole process can be best summed as "*plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*" (Yalman, 2016b:128). Unfortunately, this observation made a decade ago still seems to be relevant for the foreseeable future: that is to say, the cycles of rising expectations for a possible resolution of the conflict to be followed by disenchantments as the hopes for that resolution failed to materialize. This has been the pattern over the last half century or so since the collapse of the power sharing system between two communities in 1963, set up by the 1960 Constitution. The return of the "geopolitics discourse" back in and the re-positioning of Cyprus as a "geo-strategic" island in the SEM would risk bringing the security issues to the top of the agenda, notwithstanding the attempts to revive the bilateral negotiation process under the auspices of the UN Secretary General.

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article/.premium/cyprus-buys-israeli-made-advanced-barak-mx-air-defense-system/00000193-9719-dac2-add3-b75bd7660000.

[24] Reuters, September 25, 2024. "Cyprus leader says he is ready to resume peace talks 'today'", https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/cyprus-leader-says-he-ready-resume-peace-talks-today-2024-09-25/. Retrieved on Sept. 25 2024.

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Özet

Türkiye-AB ilişkilerinde yeni bir uzamsal-zamansal dönemeç: Çözüm bekleyen Kıbrıs sorunu

Türkiye-AB ilişkilerinin zamansallığı ve Kıbrıs sorununun içinde bulunduğu "siyasi ve hukuki durum", Türkiye'nin 1990'ların sonundan beri karşı çıktığı "bağlantı/ilişkilendirme siyaseti" kavramının özünü yansıtmaktadır. 2024 yılı, "Kıbrıs Sorununun Avrupalılaşması" olarak adlandırdığımız sürecin 30. Yıldönümüydü: Kıbrıs Cumhuriyeti, 1994 Korfu Zirvesi'nde AB'nin genişleme sürecine Kıbrıslı Türkler ve Kıbrıslı Rumlar arasında uzun süredir devam eden çatışmaya bir çözüm bulunmadan dahil edildi. Kıbrıs Cumhuriyeti, 1 Mayıs 2004 tarihinde bölünmüş bir ada olarak AB üyesi bir devlet haline gelmiş dolayısıyla Kıbrıs Rum Kesimi, Kıbrıslı Türkleri temsil etme hakkına sahip olmamasına rağmen, her iki toplum adına tüm adanın tek temsilcisi olarak kabul edilmiştir. Adadaki mevcut siyasi çıkmaz ve Türkiye ile AB arasında yapıcı diyalog eksikliği, Türkiye'nin olası AB üyeliği ile Kıbrıs sorununun çözümü arasındaki bağlantıyı ortaya çıkarmış oldu. Bu bağlamda Türkiye-AB ilişkilerinin gidişatı, Kıbrıs sorununun Güneydoğu Akdeniz'de gelişen hidrokarbon ekonomisi ile birleşmesiyle beraber ortaya çıkan jeopolitik çekişme gündemiyle yeni bir zamansallık boyutu kazandı. Her ne kadar hidrokarbon gündeminin yükselişi ve düşüşü ile birlikte Kıbrıs sorununa yeni bir politik ekonomi boyutu eklenmiş olsa da tüm süreç "*plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*" şeklinde özetlenebilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kıbrıs sorunu, zamansallık, Avrupalılaşma, karbonlaşma, bağlantı/ilişkilendirme siyaseti.

Unwavering aspirations: An exploratory analysis of the resilience of Turkish public support for EU membership[*]

Özgehan Şenyuva

Department of International Relations, METU, Ankara
e-mail: senyuva@metu.edu.tr
ORCID: 0000-0003-2433-0736

Abstract

This article explores the resilience of Turkish public support for European Union (EU) membership, despite significant political, economic, and diplomatic challenges in Türkiye-EU relations. Using secondary survey data, the study provides an exploratory analysis of trends and underlying determinants of public sentiment, examining three main hypotheses: (H1) Feasibility, (H2) Positive Historical Experience, and (H3) Ideological Entrenchment. The findings reveal that while feasibility and historical experience contribute to public support, it is the deep-rooted ideological commitment to democratic values, human rights, and the rule of law that sustains positive attitudes towards EU membership. The study argues that Turkish public opinion acts as an internal anchor, sort of a north star for the country's European aspirations, even as political divergence and skepticism from EU member states persist. Limitations of the study are noted, highlighting the descriptive nature of the analysis and the absence of advanced statistical techniques. The article concludes with a call for future research integrating more sophisticated methods to further explore the complex factors influencing Turkish public opinion on EU membership.

Key words: Turkish Public Opinion; European Union Membership; Ideological Entrenchment; Türkiye-EU Relations.

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1. Introduction

The relationship between Türkiye and the European Union (EU) has evolved through decades of complex political, economic, and social developments, marked by phases of optimism, setbacks, and prolonged stagnation. While Türkiye has held EU candidate status since 1999, recent political shifts within both Türkiye and the EU have led to significant tensions and stalled negotiations. The membership process, once symbolizing a pathway toward greater alignment with European standards in democracy, human rights, and economic prosperity, has encountered considerable roadblocks. Amid rising skepticism from EU member states and domestic challenges in Türkiye, the accession process appears indefinitely delayed.

Turkish public opinion on the European Union (EU) and Turkey's potential membership has been extensively studied, particularly since the 2000s. Seminal works, such as Şenyuva's *State of the Art* article and Çarkoğlu and Kentmen's (2011) detailed analyses, have examined the determinants of public support using available public opinion data. For instance, Çarkoğlu's pioneering study, "Who Wants Full Membership?" (2003), tested hypotheses to understand the characteristics of Turkish support for EU membership. Respondents aged 20 at the time of his survey are now 42 years old, and those who were 42 are now 64. Despite the passing decades, Turkey remains far from EU membership. However, the remarkable reality persists: Turkish public opinion continues to favor Turkey's full membership in the EU.

Eurobarometer data since 2002 consistently show that, despite fluctuations, a clear majority of Turkish citizens—across generations—support EU membership. This enduring support within Turkish public opinion poses a compelling question: why does support for EU membership persist despite the mounting political and practical obstacles? In short: *Why do the Turkish public still support Turkey's EU membership?*

Answering this question comprehensively requires longitudinal data, a coherent merged dataset, and the investment of significant time, effort, and mixed-methodological approaches. Such an endeavor is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, this study seeks to highlight the resilience and enduring commitment of Turkish public opinion toward EU membership. Its goal is to initiate a broader debate on the next stage of public opinion studies within the context of Türkiye-EU relations.

To address this, the article offers three alternative explanations grounded in Türkiye-EU relations that may guide future research. These hypotheses aim to serve as a foundation for more robust data collection and analysis, exploring the deeper dynamics underlying Turkish public support for EU membership and offering insights into its long-term resilience. First, the **Feasibility Hypothesis** (H1) suggests

that Turkish citizens maintain hope for future EU membership, viewing it as a feasible and attainable long-term objective. Despite the complexities surrounding the accession process, proponents of this view may see Türkiye's membership to the EU as part of a gradual trajectory, an eventual outcome, motivating sustained public support.

Second, the **Positive Historical Experience Hypothesis** (H2) posits that favorable past experiences and achievements in the EU accession process create a reservoir of positive sentiment towards membership. This explanation rests on the notion that the Turkish public draws on periods of successful negotiations and reforms that resulted in significant economic and political gains, fostering a sense of loyalty and optimism about future prospects, even amid recent downturns in relations.

Third, the **Ideological Entrenchment Hypothesis** (H3) argues that Turkish public support for EU membership endures due to deeply held political values, such as democracy, human rights, and rule of law, which align with core principles of the EU and the expected utility. This hypothesis is grounded in the idea of "ideological entrenchment," suggesting that fundamental political beliefs remain stable and resilient, even in times of political crises or external challenges. The Ideological Entrenchment Hypothesis (H3) is framed to address both the aspirational and utilitarian dimensions of Turkish public support for EU membership, emphasizing the EU's role as a "North Star" guiding societal aspirations. This hypothesis posits that support for EU membership is sustained by the EU's dual function as an aspirational model for democratic governance, human rights, and rule of law, as well as a practical promise of economic prosperity. This synthesis of ideological and utilitarian perspectives highlights a complex alignment between long-term societal ideals and pragmatic considerations.

From an ideological perspective, Turkish citizens have historically viewed EU standards as a benchmark for improving governance, safeguarding human rights, and reinforcing the rule of law. These ideals have become deeply embedded in public opinion, even amid domestic political turbulence and international skepticism about Türkiye's membership prospects. However, this support is not purely ideological; it is also rooted in utilitarian expectations. According to the utilitarian expectations model, Turkish citizens perceive EU membership as a pathway to tangible economic benefits, including increased investment, enhanced trade opportunities, job creation, and economic stability. These economic incentives resonate strongly, especially during periods of domestic economic uncertainty and global financial instability.

The integration of ideological and economic considerations strengthens the hypothesis by acknowledging the interplay between values and material benefits. For many Turkish citizens, EU membership represents not just an idealistic goal but

a pragmatic strategy for improving their quality of life and securing economic opportunities. The EU's perceived capacity to deliver economic growth and enhance social welfare complements its symbolic role as a normative anchor, thereby sustaining support across diverse demographic and socio-economic groups.

This reframing also considers the absence of compelling alternatives to EU membership since the early 2000s. Successive Turkish governments and the Erdoğan presidencies have failed to construct a credible vision of economic and political independence that surpasses the perceived benefits of EU integration. Unlike Brexit, where the United Kingdom chose to leave a functional membership framework, Türkiye's persistent aspiration for EU membership reflects the lack of a similarly viable "exit option." The EU's sustained appeal lies in its dual promise of normative alignment and material prosperity, underscoring its role as both a beacon of values and a foundation for economic progress. However, the aspiration-expectation gap persists, as citizens support the idea of membership while doubting its feasibility. This study reconsiders the ideological underpinnings of support, suggesting that public opinion is shaped by a combination of aspirational alignment and pragmatic concerns. As no compelling alternative to EU membership has emerged since the early 2000s, the EU retains its position as the most attractive framework for Türkiye's political, social, and economic development.

The three hypotheses introduced in this article are derived from an extensive analysis of Turkish public opinion and the determinants of support for EU membership. Their development stems from an effort to address a gap in the existing literature, which predominantly examines these determinants through a snapshot perspective, relying on single-survey data to analyze support at a specific point in time. Such an approach overlooks the importance of temporal dynamics in shaping public attitudes. In contrast, the hypotheses here aim to incorporate an over-time perspective, factoring in both historical experiences and future expectations. H1 and H2 are designed to explore questions that require longitudinal consideration, reflecting how past achievements and the perceived feasibility of membership influence enduring support. Meanwhile, H3 combines ideological and utilitarian explanations—key themes in the Turkish public opinion and EU literature—to capture the complex interplay of values and material considerations that underpin the resilience of public support for EU membership.

Through this analysis, the study aims to contribute to the broader understanding of public opinion in Türkiye and the interplay between long-term ideological commitments and evolving political contexts. It sheds light on how enduring political values and historical narratives can shape and sustain public support, offering insights into the complex dynamics of Türkiye-EU relations and the role of public opinion in foreign policy aspirations.

In outlining the scope of this study, it is important to note its exploratory and descriptive nature. The analysis is based exclusively on secondary survey data, employing descriptive statistical methods without delving into advanced statistical techniques or controlling for confounding factors such as age, gender, education, and political affiliation. This methodological choice was deliberate, as the study aims to provide an initial, broad examination of the resilience of Turkish public support for EU membership and to spark a wider discussion on this topic. By focusing on general trends and key patterns, the study seeks to highlight the underlying dynamics of public opinion. However, the findings also indicate the need for more comprehensive future research. Advanced data analysis methods, including time series analysis, multivariate regression, and structural equation modeling, would offer deeper insights into the complex factors influencing Turkish public attitudes towards the EU in a longitudinal frame, potentially uncovering the specific pathways through which ideological commitments play a role.

1.1. Nothing is free of Time and Space: Why temporality matters?

The trajectory of Türkiye-EU relations has been complex and marked by distinct phases of convergence and divergence. As Eralp (2009) argues, the interaction between Türkiye and the EU has not followed a straightforward path, but rather had a "cyclical nature" shaped by historical contingencies and shifts in both Turkish and European political landscapes. Early relations, particularly from the 1950s through the 1970s, reflected a period of alignment due to shared geopolitical concerns during the Cold War, when Türkiye's westernization efforts and security needs aligned with the European Community's (EC) strategic interests. However, this initial convergence gave way to significant divergence beginning in the late 1970s. Türkiye faced internal economic struggles and political turbulence, including the 1980 military coup, which disrupted its Europeanization process. Simultaneously, the European Community began focusing on deepening and expanding its integration project, prioritizing democratic governance and economic cohesion among its member states (Eralp 2009: 152). The result was a growing disconnect between Turkish and EU priorities, as the EC became increasingly selective about candidate countries, emphasizing criteria that Türkiye struggled to meet.

The Helsinki Summit of 1999 marked a pivotal moment, offering Türkiye official candidate status and sparking renewed optimism for EU accession. This period of convergence was largely facilitated by the EU's adoption of a more inclusive approach, recognizing Türkiye's geopolitical importance and its potential contribution to regional stability. However, Eralp points out that after 2004, the relationship again entered a phase of divergence, driven by the EU's "enlargement fatigue" and concerns over Türkiye's domestic reforms (Eralp 2009: 161). EU

skepticism intensified as Türkiye's progress on democratic reforms stalled, and contentious issues, such as the Cyprus dispute, resurfaced. The period after 2004 saw a shift from a previously favorable integration climate to a more complex and challenging environment for Türkiye's accession. Eralp notes, "as the EU turned inward and focused on institutional consolidation, the enthusiasm for Turkish membership waned," creating an asymmetry in the priorities of Türkiye and the EU (Eralp, 2009, 159).

Eralp's concept of temporality forms the basis of this article's theoretical framework, providing a lens to analyze the Turkish public's support for EU membership. Despite ongoing challenges and the EU's increasingly critical stance, Turkish public opinion has remained remarkably resilient in favor of EU membership. This article examines several hypotheses to explain this phenomenon, drawing on Eralp's observation that "temporality and interaction are crucial for understanding the fluctuations in Türkiye-EU relations" (Eralp 2009: 150).

Damla Cihangir Tetik and Thomas Diez's recent article, "Talking Past while Needing One Another: The Complex and Ambiguous Relationship between the EU and Türkiye" (2024), offers a nuanced and comprehensive analysis of Türkiye-EU relations. It extends Eralp's periodization and offers an analysis that aim to go beyond a unidirectional movement. The authors provide a through chronological account, pinpointing pivotal moments that have shaped the legal, political, and societal dimensions of this multifaceted relationship. Their argument rejects binary interpretations and they analyze different aspects of the relationship. The main argument offered is that there is a situation of both entanglement and estrangement rather than a clear unidirectional movement between Türkiye and the EU (Tetik and Diez 2024: 202). They argue that, Türkiye-Europe relations are neither linear nor inevitable; they emerge from constant struggles among diverse actors, resulting in a complex web of entanglements and ruptures that defies simplistic labels of 'pro-' or 'anti-European.' To truly understand this dynamic, one must study it across policy fields, avoiding biases tied to the idiosyncrasies of any single domain (Tetik and Diez 2024: 188-189). By framing this dynamic as one of radical interdependence and liminality, the authors highlight the absence of a "natural" trajectory for Türkiye's place within or outside Europe.

This insight complements the argument presented in this article, particularly the enduring resilience of Turkish public support for EU membership. Both studies underscore the necessity of embracing complexity and ambiguity while critically assessing the shifting currents of Türkiye-EU relations.

2. Turkish public opinion: State of art on the trends and determinants

Turkish public opinion on EU membership has undergone significant changes, characterized by fluctuating support levels and a growing skepticism towards the EU's commitment to Türkiye's accession. This paradoxical situation—enduring support coupled with deepening distrust—reflects broader socio-political dynamics within Türkiye and the evolving nature of Türkiye-EU relations.

The evolving political dynamics between the two sides, particularly the stalled negotiations and formal relations, have been the subject of extensive academic research in recent years. Notably, the (largely negative) public opinion toward Türkiye's prospective EU membership—both within key member states and among the Turkish population—has garnered significant attention. Analysts frequently highlight the declining levels of support for Türkiye's accession across various European countries, as well as in Türkiye itself. These trends are often cited as evidence supporting broader arguments about the likely future trajectory of Türkiye-EU relations. However, the link between these political developments and the shifts in public opinion has not been thoroughly explored. While many studies focus on statistical trends, few delve into the underlying factors that influence these changes in sentiment.

Rather than relying solely on quantitative analysis, this article aims to provide a more nuanced interpretation of the indicators that either shape or reflect the current state of public opinion statistics. In essence, the approach taken here seeks to discuss and interpret the available data, rather than conduct original statistical analysis. This section presents the findings of various public opinion studies, followed by a discussion of the indicators revealed through these analyses.

The central argument presented in this section is that Turkish public opinion on EU membership is highly volatile, exhibiting significant shifts over time. The analysis suggests that this volatility, although underexamined in the existing literature, is neither random nor incoherent. Instead, Turkish public opinion is highly responsive to political developments in Türkiye-EU relations, reacting either positively or negatively depending on the context. The findings also indicate that public support for EU membership is likely to remain skeptical on the eventuality of membership in the foreseeable future, barring a substantial breakthrough in Türkiye-EU relations. This trend is closely linked to a severe decline in trust toward EU institutions among the Turkish public. Trust, as a key indicator, has shown a steady downward trajectory over the past decade, suggesting a deep-seated erosion of confidence. Therefore, it can be argued that the pervasive mistrust of the EU among Turkish citizens is likely to be a significant obstacle in any future scenario of cooperation or convergence.

Survey data remains the predominant method for examining public opinion on EU integration. There is a long-standing tradition of systematic data collection on public attitudes toward European integration across various European countries, which has enabled scholars to conduct comprehensive, longitudinal analyses and identify trends and determinants. However, as noted by Çarkoğlu and Kentmen, "Although Türkiye has a long and troubled relationship with the EU, there are only a few empirically informed studies analyzing the determinants of Turkish public support for membership of the EU" (Çarkoğlu and Kentmen, 2011: 365). Much of the existing research has focused on intergovernmental politics and high-level economic and political issues, rather than on empirical analyses of public opinion trends.

The limited number of empirical studies on Turkish public opinion regarding EU integration and potential membership can be attributed to the historical lack of systematic data collection in Türkiye. Reliable and scientifically gathered data only emerged in the early 2000s (Şenyuva, 2006). Prior to this, the available data were often sporadic and collected by various institutions or individual researchers, making over-time analysis challenging and raising concerns about the reliability and validity of the findings. Türkiye's inclusion in the Eurobarometer studies from 2001 onwards marked a significant improvement in data quality, allowing for the generation of public opinion data with strong reliability and validity. Furthermore, this data became comparable with public opinion metrics from other European countries, facilitating over-time analyses and cross-national comparisons.

The integration of Türkiye into major international surveys, such as the Eurobarometer, Transatlantic Trends, and PEW Global surveys, significantly expanded the scope of research on Turkish public opinion toward the EU. These surveys included specific questions on Türkiye-EU relations, providing a rich dataset for scholars both within Türkiye and internationally to explore the determinants of support and track changes over time. Concurrently, research teams based in Türkiye also began producing their own reliable survey data, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of public attitudes.

An examination of the survey data on Turkish public opinion toward the EU reveals a strong correlation between the state of Türkiye-EU relations and public sentiment. Poll results are often influenced by the broader political context, especially during periods of divergence or heightened tensions. Notably, there is a discernible pattern of shifts in the phrasing of key questions over time, such as "Türkiye's membership would be a good thing/bad thing" or "Do you support Türkiye's membership?" At times of significant backlash or opposition, particularly during contentious negotiations, these questions have been either minimized or omitted from surveys like the Eurobarometer to avoid highlighting negative sentiments and strong objections.

While there has been a significant increase in the availability and quality of public opinion data since the early 2000s, the analysis of this data reveals a complex picture of Turkish attitudes toward EU membership. Trust in EU institutions has been consistently declining, indicating a growing disillusionment among the Turkish public. This lack of trust, coupled with the volatility of public support, underscores the importance of understanding the socio-political factors that drive these trends. Without addressing the underlying issues of trust and political alignment, efforts to foster support for EU integration in Türkiye are likely to face significant challenges.

Historically, Turkish public opinion was strongly in favor of EU membership, especially during the early 2000s, when support peaked at around 70%. This period, often referred to as the "golden age" of Europeanization, was marked by optimism about Türkiye's accession prospects following the 1999 Helsinki Summit, where Türkiye was officially recognized as a candidate country. The momentum for reform, driven by the perceived benefits of EU membership, aligned with Türkiye's broader modernization agenda. Citizens anticipated economic gains, including increased foreign investment and improved access to European markets, which underpinned widespread support across different segments of society. However, this enthusiasm began to decline significantly after the mid-2000s. The initial optimism was dampened by several political and economic setbacks that revealed deep structural issues in the accession process. One of the critical turning points was the EU's handling of the 2004 Cyprus Referendum, where the Turkish public perceived the EU's actions as biased and unfair. Despite Turkish Cypriots voting in favor of the Annan Plan, which aimed at reunification, the Republic of Cyprus—represented by the Greek Cypriot administration—was admitted into the EU without resolving the ongoing dispute. This event was seen as a clear example of the EU applying double standards, which led to a rapid decline in public support for membership and a growing sentiment of disillusionment.

By the time formal accession negotiations began in 2005, public support had already dropped significantly, reflecting a broader disillusionment with the EU's perceived reluctance to embrace Türkiye fully. The Eurobarometer data from this period highlight the volatility of Turkish public sentiment, showing a steep decline in trust towards EU institutions. While support for the *idea* of membership remained relatively stable, confidence in the EU as a trustworthy partner eroded rapidly. Şenyuva (2018) notes that this trend was particularly evident in surveys from 2004 to 2015, where the net trust in EU institutions shifted from a positive outlook to a deeply negative perception, with trust levels falling by almost 50 %.

Özgehan Şenyuva's 2009 article, *Türkiye Kamuoyu ve Avrupa Birliği 2001-2008: Beklentiler, İstekler ve Korkular*, provides an early and comprehensive analysis of Turkish public opinion on EU membership, using Eurobarometer data

from 2001 to 2008. The study identifies key trends, including strong initial support peaking in 2004, driven by political reforms and accession talks, followed by a decline after 2005 as skepticism about the EU's intentions grew alongside political tensions.

A major finding is the erosion of trust in EU institutions, exacerbated by political rhetoric and negative media narratives. Şenyuva (2018) highlights the role of national identity in fostering skepticism, with strong attachment to sovereignty correlating with concerns over cultural incompatibility. These dynamics reflect broader fears of losing autonomy and distinctiveness within the EU framework. Methodologically, the study's longitudinal approach tracks shifts in sentiment over time, offering valuable insights into how political, economic, and identity-related factors interact to shape Turkish attitudes toward EU membership.

A notable aspect of Şenyuva's findings (2009) is the fluctuation in public attitudes, characterized by phases of enthusiasm followed by periods of disillusionment. For instance, the Eurobarometer surveys from 2001 to 2004 indicate increasing public approval of EU membership, reaching a high of 71% in favor by 2004. This rise was linked to positive political developments, such as the Turkish government's reform initiatives and the EU's decision to start accession talks. However, from 2005 onwards, public support began to decline sharply, coinciding with mounting skepticism about the EU's intentions and increasing political tensions between Türkiye and the EU. By 2007-2008, support for EU membership had fallen below 50%, highlighting a significant shift in public sentiment.

One of the central arguments of the article is the growing disillusionment among the Turkish public towards EU institutions. The study emphasizes the role of political messaging and media narratives in shaping public perceptions, pointing out that anti-EU rhetoric from political elites, particularly after the start of formal negotiations, contributed to a decline in trust. This decline in institutional trust is reflected in the Eurobarometer data, which show a steady drop in the perceived credibility of EU institutions. The net trust level, which was positive in the early 2000s, turned sharply negative by 2007, indicating a substantial erosion of confidence among Turkish citizens.

Şenyuva also explores the role of national identity and cultural factors in shaping public attitudes. The study finds that a strong attachment to national identity correlates with increased skepticism towards EU membership. This finding aligns with broader literature suggesting that individuals who prioritize national sovereignty are more likely to view EU integration as a threat to cultural distinctiveness and autonomy. The analysis of survey responses reveals a deepening perception of cultural differences between Türkiye and the EU, with many Turkish

citizens expressing concerns that these differences are too significant to bridge, potentially hindering Türkiye's full integration into the European bloc.

From a historical perspective, Şenyuva's findings provide a valuable baseline for understanding the dynamics of Turkish public opinion on EU membership. The article's emphasis on the volatility of support and the decline in institutional trust lays the groundwork for subsequent research, including the current study's focus on the resilience of public support despite growing skepticism. In particular, Şenyuva's analysis of the role of national identity and cultural perceptions resonates with the **ideological entrenchment hypothesis** (H3) proposed in this article, which posits that deeply held political values related to democracy, human rights, and economic prosperity aspirations underpin consistent public support for EU membership, even in the face of political obstacles and declining trust in EU institutions.

The early identification of trends in public skepticism, as well as the emphasis on the interplay between economic expectations and identity concerns, aligns closely with the arguments made in the present research. Şenyuva's work underscores the importance of considering both the instrumental and ideational dimensions of public support, highlighting how shifts in political context and elite rhetoric can influence broader public attitudes. This historic analysis provides a critical foundation for understanding the resilience of Turkish public opinion and supports the argument that ideological entrenchment, rather than merely economic or political calculations, plays a significant role in sustaining public support for EU membership over time.

The decline in trust can be attributed to several factors, including the EU's inconsistent stance on Türkiye's accession and the influence of domestic political narratives. Political elites in Türkiye, particularly from the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), have played a significant role in shaping public perceptions. Initially, the AKP government was a strong proponent of EU membership, using the reform agenda to consolidate its power and weaken the Kemalist-bureaucratic establishment. However, as the party's domestic position strengthened, the EU's strategic importance in the AKP's political calculus began to diminish. By the late 2000s, the tone of government rhetoric had shifted, reflecting a more confrontational stance towards the EU, which resonated with a public increasingly disillusioned by what they perceived as European hypocrisy and reluctance to treat Türkiye as an equal partner (Arkan, 2016).

The analysis by Yaka (2016) further elaborates on this shift, highlighting the role of Gramsci's concept of "common sense" in understanding the changes in Turkish public opinion. Yaka (2016) argues that the public's initial enthusiasm for EU membership was rooted in a pragmatic, instrumental view of the EU as a means to achieve economic stability and political reform. However, as the EU's reluctance to progress with accession negotiations became more apparent, this pragmatic

support transformed into a more skeptical and even hostile stance. The Gramscian framework helps explain the contradictions in public attitudes: while there is a desire for the economic benefits associated with EU integration, there is also a deep-seated mistrust rooted in historical grievances and cultural differences. Yaka's (2016) study reveals that Turkish common sense about Europe has always been ambivalent, combining admiration for European modernization with a historical resentment of Western dominance and perceived cultural arrogance.

The generational divide in attitudes towards the EU is also noteworthy. Younger, university-educated individuals tend to have a more favorable view of the EU, often seeing it as a symbol of democratic values and human rights. This segment of the population, exposed to EU-funded educational programs and cultural exchanges, views European integration as a pathway to broader opportunities. In contrast, older generations and more conservative segments of the population exhibit higher levels of skepticism, shaped by nationalist narratives and concerns over cultural sovereignty. (Çarkoğlu and Kentmen, 2011). However, the youth perceptions are not free of and above the current negative situation of the Türkiye-EU relations and even the most educated youth groups voice their criticisms of the EU and shared belief that Turkey is not treated fairly, thus believing that eventual membership is unlikely (Bedir and Şenyuva, 2024).

Despite fluctuations in support, Turkish public opinion continues to exhibit a certain level of aspiration towards EU membership, albeit more symbolic than practical. Surveys indicate that while many citizens doubt the feasibility of full membership, they still regard the EU as a benchmark for democratic governance and human rights standards. This suggests that the underlying desire for Europeanization, rooted in Türkiye's long-standing modernization project, has not entirely faded, even if confidence in the EU's commitment to Türkiye's accession has waned. The decline in support and trust towards the EU can be seen as a response to the perceived double standards and inconsistency in the EU's approach, combined with a growing domestic narrative that emphasizes national sovereignty and self-reliance. Understanding these nuanced attitudes requires a comprehensive analysis that considers both the evolving political dynamics and the deeper socio-cultural context that shapes public perceptions.

The article *Diagnosing Trends and Determinants in Public Support for Turkey's EU Membership* by Ali Çarkoğlu and Çiğdem Kentmen (2011) offers a comprehensive examination of Turkish public opinion on EU membership. It stands out as one of the most thorough analyses in the field, integrating findings from multiple large-scale surveys and testing a variety of theoretical models to explain the determinants of support. The authors draw on data from the Turkish Election Surveys (TES), Eurobarometer (EB), and the International Social Survey

Programme (ISSP) to explore cross-sectional and temporal trends, making this work a seminal contribution to understanding Turkish attitudes towards EU membership.

The article begins by addressing a notable gap in the literature: while there is extensive research on EU-Türkiye relations from an institutional and policy perspective, fewer studies have empirically analyzed the determinants of Turkish public opinion. Çarkoğlu and Kentmen's (2011) approach is methodologically rigorous, using a combination of longitudinal and cross-sectional analyses to offer a nuanced picture of how support for EU membership has evolved over time. Their study covers a period from 2001 to 2009, capturing significant shifts in public sentiment during key phases of Türkiye's EU accession process.

The authors identify three primary models to explain public opinion trends: the utilitarian expectations model, the democratic satisfaction model, and the identity-based model.

The **utilitarian expectations model** posits that individuals' support for EU membership is primarily shaped by their economic perceptions. According to this model, Turkish citizens who believe that EU accession will lead to positive economic outcomes—such as increased investment and job creation—are more likely to support membership. Çarkoğlu and Kentmen's (2011) analysis confirms this hypothesis, showing a significant correlation between positive economic evaluations and higher levels of support for EU membership. However, their findings also suggest that this relationship has weakened over time, particularly in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, which led to growing skepticism about the EU's economic stability and benefits.

The **democratic satisfaction model** examines the link between support for democracy and positive attitudes towards EU membership. The EU has historically been seen as a promoter of democratic norms and human rights, and Çarkoğlu and Kentmen (2011) argue that satisfaction with the democratic functioning of the Turkish political system is positively associated with support for EU membership. Their results indicate that Turkish citizens who are satisfied with the state of democracy in Türkiye tend to favor EU accession, viewing the EU as a guarantor of democratic values and good governance. This finding aligns with previous studies suggesting that the EU's role in promoting democratic reforms during Türkiye's candidacy process initially boosted public support.

The **identity-based model** explores the impact of national identity and religiosity on public attitudes towards EU membership. The authors find that strong attachment to national identity negatively correlates with support for EU accession, as individuals who prioritize national sovereignty and cultural distinctiveness perceive the EU as a threat to Türkiye's autonomy. Interestingly, the analysis reveals that religiosity does not have a significant direct effect on EU attitudes, contradicting earlier research that suggested strong Muslim identity might foster Euroscepticism.

Instead, Çarkoğlu and Kentmen (2011) highlight the importance of political attitudes shaped by religious beliefs, such as preferences for a Shari'a-based regime, which are linked to lower support for EU membership.

A key strength of this article is its comprehensive review of previous studies on the topic, including the works of Çarkoğlu (2003), Kentmen (2008), and other scholars who have examined the relationship between economic perceptions, political satisfaction, and identity factors. The authors critically engage with these earlier findings, providing a systematic comparison of different datasets and measures used in previous research. They argue that inconsistencies in past studies are often due to variations in survey design and question wording, which affect the comparability of results. To address this issue, Çarkoğlu and Kentmen (2011) employ a consistent measure of support based on a hypothetical referendum question, which allows them to provide a more reliable assessment of trends in public opinion. The empirical results presented in the article underscore the complexity of Turkish public attitudes towards the EU. While utilitarian and democratic considerations play a role in shaping support, the influence of national identity appears to be increasingly dominant. The authors suggest that rising nationalism and the backlash against EU-driven reforms targeting minority rights have contributed to a more polarized public opinion. By 2009, support for EU membership had fallen below 50%, reflecting a significant shift in public sentiment from the early optimism of the 2000s.

In discussing the implications of their findings, Çarkoğlu and Kentmen (2011) emphasize the need for a more nuanced understanding of the determinants of support for EU membership in Türkiye. They argue that while economic and democratic factors are important, the growing salience of identity-based concerns suggests that future analyses should pay closer attention to the interplay between national identity, political ideology, and perceptions of sovereignty.

This article's detailed exploration of the factors influencing Turkish public opinion provides valuable insights that align closely with the arguments put forward in the current study on the resilience of Turkish public support for EU membership. Specifically, the analysis by Çarkoğlu and Kentmen (2011) complements the **ideological entrenchment hypothesis** proposed in this article, which posits that deeply held political values, rooted in democratic norms and aspirations for economic advantages, underpin persistent support for EU membership despite increasing skepticism about its likelihood. Their findings on the enduring significance of identity-based concerns, even as economic and political considerations fluctuate, lend support to the notion that ideological commitments play a critical role in shaping public attitudes towards the EU.

3. Resilience of Turkish public opinion: Support for EU membership is always there

Turkish public opinion on EU membership has shown itself to be highly dynamic and responsive, fluctuating significantly over the years. By examining various public opinion surveys conducted since the early 2000s, it is possible to discern several key trends.[1]

One prominent characteristic of Turkish public opinion towards EU membership is its volatility, with periods of strong support followed by notable declines. For example, data from the Transatlantic Trends Survey indicates a substantial drop in the percentage of Turkish citizens who believed that EU membership would be beneficial—from a peak of 73% in 2004 to just 38% by 2010. Interestingly, this figure rebounded to 53% by 2014 (Transatlantic Trends Survey, 2014). Similar patterns are evident in other surveys as well. The Pew Global Attitudes Survey reflects this volatility, illustrating fluctuations in public sentiment. For instance, in 2005, 31% of respondents strongly favored EU membership, but this figure decreased by 2011 and 2014, with rising opposition and a significant proportion of respondents remaining undecided.

The fluctuations in support are not arbitrary but rather closely linked to the broader political context, both domestically and internationally. High levels of support in 2004 and 2005 coincided with significant developments in Türkiye-EU relations. The reform packages passed in the Turkish Parliament during 2002-2004, alongside positive signals from European political leaders and a favorable assessment in the EU's Progress Report of October 2004, culminated in the decision at the EU summit in December 2004 to start formal negotiations by October 2005. These concrete advancements were mirrored in public sentiment, with support levels peaking at 74% in the Transatlantic Trends Survey and 71% in the Eurobarometer data. However, following this peak, support steadily declined, reflecting the stagnation in negotiations and increasing political tensions.

A similar shift in public sentiment was observed in 2014, as noted in the Transatlantic Trends Survey data. Support for Türkiye's EU membership rose significantly from 45% to 53%, marking the highest level of approval since 2006. This increase was accompanied by a drop in the percentage of respondents who viewed EU membership negatively, decreasing from 36% to 29%, the lowest level since 2009. The June 2014 Eurobarometer findings were consistent with this trend, showing a sharp rise in the proportion of respondents with a positive image of the

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[1] This article is primarily descriptive and argumentative, focusing on broader trends and theoretical considerations rather than presenting detailed secondary public opinion data. For an in-depth analysis and comprehensive presentation of Turkish public opinion and survey findings on EU membership, readers are encouraged to consult Şenyuva's study on mistrust in Turkish-EU relations (Şenyuva, 2018).

EU, from 20% in late 2013 to 43% in mid-2014. This surge in support was largely driven by center-left voters, who, disillusioned with domestic political developments, viewed closer ties with Europe as a safeguard against perceived infringements on democratic freedoms and civil liberties (Şenyuva 2014: 3).

Conversely, the fall of support to 28% in the 2016 survey marks a significant downturn, coinciding with the aftermath of the failed coup attempt in July 2016. During this period, negative perceptions reached a record high, with 39% of respondents viewing Türkiye's EU membership as a "bad thing." The political climate following the coup attempt, coupled with disappointment over the EU's muted response and perceived lack of solidarity with Türkiye, contributed to this steep decline. However, subsequent data suggest a gradual recovery in support, indicating a potential shift back towards favoring EU integration. This trend may be attributed to certain societal groups reconsidering the EU as a stabilizing force amid concerns over deteriorating democratic standards and rule of law during Türkiye's state of emergency.

The analysis of these survey results highlights several key insights. First, Turkish public opinion on EU membership is highly sensitive to political developments and reflects the broader state of Türkiye-EU relations. The timing of notable increases and decreases in support aligns with specific events and changes in diplomatic relations. Secondly, radical shifts between strong support and strong opposition are not typical. Instead, many respondents tend to move to more neutral positions, such as "Don't Know" or "Neither Good nor Bad," before expressing firm opposition. However, the space for neutral responses has narrowed in recent years, particularly after the political disruptions of 2016, suggesting a consolidation of attitudes into more distinct camps of support and opposition.

In addition to international surveys like the Eurobarometer and Pew Global Attitudes, the Kadir Has University's *Turkish Foreign Policy Perceptions Survey* provides a critical, longitudinal dataset on Turkish public opinion regarding EU membership. Since 2013, this survey has consistently asked respondents, "Do you support Türkiye's membership in the European Union?" (*Türkiye'nin Avrupa Birliği'ne üye olmasını destekliyor musunuz?*). The data from this survey offer a comprehensive overview of the resilience of Turkish public opinion on the issue. The percentage of respondents who support EU membership has generally remained positive, except during notable declines in 2013, 2015, and 2017. In 2013, only 47.5% supported EU membership, dropping further to a low of 42.4% in 2015. The year 2017 also witnessed a brief dip, with support at 48.4%, while opposition surpassed support at 51.6%. However, this trend reversed in subsequent years, with a notable peak in 2019 when support rose to 61.1%, while only 38.9% opposed. By 2021, support reached 59.3%, with a corresponding decline in opposition at 40.7%. Although there was a slight decrease in support to 54.2% in 2022, it still remained

above the opposition level of 45.8%. The results indicate fluctuating, yet overall positive attitudes towards EU membership, underscoring the enduring aspiration for European integration despite political challenges (Aydın et al, 2022). This consistent pattern of responses demonstrates that the Turkish public remains open to EU membership, highlighting a resilient and sustained level of support over time.

Despite the fluctuating levels of support, one significant trend stands out: Turkish public opinion has not shifted decisively towards Euroscepticism or outright rejection of EU membership. Instead, even during periods of heightened tension and disillusionment, a substantial portion of the population continues to favor accession, albeit with varying degrees of enthusiasm. This enduring support indicates that the Turkish public remains attuned to political changes and developments, both positive and negative, and continues to view EU membership as a desirable, if challenging, objective. The resilience of this support suggests that the idea of European integration remains an influential aspect of Türkiye's political identity, driven by deep-rooted aspirations for democratic values, economic prosperity, and international alignment.

4. Feasibility or reservoir of positive history? An initial look into H1 and H2

This section explores two key explanations for the sustained, yet paradoxical, support among the Turkish public for EU membership: the **Feasibility Hypothesis (H1)** and the **Positive Historical Experience Hypothesis (H2)**. According to the Feasibility Hypothesis, Turkish citizens still hold onto the hope that EU membership remains a realistic, achievable goal, viewing it as part of a broader trajectory of gradual alignment with EU standards. This belief is seen as a driver of public support, suggesting that many still perceive accession as a viable long-term objective. In contrast, the Positive Historical Experience Hypothesis posits that favorable experiences and milestones in Türkiye-EU relations, particularly during successful negotiation periods, have built a lasting reservoir of positive sentiment. This perspective assumes that Turkish citizens draw upon these historical moments of progress, fostering a sense of optimism and loyalty toward the idea of EU membership, even during periods of stagnation and setbacks.

A significant factor contributing to the growing mistrust in EU membership prospects is the issue of **eventuality**—whether Türkiye will ever be allowed to join the EU as a full member. Public concerns have been amplified by the repeated blocking of key negotiation chapters by certain EU member states, often driven by domestic political interests or identity-related concerns. The perception that some EU politicians openly oppose Türkiye's accession based on anti-Turkish rhetoric has further eroded confidence in the process. This sentiment is reinforced by Turkish

political leaders, especially from the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), who frequently emphasize Türkiye's commitment to full membership while simultaneously criticizing the EU for unfair treatment and the prioritization of member states' national interests over legal and technical criteria. Such political messaging, oscillating between commitment to EU goals and accusations of exclusion, has heightened skepticism about the eventual success of the membership bid.

This ongoing narrative of exclusion and unfair treatment has led to a significant questioning of EU membership's feasibility within Turkish public opinion, affecting levels of support. While many Turks continue to express a desire for EU membership, there is widespread wariness about the likelihood of this goal ever being realized. For instance, the 2009 Transatlantic Trends Survey revealed that 65% of respondents believed that Türkiye's membership in the EU was unlikely to happen, reflecting a profound skepticism about the EU's genuine willingness to accept Türkiye.

The Kadir Has University's *Turkish Foreign Policy Perceptions Survey* consistently includes a question on the likelihood of Türkiye becoming a member of the European Union, asking respondents, "Do you believe that Türkiye can become a member of the EU?" (*Türkiye'nin Avrupa Birliği'ne üye olabileceğini düşünüyor musunuz?*). The results from the 2022 survey, indicate a persistent and significant skepticism among the Turkish public. In 2022, only 38.8% of respondents believed that EU membership was achievable, while a substantial 61.2% expressed disbelief. This skepticism is not a recent development but has been a consistent trend over the years. For instance, the negative response peaked in 2017, with 81.3% of respondents doubting the possibility of EU accession, and similar high levels of disbelief were recorded in subsequent years: 71.5% in 2018, 68% in 2019, and around 66% in both 2016 and 2020. Although there was a slight improvement in 2021, with 44.7% expressing optimism, the overall trend remains pessimistic. These findings highlight a deep-seated mistrust and a widespread belief that Türkiye's membership in the EU is unlikely, reflecting the broader disillusionment with the accession process (M. Aydin et al., 2022). This strong and consistent disbelief among the Turkish public underscores a critical challenge for future Türkiye-EU relations, as it signals a lack of faith in the feasibility of full membership, irrespective of ongoing negotiations or diplomatic efforts.

Turkish Foreign Policy Perceptions Survey also investigates public preferences regarding the type of relationship Türkiye should pursue with the EU, specifically asking, "Should Türkiye establish a different model of relationship with the EU instead of full membership?" (*Sizce Türkiye ve AB arasında üyelik yerine farklı bir modelde ilişki kurulmalı mıdır?*). The 2022 findings clearly indicate that the majority of Turkish respondents remain opposed to alternative models of

association, with 68.4% rejecting the idea. This resistance to considering alternatives has been a consistent trend over recent years. In 2021, 68.3% opposed an alternative model, similar to 2020, when opposition peaked at 73.1%. Even in 2018 and 2019, around 70% of respondents preferred full membership over any other relationship model. The data reveal a strong preference for the traditional goal of full EU membership, rather than settling for a lesser form of partnership. This consistent opposition underscores the Turkish public's clear aspiration for comprehensive integration and signals a reluctance to accept what might be perceived as a "second-tier" status within the European framework (M. Aydin et al., 2022). The findings suggest that any attempt to propose alternative models would likely face significant resistance from the Turkish public, as the majority remains steadfast in their support for the original objective of full membership. Those who did support alternative forms of cooperation primarily favored economic collaboration through customs union or partnerships focused on security and counter-terrorism, highlighting a clear reluctance to settle for less than full membership (Aydin et al., 2022).

The broader debate on alternative relationship models between Türkiye and the EU has been discussed at length by Akgül Açıkmeşe and Şenyuva (2018). In their analysis, the authors argue that in Türkiye, both political leaders and the general public view alternative proposals, such as privileged partnership or strategic partnership, with deep skepticism. There is a widespread perception that these models are merely stalling tactics designed to avoid granting full membership. As Akgül Açıkmeşe and Şenyuva argue, discussions on non-membership alternatives would face significant obstacles, requiring a comprehensive and transparent public communication strategy from the outset. Without a clear and inclusive dialogue involving various opinion leaders, any attempt to negotiate an alternative framework would likely be met with categorical opposition from the Turkish public, who remain steadfast in their preference for full EU membership over any lesser form of integration.

The preference for full membership can be partly explained by its clarity and concreteness compared to other vague, undefined and also unprecedented models of cooperation. For many respondents, alternative forms of association might be seen as an acceptance of failure in achieving the ultimate goal of full membership, creating a psychological barrier against settling for less. Niedermayer and Westle's framework on Eastonian conceptualization of support suggests that in contexts where there is no strong reservoir of positive achievements, public opinion is more volatile and tends to rely heavily on short-term cost-benefit calculations (Niedermayer and Westle, 1995). This perspective appears relevant to the Turkish case.

The skepticism surrounding eventual membership is frequently echoed in Turkish political discourse, where the narrative often combines criticism of EU institutions with declarations of continued commitment to the accession goal. As illustrated by the narrative analysis conducted by the FEUTURE project, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and other political leaders have adopted a dual strategy: on the one hand, they criticize the EU for its perceived biases and hostile treatment of Türkiye; on the other hand, they emphasize Türkiye's ongoing dedication to achieving full membership (Hauge et al. 2019). Üstün's (2018) analysis of populist rhetoric towards Europe highlights these mixed signals, noting that within a single speech, government representatives may shift between condemning the EU's approach and reaffirming their commitment to European integration. This duality, evident since the early days of AKP rule, reveals a pattern of strategic framing that uses EU relations as a tool for domestic political mobilization and polarization (Akşit and Şenyuva, 2016).

The survey data from the *Attitudes of Turkish Citizens to Domestic Politics and EU Relations* by JETRO Institute of Developing Economies (Imai 2023) provides valuable insights into Turkish public opinion on the state of Türkiye-EU relations. Respondents were asked to evaluate Türkiye-EU relations in 2022 on a scale from 1 (very negative) to 10 (very positive). The results indicate a predominantly negative assessment, with a substantial proportion of the respondents (16.7%) rating the relationship as "very negative" (1). In total, over one-third of the respondents (30.5%) rated the relations at 3 or below, reflecting a highly critical perception. The median response was around the midpoint (5), which was selected by 17.7% of respondents, indicating a general ambivalence or mixed feelings. Positive evaluations (scores of 8 or higher) were scarce, with only 9.8% of respondents offering such a rating. Furthermore, 16.5% of respondents indicated that they had no opinion, reflecting a degree of uncertainty or disengagement.

When respondents were asked to compare the current state of Türkiye-EU relations to that of 2012, the majority view was similarly pessimistic. Nearly 39% of the respondents believed that relations had deteriorated ("daha kötü"), while only 14.7% thought they had improved ("daha iyi"). A notable 25.7% indicated that they saw no change ("aynı"), and 20.9% expressed no opinion. The predominant view that relations are worse than they were a decade ago challenges the idea proposed in the Positive Historical Experience Hypothesis (H2), which assumes that favorable past experiences continue to foster optimism about the relationship. Instead, these findings suggest that Turkish public opinion reflects a consistent narrative of dissatisfaction and skepticism, underpinned by negative assessments of both past and current interactions between Türkiye and the EU.

The overall trend indicated by these survey results reveals that the Turkish public does not perceive the past decade of Türkiye-EU relations positively, nor do

they see significant improvements over time. This suggests a fundamental challenge to H2: the reservoir of positive historical sentiment appears to be either depleted or outweighed by more recent negative experiences. Rather than drawing on a legacy of successful interactions to maintain optimism, the prevailing public sentiment acknowledges a continuity of problematic relations, reinforcing a broader sense of disillusionment with the EU accession process.

While both the Feasibility Hypothesis and the Positive Historical Experience Hypothesis offer insights into why support for EU membership persists among the Turkish public, they seem insufficient to fully explain the current sentiment. Despite some optimism about alignment with EU standards, there is a prevailing belief that full membership is unlikely in the foreseeable future. Moreover, the notion of a reservoir of positive historical experiences is increasingly overshadowed by a sense of betrayal and disappointment in the EU's approach. The Turkish public's mistrust of EU institutions, coupled with negative perceptions of past interactions, suggests that neither hypothesis adequately captures the deep-seated skepticism now prevalent. Rather, it appears that support for EU membership is sustained more by ideological and aspirational factors than by genuine belief in the likelihood of accession or fond memories of past relations.

5. Ideological entrenchment: Value and interest driven support

The resilience of Turkish public support for EU membership, despite political and practical setbacks, can be best understood through the lens of ideological entrenchment. While individual determinants such as political preferences, and historical experiences offer partial explanations, it is the alignment with core democratic values and economic expectations that appears to sustain positive sentiment. The *Attitudes of Turkish Citizens to Domestic Politics and EU Relations* survey conducted by Imai (2023) provides important insights into this phenomenon, highlighting the enduring belief among Turkish citizens in the EU's role as a promoter of democracy.

According to the survey's findings, respondents were asked to evaluate the European Union's role in promoting and strengthening democracy in non-member countries. The results show that a substantial portion of the Turkish public views the EU's efforts positively. Specifically, 20.3% of respondents rated the EU's role as "positive," and an additional 7.1% described it as "very positive," totaling 27.4%. This favorable perception is noteworthy, especially given the broader skepticism towards EU institutions in other aspects of the relationship. While a combined 22.5% of respondents viewed the EU's involvement negatively (6.8% "very negative" and 15.7% "negative"), the largest group (35.3%) remained neutral, indicating neither a strongly positive nor negative stance. The fact that a significant

proportion (47.7 %) of the public perceives EU actions as beneficial for democracy promotion suggests a deep-seated alignment with the democratic values associated with European integration.

Further supporting this trend, the survey asked respondents whether the EU should continue its involvement in promoting and developing democracy in non-member states. The responses indicate a clear preference for continued EU engagement, with 26.8% agreeing that the EU "should continue," and an additional 13.5% expressing strong support ("definitely should continue"). Together, these positive responses account for 40.3% of the sample, reflecting a robust endorsement of the EU's role in fostering democratic norms. Only a small minority, 13.9%, opposed the idea of continued EU involvement (5.9% "definitely should not continue" and 8.0% "should not continue"). Notably, a considerable segment of respondents (30.7%) expressed uncertainty, indicating that while there is some ambivalence, the overall sentiment leans towards favoring EU engagement in democracy promotion.

The Kadir Has University's *Turkish Foreign Policy Perceptions Survey* (Aydin et al., 2022) further illustrates the multi-dimensional support for EU membership among the Turkish public. While economic benefits remain a prominent driver, there is substantial recognition of the value-based advantages, underscoring the ideological alignment with core EU principles. According to the survey data, 42.9% of respondents believe that EU membership would lead to the widespread promotion of human rights in Türkiye (*İnsan hakları yaygınlaşır*), and 39.4% anticipate an improvement in democracy (*Demokrasi gelişir*). These figures reveal that the Turkish public perceives EU membership not only as a pathway to economic prosperity—indicated by the 65.5% who believe that the country's economic level would rise—but also as an opportunity for advancing democratic norms and human rights.

The data suggests that the public's expectations go beyond mere financial gains; there is a strong appreciation for the ideological and normative aspects of EU integration. The fact that human rights and democracy are cited as significant expected benefits directly following economic improvement signals an understanding of the EU as a value-driven project. This alignment with democratic and human rights values lends support to the Ideological Entrenchment Hypothesis, which posits that Turkish public support for EU membership is rooted in shared political and normative beliefs. Thus, while economic motivations remain strong, the sustained public backing for EU membership is also significantly influenced by an appreciation for the potential improvements in Türkiye's democratic landscape and human rights standards, reflecting a deeper ideological commitment beyond material interests.

These findings highlight a critical aspect of the ideological entrenchment hypothesis: Turkish public support for EU membership is not solely rooted in pragmatic considerations but is also driven by the perceived alignment with fundamental democratic values. Despite widespread disillusionment with the accession process and skepticism about the feasibility of full membership, there remains a core belief that the EU represents an important standard-bearer of democracy and human rights. This ideological commitment helps explain why support for EU membership endures, even in the face of significant political and diplomatic challenges.

6. Conclusion

This article has explored Turkish public opinion on EU membership through analysis of secondary survey data, focusing on trends, shifts, and underlying determinants of support. The findings indicate a clear and persistent pattern: Turkish citizens have historically supported, and continue to support, Türkiye's bid for EU membership. To explain this enduring resilience, the study examined three key hypotheses. The Feasibility Hypothesis (H1) suggested that public support is sustained by a belief in the long-term possibility of EU accession, yet the data show increasing skepticism about the likelihood of membership ever materializing. The Positive Historical Experience Hypothesis (H2) posited that favorable past interactions with the EU create a reservoir of positive sentiment; however, findings from recent surveys reveal that historical grievances and disillusionment with the accession process undermine this explanation.

The most compelling explanation emerges from the Ideological Entrenchment Hypothesis (H3), which argues that the support for EU membership is grounded in deeply held political values, such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law coupled with utilitarian aspirations. The European Commission's 2024 report offers a stark critique of Türkiye's progress in these fundamental areas, highlighting systemic issues that continue to hinder alignment with EU standards. The report points out the significant shortcomings in judicial independence and the persistent political interference that undermines the impartiality of the legal system. Despite the introduction of judicial reform packages, deep-rooted problems remain unaddressed, and Türkiye's reluctance to implement European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) rulings exacerbates concerns over the rule of law. Additionally, the report notes a decline in fundamental rights, marked by increasing restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, and the activities of civil society organizations. This critical assessment underscores the widening gap between Türkiye's domestic political environment and the normative framework upheld by the European Union.

In this light, the Ideological Entrenchment Hypothesis (H3) gains even greater significance. Amidst the critical state of democracy and human rights in Türkiye as outlined in the Commission's report, Turkish public opinion remains firmly supportive of EU membership. This suggests that the public's desire for EU integration is not merely based on pragmatic economic considerations but is deeply rooted in an ideological alignment with European democratic values. The steadfast public support reflects a continued aspiration for the normative benefits associated with EU membership, including stronger rule of law, protection of human rights, and adherence to democratic principles. While feasibility and historical experience offer partial explanations, the enduring support appears to be sustained by the EU's role as a "North Star," symbolizing democratic values, human rights, and economic opportunity. However, this ideological alignment is tempered by an acute awareness of the aspiration-expectation gap, wherein the public values EU standards while doubting the likelihood of membership.

As Eralp's (2009) cyclical conceptualization of Türkiye-EU relations suggests, the current phase is one of pronounced divergence, exacerbated by the critical findings of the European Commission. However, the enduring support from the Turkish public highlights a potential avenue for convergence in the future. If the EU was once seen as a potential external anchor for Türkiye's democratic consolidation, the current analysis indicates that the internal anchor is now the ideological commitment of the Turkish public. Despite the severe criticisms and lack of tangible progress noted by the European Commission, the Turkish public's unwavering support for EU membership serves as a reminder of the deep-seated values driving their preferences. It suggests a resilient commitment to democracy and human rights that persists even in the face of adverse political developments. The study also notes down the absence of credible alternatives to the EU as a significant factor in maintaining support. Successive Turkish governments have not demonstrated an ability to establish an economic or political framework capable of surpassing the perceived benefits of EU integration. This failure to "outperform" the EU has left the public reliant on the EU as both an aspirational model and a safety net against domestic challenges.

However, the study also acknowledges its limitations. It relies exclusively on secondary data and employs only descriptive statistical analysis without exploring advanced statistical techniques or controlling for potential confounding variables, such as age, gender, education, and political affiliation Future research should employ advanced statistical methods, such as time-series analysis and structural equation modeling, to investigate the dynamics between institutional trust and aspirations for EU membership. By integrating these approaches, scholars can better understand how Turkish public opinion evolves in response to domestic and

international developments, offering deeper insights into the resilience and adaptability of Türkiye's European aspirations.

This approach was intentional, aiming to provide an exploratory analysis that sparks a broader discussion on the resilience of public support over time. Future research would benefit from integrating advanced data analysis methods, including time series analysis, multivariate regression models, and structural equation modeling, to better understand the complex interplay of factors influencing public opinion. Such an effort would not only offer deeper insights but also help delineate the pathways through which ideological commitments continue to shape Turkish attitudes towards the European Union.

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Özet

Sarsılmaz umutlar: Türkiye kamuoyunun AB üyeliğine yönelik desteğinin dirençliliği üzerine keşifsel bir analiz

Bu makale, Türkiye-Avrupa Birliği (AB) ilişkilerindeki siyasi, ekonomik ve diplomatik zorluklara rağmen, Türkiye kamuoyunun AB üyeliğine olan desteğinin dirençli yapısını incelemektedir. İkincil anket verileri kullanılarak yapılan bu keşifsel analizde, kamuoyunun eğilimleri ve destek nedenleri üç temel hipotez üzerinden değerlendirilmiştir: (H1) Gerçekleşebilirlik, (H2) Olumlu Tarihi Deneyim ve (H3) İdeolojik Yerleşmişlik. Bulgular, kamuoyu desteğinin gerçekleşebilirlik ve tarihi deneyimlerle bağlantılı olsa da, demokratik değerler, insan hakları ve hukukun üstünlüğüne olan ideolojik bağlılığın, olumlu tutumların devam etmesini sağladığını göstermektedir. Çalışma, Türk kamuoyunun, AB üyeliği sürecinde ülkedeki Avrupa hedeflerine içsel bir dayanak noktası, bir nevi kutup yıldızı oluşturduğunu savunmaktadır. Çalışmanın kısıtları belirtilmiş olup, analizde gelişmiş istatistiksel tekniklerin kullanılmadığına dikkat çekilmiştir. Makale, gelecekteki araştırmalara, Türk kamuoyunun AB üyeliğine yönelik tutumlarını etkileyen karmaşık faktörleri daha detaylı incelemek için daha sofistike yöntemlerin entegrasyonu çağrısında bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Türkiye Kamuoyu; Avrupa Birliği Üyeliği; İdeolojik Yerleşmişlik; Türkiye-AB İlişkileri.

What accounts for the EU's actorness within its "geopolitical awakening"?: The Israeli-Palestinian conflict and effectiveness and cohesion of the European Union[*1]

Özlem Tür
Department of International Relations, METU, Ankara
e-mail: tur@metu.edu.tr
ORCID: 0000-0003-3236-5365

Başak Alpan
Department of Political Science and Public Administration, METU, Ankara
e-mail: balpan@metu.edu.tr
ORCID: 0000-0003-1955-4700

Abstract

Since mid-2010s, two concomitant processes have been going on in terms of the EU's perspective on its foreign policy: The EU's relatively proactive inclusion into some particular conflicts (and its deliberate self-exclusion in some others) on one hand and the rise of the geopolitical tone of the EU foreign policy and neighbourhood policy on the other. This recent "geopolitical turn" challenged the Union's predominant position in crisis situations as well as its broader self-representation about its own foreign policy actorness. On top of this, there has been many question marks about the EU's actorness in terms of its involvement in protracted conflicts. Despite good intentions and progressively improved capabilities, it is intriguing why the EU had been selective in the management of some territorial conflicts in its neighbourhood.

The main argument of the paper is that current mainstream theoretical approaches of the European foreign policy, such as "normative power Europe", are overly optimistic and do not allow to put in focus certain dynamics the understanding of which are crucial to understanding the shortcomings of the EU's actorness in terms of the Israeli-Palestine conflict, where the actorness is captured throughout the paper in terms of the EU's effectiveness and coherence.

Key words: EU actorness, Israeli-Palestine Conflict, Normative Power Europe, geopolitics.

1. Introduction

In its 2016 *Global Security Strategy*, the EU has pointed out violent conflicts as a major threat to European security and stated its aim to contribute to their resolution (EEAS, 2016). Within this framework, it has incrementally extended its potential and jurisdiction for diplomatic action and civilian and military intervention in conflict zones. Nevertheless, Israeli-Palestinian conflict has hardly been one of them. This tendency to introduce a broader understanding of "security" (both geographically and conceptually) in the region, as to include "state and societal resilience, with the aim of tackling governmental, economic, societal, climate and energy fragility" (EEAS, 2016: 9) also overlapped with the waning of the EU's *normative power Europe* claim and, on the part of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), the recalibration of the "geopolitics" focus. Especially after the migration flows into the EU countries as well as Russia's invasive actions in the Caucasus in the mid-2010s, the EU approach to the neighborhood highly displayed characteristics of "geopoliticization"[2] (Cadier, 2019). Indeed, the Union's increasing tendency to pursue a foreign policy perspective less influenced by a norm-based liberal ideational framework (the so-called *normative power Europe* claim) *(Manners, 2002: 241)* and more determined by an interest-based rational calculation of the costs and benefits of alternative courses of action – so-called *realpolitik- was exacerbated greatly with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. For the EU, the war showed that, "*Europe is even more in danger than we thought just a few months ago" and brought the EU's "geopolitical awakening" (EEAS, 2022).

Thus, since mid-2010s, two concomitant processes have been going on in terms of the EU's perspective on the neighborhood: The EU's relatively proactive inclusion into some particular conflicts (and its deliberate self-exclusion in some others) on one hand and the rise of the geopolitical tone of the EU foreign policy and neighborhood policy on the other. This recent "geopolitical turn" challenged the Union's predominant position in crisis situations as well as the its broader self-

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[2]   Cadier coins the term, "geopoliticization" to denote the geopolitical framing of the EU's Eastern Partnership in public discourses by political actors especially in some member states like Poland and Czech Republic, which are geographically and historically more exposed to the Russian threat than other member states (Cadier, 2019).

representation about its own foreign policy actorness. On top of this, there has been many question marks about the EU's actorness in terms of its involvement in protracted conflicts. Despite good intentions and progressively improved capabilities, it is intriguing why the EU had been selective in the management of some territorial conflicts in its neighborhood.

The main argument of the paper is that current mainstream theoretical approaches of the European foreign policy, such as "normative power Europe", are overly optimistic and do not allow to put in focus certain dynamics the understanding of which are crucial to understanding the shortcomings of the EU's actorness in the neighborhood, where the actorness is captured throughout the paper in terms of the EU's *effectiveness* and *coherence*. When it comes to the EU's actorness in terms of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the EU is constantly facing the dilemma of its self-definition as a humanitarian actor, and its operational conduct. Through this, the article identifies a key tension between the EU's normative commitments and its recent geopolitical take on. The paper is structured as follows: We will first delve into the conceptual debate on the EU's actorness and its conflict management capabilities. We will then move to exploring the background which led to the tension between the EU's self-claimed *normative power* and its "geopolitical awakening". Thirdly, we will empirically scrutinize the EU's foreign policy actorness regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, starting from mid-2010s up until the very last Israeli attack of 7 October 2023, by focusing on the EU's *effectiveness* and *cohesion* in relation to the EU's actorness debate. Last, but not least, we will present a concluding discussion on the implications of the caveats of the EU's foreign policy actorness on the potential geopolitical challenges coming ahead.

2. The EU's actorness as a research agenda

The first debates on the EU's actorness could be traced back to the early 1970s when the European Political Cooperation (EPC) was introduced and the discussion on whether the then Community had capability and strength to act in a civilian, normative and military capacity when the third parties are in picture was launched. In this context, the term, actorness has first been coined by Sjöstedt as the "ability to function actively and deliberately in relation to other actors in the international system" (Sjöstedt, 1977: 16). Here, he first identified two key aspects to understanding the EU's potential role in the global arena: actor capability, which concerned structural characteristics; and actor behaviour, which include more dynamic features related to the Union's performance (Sjöstedt, 1977: 6). After Sjöstedt's study, there has been a myriad number of studies focusing on various aspects of the EU's actorness. In particular, after the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 and the launch of the second pillar of the EU's institutional legal framework, i.e. the so-

called Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), studies which depicted the Union as a hybrid international actor, reflecting a number of tensions built into the roots of the Treaty have multiplied (Smith, 2013). These tensions -reflected in the international roles and status of the EU- arise from the logics expressed in institutions and policies, and the ways in which those logics interact with each other when confronted with situations in which diplomatic, economic and security concerns are entangled (Smith, 2013: 15). Within this conversation, another point of contention within the literature has been the urge to measure the EU's actorness, for which Juppille and Caporaso (1998) have proposed four criteria to explore the versatile influence of the EU's foreign-policy related institutional set-up: *Recognition*, *authority*, *autonomy* and *cohesion*. In line with Jupille and Caporoso's conception, *recognition* relates to international recognition by third parties whereas *cohesion* relates to the ability of the EU and its member states to aggregate their preferences and to produce common objectives, positions and actions on international issues (Jupille and Caporaso, 1998: 220). On the other hand, *autonomy* relates to the degree of distinctiveness and independence the EU exhibits from its internal constituents (i.e., the member states) in terms of goal formation, decision-making and policy implementation as well as its discretionary power to settle objectives, make decisions, and implement actions as a distinct international entity (Jupille and Caporoso, 1998). On the other hand, externally one should consider the structural context of the action, which is also known as "opportunity" (see Jupille and Caporaso, 1998). It is concerned with the extent to which the EU's institutional apparatus is distinct from the foreign policies of member states, even if it intermingles with domestic political institutions. A central aspect of EU autonomy is the degree of involvement of supranational EU actors in the policy formulation process and external representation of the EU. Authority to act externally.

Bretherton and Vogler (2006) in another seminal study have used the notions of *opportunity* (factors in the internal environment of ideas and events that constrain or allow action); *presence* (the EU's ability to have influence beyond its frontiers) and *capacity* (which refers to the internal context of the EU's external action) to explore the validity of the EU's actorness, expanding its scope to include the EU's internal characteristics as well as the external environment it operates in.

Mainly after the Lisbon Treaty of 2009, which had promised a more active, coherent, effective and multidimensional European foreign policy, what we see is a rather robust literature on the EU's actorness, which has mainly developed along two central strands. The first has focused on the normative and rule-based approach to European integration, which translated into the EU's norm diffusion where the EU values, policies and institutions travel across different contexts including member states, candidates, EU neighbours and other regions of the world (Börzel and Risse 2012; Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2011). In this respect, the EU

enlargement is seen as a tool of the EU's actorness for norm diffusion through different mechanisms of rule and policy transfer, such as external incentives arising from conditionality principles, identity change out of social learning, or strategic adaptation due to lesson-drawing (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2004; Checkel 2005; Webb, 2018). A more critical wave in the norm diffusion literature also emerged which focused on the spread of norms from the standpoint of the local/domestic, drawing on the interactive and inter-relational nature of norms, focusing on the contestation patterns, localisation practices, and translation strategies, which introduce another intriguing dimension to the EU's actorness debates (Acharya, 2004, 2009; Wiener, 2004, 2007, 2014).

The second strand has rather focused on the emergence of the EU as a significant foreign policy actor both in terms of addressing the conflicts in various part of the world and the development of its military tools (Bono, 2004; Kaldor et.al., 2007; Altunışık, 2008; Olsen, 2009; Hartel, 2023). A significant variant in this second group of studies has been the studies focusing on the EU's involvement in international conflicts, state-building and cases of contested statehood (Noutcheva, 2020; Bouris and Papadimitriou, 2019; Wydra, 2018). According to Bouris and Papadimitrou, the EU's involvement during the lifespan of security crises could be explored through three key stages: *conflict prevention* (the EU is involved before the conflict erupts), *conflict management* (the EU gets involved during the unfolding of the conflict) and *conflict resolution* (the EU gets involved after the cessation of hostilities) (Bouris and Papadimitrou, 2019: 278).

Mainly within this context and after the Lisbon Treaty have we witnessed the so-called "effectiveness turn" within the debates on the EU's actorness (Drieskens, 2017: 1539). Assessments of the EU's influence were made in various case studies and general research on EU foreign policy (such as Laatikainen and Smith, 2006; Smith, 2010; Bickerton, 2011). The EU's effectiveness has been compared in some studies to that of other great powers, such as the US (for example, Keukeleire and MacNaughtan, 2008), or analsed against the background of the changing world order where the EU's influence would be waning because of the shift of power towards the emerging economies (particularly China and India) (Delaere and van Schaik, 2012: 7).

As the EU's role as a global actor still continues to garner attention from scholars and practitioners and as we aim in this paper to think about the EU's actorness against the background of the Union's "geopolitical awakening", we argue that EU's actorness in an inhospitable geopolitical landscape fundamentally underlines the aspects of *coherence* (i.e. the Union's ability to speak with one voice)

and *effectiveness* (i.e. the ability to effect what others do[3]). The nature of international power constellations and the fact that the geopolitical EU is now keen on speaking the "language of power" clearly affect the EU's ability to wield influence and to practice actorness (European Parliament, 2019). In this paper, we will focus on the coherence and effectiveness of the EU in terms of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Section 4. But, before doing that, we will explore the historical developments which paved the way to the "geopolitical Europe" in the next section.

3. Political background: Shift from "Normative Europe" to "Geopolitical Europe"

In 2013, the then president of the European Commission (EC), Barroso announced the launch of the EC's new project for "A new narrative for Europe", revolving around culture, cultural diversity and "European values", such as "human dignity, democracy, the rule of law and diversity" (Barroso, 2013). Barroso in this speech tells that since the early 1950s, these values had been the crux of the European integration and the EU's self- representation, culminating around the EU's so-called *normative power Europe* claim. Nevertheless, in December 2019, Ursula von der Leyen assumed office as the President of the EC this time with the intention of leading a "geopolitical Commission" (European Commission, 2019). This shift in the self-narrative of the EU has also been evident within the framework of the ENP narratives as put forward by the official EU documents and speeches of EU actors (Alpan, 2023). How could we make sense of this shift? Are the "normative Europe" and "geopolitical Europe" mutually exclusive? This section will aim to address this question, as to set ground for the thorough exploration of the EU's actorness in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the 2010s in the next section.

Especially starting from the 1990s, the EU significantly represented itself as a political institution approximating to the motto of "ever closer Union" mentioned in the Rome Treaty through focusing on shared European values and norms, going beyond merely being an economic cooperation. In an influential attempt to characterize the EU's special role in world affairs, Manners invented the term "normative power" (Manners, 2002). According to the "normative power" perspective, the EU's impact on the global system is ideational. It shapes global conceptions of what is "normal" based on its founding principles such as peace, liberty, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law – principles that were shaped in turn by the historical context of the EU's origin, its hybrid (international and

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[3]   Following Ginsberg, we associate the EU's actorness with the degree to which the behaviour of others was changed, either directly and indirectly (Ginsberg, 2001: 2).

supranational) character, and its political-legal constitution. As Rifkin famously put, "Europeans can make the world more civilised place if they have the confidence and capacity to export their ideas" (Rifkin 2004). Thus, since the late 1990s, the EU's impact on the domestic governance of the third countries (be them candidate, neighbour or third countries) as well as its role in the resolution of the regional conflicts, have mainly been assessed through the conceptual lenses of normative or transformative powerhood.

Nevertheless, especially starting from the mid-2010s, what we see in the EU foreign policy is a shift towards a more geopolitical orientation, which reflects a move away from purely normative principles and towards a more interest-driven *realpolitik*, shaped by the EU's security concerns and its desire to assert its influence in an increasingly multipolar world. Within this context, "security" has been the buzzword for the Union. For example, in its 2016 *Global Security Strategy*, the EU has singled out violent conflicts as a major threat to European security and stated its aim to contribute to their resolution.

> a multi-dimensional approach through the use of all available policies and instruments…; a multi-phased approach, acting at all stages of the conflict cycle…; a multi-level approach acting at the local, national, regional and global levels…; [and] a multi-lateral approach engaging all players present in a conflict and necessary for its resolution (EU Global Strategy, 2016: 28–29).

For the EU, this transformation coincided with a series of internal and external crises such as the migration crisis, coronavirus pandemic and the associated restrictions and the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. Indeed, starting from early 2010s, the sense of "urgency" in the EU increased intertwined with the feeling shared by many that the EU project came to an end not only because of deep divisions between the EU member states at instances such as migration crisis and Brexit but also it is no longer appearing as an alluring project for the countries which are not central engines of the EU integration. The coronavirus pandemic and associated restrictions accelerated this trend. Brexit has become the symbol of disintegration and isolationism (Riedel, 2023: 298). The so-called "migrant crisis", has demonstrated that the degree of integration and solidarity among EU members is not as deep and complete as expected, bolstering the already existing economic and socio-political crises (Prodromidou et.al, 2019: 7). The so-called "migrant crisis", has demonstrated that the degree of integration and solidarity among EU members is not as deep and complete as expected, bolstering the already existing economic and socio-political crises (Prodromidou et.al, 2019: 7). Throughout this period, the EU's Southern Neighbourhood and broader Middle East and North Africa (MENA), have witnessed major geopolitical shifts such as the growing

influence of the Gulf states and the proliferation of regional cleavages and intra-state conflicts, as well as more volatile alliances and rivalries, which also include a range of powerful non-state actors (Lecocq, 2020: 364). In this context, the EU seemed willing to embrace a "more traditional geopolitical approach" even if it meant accepting the limits of its civilian and normative power identity on the world stage (Nitoiu and Sus, 2019: 12). Within this framework, according to Josep Borrell, "Europe must quickly learn to speak the language of power" and become "geopolitically relevant" (European Parliament, 2019).

Indeed, 24 February 2022 was a historical turning point that forced the EU to become a fully-fledged security actor in the biggest geopolitical conflict in Europe since WWII. This meant a narrative shift on the part of the EU from a "normative power Europe" to "geopolitical Europe". *For the EU, the war proved that, "Europe is even more in danger than we thought just a few months ago"* and brought the EU's "geopolitical awakening" (EEAS, 2022).

Nevertheless, this "geopolitical turn" is not peculiar to the EU. A recent poll made by the ECFR (European Council on Foreign Relations) in 21 countries found out that although Europe and United States of America are seen as more attractive and having more respectable values (or, as having more normative power) than both China and Russia, this does not translate into political alignment. For most people in most countries -including some EU countries- what we witness is an *à la carte* world in which you can mix and match your partners on different issues, rather than signing up to a set menu of allegiance to one side or the other (Garton-Ash et.al., 2023). In this increasingly geopolitical world, the EU has been self-declaredly organising its foreign policy perspective in line with geopolitical considerations, which would have a potential impact on its actorness in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which we now turn to.

4. The EU's actorness and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

4.1. *Background information: Limits of the EU's actorness since the 1970S*

Since the 1970s, the European Community has been issuing declarations about the Palestinian issue. This has been an ongoing trend, as the Community and later the Union have often been criticised for issuing declarations but not taking steps on the ground to implement them. The 1971 Schuman Paper is telling as the member states found a common position on basing their call on the UN Resolution 242, but differed on the approach towards the issue of refugees and Jerusalem. Venice Declaration is a turning point in 1980, as it is the first common and coherent position of the Community and is rather a pro-Palestinian stance on the issue.

The dynamic institutional development of the CFSP in the 1990s, which paved the way for a greater role of supranational EU actors in Europe's conflict resolution approach was intertwined with the EU's goal to reduce its energy dependency from the Middle East and focusing more on soft aspects of security (Müller, 2013: 26). It was mainly with the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference that the EC began to play a role in the conflict, as a provider of aid and financing the Palestinian community. While the political issues were taken over by the US, the EC took upon financial responsibility of the peace process, supporting financially several grandiose aid projects, especially regarding the setting up of the Palestinian Authority. (Youngs, 2006: 146) The EC was the financial sponsor of almost half of the total economic aid granted to the Palestinians throughout the peace process (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan, 2008: 282). By embracing the Oslo Accords two years later, the EU pledged substantial aid and support for the Palestinian National Authority, including massive investments like the Gaza airport, tragically destroyed by Israel soon after it became operational (Soler I Lecha, 2024: 121). In this respect, it could be argued that the EU in the early 1990s, particularly due to the euphoria created by the Maastricht Treaty, paid more attention to the Union's *effectiveness* in the Middle East rather than its *coherence*.

As the Barcelona Process was initiated in 1995 and EU's quest to increase partnership with the Mediterranean countries was given an impetus, the European aim of being an actor in the MEPP was also underlined. By inviting Palestine to join as a full participant, this initiative created new and unprecedented avenues for political dialogue, confidence-building and practical collaboration among Israel, Palestine and their Arab and European neighbours (Soler I Lecha, 2024: 121). Persson argues that the main objective of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership was to improve the Union's actorness in the peace process in political, economic and social-cultural terms (Persson, 2015: 119) in general, where the EU tried to lead an independent peace process from the US, thus consolidating its power in the Middle East politics. Through a European path, which emphasized the importance of supporting the democratic institutions and strengthening of the rule of law and civil society the EU was committed to engage with the region and thus the Palestinians and the Israelis as a part of the Partnership (Schlumberger, 2011: 140).

In line with the decisions of the Amsterdam Treaty and the appointment of Javier Solana as the High Representative, the EU policy towards the peace process became more solid in terms of institutionalism in the late 1990s. However, the euphoria of peace ended with the collapse of the Oslo Peace Process and the beginning of the al-Aqsa intifada in 2000. Although hopes for a negotiated peace and a solution based on two-states with the creation of a Palestinian state were dashed, the EU continued to play a role as a part of multilateral mechanisms, i.e. the Quartet, and also by providing aid and support for institutional capacity building to

the Palestinian Authority. As the situation in Palestine got worse, with the intifada and the impact of the 9/11, the EU again issued a Declaration – the Sevilla Declaration in 2002, where it emphasized the significance of multilateral frameworks to find a durable solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. It was stated that: "The crisis in the Middle East has reached a dramatic turning point. Further escalation will render the situation uncontrollable…There is an urgent need for political action by the whole international community. The Quartet has a key role to play in starting a peace process" (The Council of the European Union, 2002).

The first time the EU went beyond issuing declarations and taking steps on the ground came when the EU Border Assistance Mission at the Rafah crossing point, code-named EUBAM Rafah, to monitor the operations of this border crossing point was established. As Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza in 2005, the EU took on the mission "to contribute to the opening of the crossing point and to build confidence between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, in co-operation with the European Union's institution building efforts" (The European Union, 2010). With EUBAM Rafah, the EU changed its traditional policy of issuing declarations in reaction to developments on the ground and came to the ground with deployment of its security forces for crisis management and conflict resolution. This is a turning point in the CFSP as well as it is the first military deployment under the command of a European general. Another EU mission under the CSDP was employed in the Palestinian territories named EUPOL COPPS (Coordination Office for Palestinian Police Support), the same year. The EU defined EUPOL COPPS as an expression of the EU's continued readiness to support the Palestinian Authority in complying with its Roadmap obligations, in particular with regard to "security" and "institution building".

Although the EU role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict began to increase, it was rather short lived as the 2006 legislative elections for the Palestinian Authority, which resulted with the victory of Hamas became a game changer. Both EUBAM Rafah and EUPOL COPPS were suspended. The EU foreign ministers put forward their concern "that the new Palestinian government has not committed itself to the three principles laid out by the Council and the Quartet in their statements of 30 January: nonviolence, recognition of Israel's right to exist and acceptance of existing agreements. It urged the new Palestinian government to meet and implement these three principles and to commit to President Abbas' platform of peace" (Council of the European Union, 2006). The EU indicated compliance with these three principles as a condition for future financial aid and suspended aid to Hamas-led Palestinian government after its refusal to implement these principles. As Gaza became a new zone of conflict after 2007 (i.e. the expulsion of Hamas from West Bank and the beginning of its government in Gaza), the EU went back to its traditional policy of issuing declarations. 2009 Goldstone report announced after the

Israeli Operation on Gaza -the Cast Lead- and pointing to Israeli non-compliance with international law led to concerns in the European countries but only resulted with a few declarations on the issue (The United Nations, 2009).

4.2. *The two dimensions of the EU's actorness in the 2010s: Coherence and effectiveness at work?*

Although it is argued that the EU gradually strengthened its actor capacity and progressively expanded its activities in conflict resolution, conflict prevention and conflict management especially after the 2009 Lisbon Treaty (see Mueller, 2013 for a good discussion), the Union continued its cautious and strategic engagement with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during the 2010s.

The broader shift in EU foreign policy towards a more geopolitical orientation emphasized by the 2019 European Commission under Ursula von der Leyen, has introduced new complexities into the EU's role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As previously discussed, this shift reflects a move away from a predominantly normative perspective towards a more interest-driven *realpolitik*, shaped by the EU's security concerns and its desire to assert its influence within the increasingly complex geopolitical world. In the Middle East, this shift has manifested in a more The Abraham Accords—a series of normalization agreements between Israel and several Arab states brokered by the US in 2020—posed another challenge to the EU. While the accords were hailed as historic steps towards peace in the region, they side-lined the Palestinian question, further complicating the EU's position. The EU cautiously welcomed the Accords but reiterated that a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains essential for lasting peace in the Middle East.

4.2.1. *Coherence*

In the intergovernmental realm of the CFSP, the EU's capacity to reach sufficient convergence among national foreign policy positions is of central importance for the adoption of common policies, which is also an obligation set out in the Treaties (Wessel, 2000; Hillion, 2008). Alongside with the institutional challenges of achieving *coherence* in terms of EU foreign policy, Lisbon Treaty's claim of "one voice Europe" has mainly been constrained by the significance of divergent member state policies and interests in terms of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The so-called "one-voice Europe" claim and the EU's *coherence* was put to test for the first time on the Palestinian issue in the 2012 voting for Palestinian "non-member observer status" in the UN General Assembly. Sixteen of the EU member

states voted in favor, while others abstained and the Czech Republic voted against the resolution. Consequently, the EU failed to vote as a single block that challenged the coherence of the EU as an actor, despite the call of the European Parliament for supporting "the High Representative in her efforts to create a credible perspective for relaunching the peace process" (The European Parliament, 2012). Consequently, the voting preferences of the member states in the UN clearly indicated that national policy priorities overweight the European ones, contrary to obligations of member states under the Lisbon Treaty.

In the 2010s, another primary reason for the EU's failure to practice *coherence* in terms of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the contestation in the EU and particularly in the European Parliament (EP) on the role and nature of Hamas (Lococq, 2020: 370). This became more outspoken when initiatives for a Palestinian unity government has been proposed in the EP in 2011 and 2014 (Lococq, 2020: 370).

4.2.2. *Effectiveness*

Most of the numerous academic studies agree that the EU could employ a wide variety of foreign policy tools at its disposal, yet its action remains ineffective due to many factors (Akgül-Açıkmeşe and Özel, 2024: 61). While the EU has "succeeded in strengthening its *effectiveness* in international affairs and in developing a common vision on resolving the Israeli-Palestine conflict, still it finds it difficult to translate its foreign policy instruments into a cohesive and effective approach" (Müller, 2012: 2).

The complex ineffectiveness of the EU is also acknowledged in Palestine and Israel by the stakeholders of the conflict. Müller's study which presents the results of the elite interviews in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Ramallah in 2016 and 2017 shows that Israeli and Palestinian elites see the EU's aim for peacebuilding can raise high hopes and expectations that the EU subsequently finds difficult to meet (Müller, 2019: 264). In particular, representatives of Israel's elite frequently contest the EU's self-representation as an actor unified by a coherent international identity and a common normative vision for peacebuilding (Müller, 2019: 259). The Israeli elites also point to the rise of far-right parties in certain members states as a factor that demonstrates a lack of internal coherence between supranational EU institutions and individual member states. As stated by an Israeli politician, with the rise of right-wing populism in EU member states "nationalism is becoming more popular and human rights are being shoved into a corner" (cited in Müller, 2019: 259). The picture is more or less the same for the Palestinian elites. For the Palestinian civil society activists, the EU appears as an "underutilized power" or even hypocritical actor that merely talks about democratic principles, human rights and the respect for

international law, whilst it then fails to take meaningful action to defend the rights of Palestinians (cited in Müller, 2019: 262).

One particular reason for the lack of EU *effectiveness* in the 2010s has been the ensuing developments of the Arab Spring, which pushed the Palestinian issue to the backburner for some time. On the one hand the EU had to respond to the Arab masses taking onto the streets calling for regime change and dignity and on the other had to respond to the emerging civil wars in Syria, Libya and Yemen that brought an imminent refugee crisis. The EU responded to these challenges with what was coined as 3 Ms: money, market and mobility where mobility was the most problematic to grant. Adopting a "more-for-more" approach as well, providing more resources to countries that managed to make more progress and reform, the EU's role remained rather restrained, highlighting the security risks the uprisings caused in Europe's neighborhood.

In 2013, the EU issued guidelines for Israel as the Israeli settlements became an issue of concern in the occupied Palestinian territories. The EU underlined that the aim of guidelines was to ensure the respect of EU positions and commitments in conformity with international law on the non-recognition by the EU of Israel's sovereignty over the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967. They set out the conditions, under which the Commission would implement key requirements for the award of EU support to Israeli entities or to their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967. The EU made it clear that it does not recognize the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem as a part of Israeli territory. Therefore, the EU's Foreign Affairs Council underlined the importance of limiting the application of agreements with Israel to the territory of Israel, as recognized by the EU. Hence, the failure to meet these guidelines resulted in prohibition of grants, prizes and financial instruments from the EU to the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories (The European Union, 2013). Although the guidelines were important in showing the EU commitment to a future two-state solution, with the creation of a Palestinian state in the occupied territories of West Bank and Gaza, with East Jerusalem as its capital, they did not change much on the ground to prevent Israeli settlement activity or encourage the dialogue with the Palestinian Authority.

As the Palestinian issue was at the backburner and a two-state solution was out of sight with Gaza under Hamas and West Bank struggling with aggressive Israeli settlements the then-U.S. President Donald Trump's announcement in December 2017 came as yet another turning point in the conflict and the EU role. Trump's announcement on the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, diverging from longstanding international consensus on the city triggered international responses, with the EU among the most prominent voices opposing it. The EU's official response emphasized that the status of Jerusalem should be

determined through negotiations between Israel and Palestine, in line with United Nations Security Council resolutions. The EU reiterated its position that the city should serve as the capital for both states, Israel and a future Palestinian state. The EU's reaction was underscored by High Representative Federica Mogherini, who stated that the union would continue to "respect the international consensus" on Jerusalem's status and would "not follow the United States in its decision." This reaction underlined EU's strong belief in a rules-based international order and adherence to the United Nations' resolutions, specifically UNSC Resolution 478, which condemns unilateral actions to alter Jerusalem's status. Following 2017, the EU repeatedly condemned any unilateral declarations or actions regarding Jerusalem, calling for shared governance that respects the city's significance to all three Abrahamic faiths. Despite the condemnations, the EU was limited in its capacity to counterbalance them effectively. This revealed the EU's constraints as an *effective* foreign policy actor, particularly in a geopolitical environment increasingly dominated by US unilateralism and shifting alliances in the Middle East. Despite its opposition to Trump's policies, the EU failed to present a unified and forceful alternative vision. Internal divisions within the EU—especially between countries with closer ties to Israel (such as Hungary and Austria) and those more critical of Israeli policies (such as Ireland and Sweden)—further limited collective action.

5. Conclusion

For several decades, the EU's actorness in the international stage has been a fruitful topic for debate. One of these debates is the recurrent questioning about the European capacity to act as an international actor. Indeed, while facing many political, economic, and social challenges, the Union has not stopped stressing its desire to act as a global actor. However, many observers continue to highlight the lack of its international capacity compared to the expectations it creates in Europe and worldwide. In particular,

In a nutshell, since the 1970s, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was characterised with the limitations of the EU approach to and policies on the issue, which usually remained reactive, limited to humanitarian issues when on the ground and can hardly be translated into political roles, which has historically been championed by the US. The EU has mostly followed the US position on the issue and when not in compliance, for example with the policies of the first Trump administration, lacked tools to revise the steps or implement alternative paths to peace. The Hamas attacks on Israel on 7 October further put the EU's actorness in the Palestinian issue to test. The EU condemned the violence, called for an immediate ceasefire and emphasized the need for humanitarian access to Gaza, where the civilian population was heavily

impacted by Israeli airstrikes. Diplomatically, the EU has engaged with both Israeli and Palestinian leaders in an effort to broker ceasefires and promote dialogue. However, this humanitarian role continues to be overshadowed by the EU's limited ability to play a political role or assert influence on the parties. The most significant reason for this has been fragmentation and divergent foreign policy stances of member states vis-à-vis the conflict. For example, France, Sweden, and Ireland have historically been more vocal in their criticism of Israeli policies, especially with regard to settlements and human rights violations in the occupied territories. They have called for a stronger EU position in support of Palestinian statehood and against Israeli policies that undermine the two-state solution. For instance, Sweden was the first EU member to officially recognize the State of Palestine in 2014. In contrast, some other member states, such as Germany, Austria, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, have maintained close relations with Israel, emphasizing its right to security and opposing any policy that might hinder close relations with Israel. Germany, in particular, due to its history, has been a staunch defender of Israel in many EU institutions, often advocating for a more cautious and balanced approach to the conflict. Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, and Slovakia, the Visegrád Group also consistently veto stronger criticisms and condemnations by the EU of Israeli actions. This fragmentation continues to undermine the EU's credibility as a foreign policy actor, in the Palestinian issue in particular and the Middle East, in general.

The 7 October attack also split the EU institutions. Whereas European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen projected the Israeli flag on the Commission's headquarter buildings and stressed Israel's "right to defend itself-today and in the days to come", European Council President Charles Michel emphasized the need for the European Union to avoid double standards in its approach to the conflict, stressing the primacy of the international law (Konecky, 2024).

One can also argue that even if the EU acts coherently and effectively, the actors involved in the issue crowd out the EU. There are not only the regional actors who are actively involved in the ceasefire negotiations like Egypt, Qatar and Türkiye but the US, that is a game setter in the course of the conflict and overshadows any role the EU could play. The newly-elected Trump administration has the potential to challenge decades of conventional policy in the Middle East, significantly altering its long-held commitment to the two-state solution (Noll, 2024). This would come as a serious shock to the EU and its member states, which have traditionally positioned themselves alongside the United States as equal defenders of the two-state solution outlined in the Oslo Accords and will fundamentally shift the Union's claim of "actorness" in the conflict (Noll, 2024). It is true that the EU still has a leverage lies with economic

and humanitarian dimension of the conflict and it has continued for decades to provide substantial aid to Palestinian civilians affected by the conflict and has engaged with international partners to coordinate relief efforts. Nevertheless, the fact that Oliver Varhelyi, the then EU Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement, right after the 7 October attack announced the suspension of development aid for Palestine, which adds up to over €1 billion for the period 2021-2024, put a bold question mark on the reliability of this aid. At a general level, the latest developments significantly highlight the persistent tension between the EU's humanitarian commitments and its geopolitical limitations, particularly when dealing with protracted and deeply entrenched conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

It is also vital to take into account how the EU's struggle for "actorness" in the region is perceived by the European citizens, who are allegedly at the centre of all EU decisions. For example, according to an October public opinion poll in the Netherlands, 55 percent of the public thought that the Dutch government should be more critical of Israel, and only 6 percent said it should be more supportive of it (as cited in Konecny, 2024). Similarly, a January poll showed that 61 percent of Germans thought Israel's military action in Gaza was not justified given the many civilian victims (as cited in Konecny, 2024). Thus, the EU's actorness debate should also take into consideration how this actorness across different geographies and cases are taken by the Europeans, which would be the focus of another study.

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Özet

AB'nin "jeopolitik uyanışı" içinde aktörlüğü nasıl açıklanabilir ? İsrail-Filistin çatışması ve Avrupa Birliği'nin etkinliği ve uyumu

2010'ların ortalarından beri Avrupa Birliği'nin dış politika perspektifi ile ilgili devam eden iki süreçten bahsedilebilir. Bunlardan ilki AB'nin aktif bir şekilde bazı çatışmalara dahil olması (ve bazılarından da kendisini uzak tutması), ikincisi ise AB dış politika ve komşuluk siyasetinde artan jeopolitik vurgudur. Bu yeni "jeopolitik yönelim" AB'nin kriz durumlarındaki genel duruşunu ve dış politika aktörlüğü ile ilgili kendisi ile ilgili ortaya koyduğu tanımlamalara önemli bir meydan okumadır. Bu tartışmanın ötesinde, AB'nin uzun zamandır süregelen çatışmalarda oynadığı aktörlük ile ilgili de devam eden sorular bulunmaktadır. Tüm çabalarına ve zaman içinde iyileştirilmiş yeteneklerine rağmen AB'nin komşu bölgelerinde devam eden çatışmalara dahil olma konusunda niçin bu derece seçici olduğu merak konusu olmaya devam etmektedir. Bu makalenin temel argümanı AB dış politikası ile ilgili kullanılan teorik yaklaşımların (örneğin "normatif güç Avrupa" gibi) fazla iyimser olduğu ve AB'nin komşu bölgelerdeki aktörlüğünün belirli yönlerine odaklanmayı zorlaştırdığıdır. Bu makalede AB'nin bu bölgelerdeki aktörlüğü AB'nin etkinliği ve uyumu açısından ele alınmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Avrupa Birliği, AB dış politikası, AB dış politika aktörlüğü, Filistin meselesi