Thorny Relations with the EU under AK Party Rule: Challenges and Prospects

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ABSTRACT *Turkey-EU relations have historical significance in terms of politics, societal structures along with the longevity of Turkey's EU accession process. The relationship between them should not be seen as one in which the EU requires and Turkey fulfills accordingly. A multi-dimensional and reciprocal approach is necessary to evaluate the flow of relations rather than short-term or daily political ups and downs. This paper analyzes the relationship between Turkey and the EU under successive AK Party governments in chronological order, along with political and social reflections by focusing on the main turning points and considering the development of relations in the long-run of politics.*

Introduction

Relations between Turkey and the European Union (EU) have faced many highs and lows since Turkey's initial application to the European Economic Community in 1959. Therefore, in order to understand certain vicissitudes in Turkey's EU membership process under successive AK Party governments, it is necessary to take into account both historical and reciprocal perceptions of the relations between these two. In order to build a comprehensive understanding, it is necessary to base the discussion on the fact that, Turkey-EU relations should be seen as dynamic and reciprocal in the flow of history. Both sides have faced dramatic social, economic and political changes with regard to the internal dynamics or developments that have taken place at the international level. Moving towards more specific objectives, the first AK Party government defined full membership to the EU as its strategic goal in the area of foreign policy.

In the first years of AK Party government, the full membership of Cyprus to the EU and changes in heads of governments in Germany and France might be

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seen as factors that created a negative impact on Turkey's EU accession process. On the one hand, AK Party governments tried to pursue relations with the EU, while on the other paving the way for the establishment of regional peace and economic development inside Turkey. The pro-active diplomacy followed by AK Party governments later caused arguments about whether there was an axis-shift in Turkey's foreign policy proceeding along with the Neo-Ottomanism discussions.

Additionally, 2011 was one of the milestones, not just in the relationship between Turkey and EU, but also at the regional and international levels. The so-called Arab Spring did not bring stability and democratization to the countries in North Africa and the Middle East. While Turkey faced serious security and political crises, it was believed that it did not get enough support from the EU member states in its backing of the democratization and freedom demands of the Muslim Brotherhood, especially in Egypt. Another turning point in the relations of Turkey and the EU was the coup attempt that took place on July 15, 2016. Regarding the post-failed coup process, there is a huge gap between Turkey and EU about the perception of the coup attempt. While Turkey considers itself legitimate in fighting against members of the Fetullah Terrorist Organization (FETÖ),[1] the EU prioritizes protection of basic rights and freedoms along with respect to the rule of law. It should also be noted that the rise of far-right parties and excessive discourses have started to damage the core values of the EU while creating obstacles over Turkey's accession initiatives.

This paper intends to examine Turkey-EU relations under AK Party governments with an emphasis on significance of continuity of relations instead of domination of daily politics. Continuity of relations is useful to define the relationship between Turkey and EU especially if structural differences such as identity, culture and religion are taken into consideration. In this sense, under AK Party governments, political and economic stability in domestic affairs paved the way for determination in foreign policy making processes while policy preferences in the EU have varied with the changes in the heads of governments. However, prioritizing the importance of continuity of relations between Turkey and EU, the historical and structural ties provide comprehensive outcomes. This paper claims that even though Turkey started accession talks in 2005 and faced serious challenges in the following years, such as deceleration in accession talks, reforms, the EU membership of Cyprus, changing heads of governments in Germany and France, crises emerged in

the aftermath of Arab Spring along with refugee crisis and coup attempt in July 15, 2016, under AK Party governments the continuity of identical, structural and cultural differences play a more determinant role than the short-term volatile changing dynamics. Therefore, in the first part, background of Turkey-EU relations and the significance of Europeanization for the first AK Party government will be discussed. In the second part of the work, the influence of government changes in Germany and France and the EU membership of Cyprus on Turkey's EU accession processes are examined along with blocked chapters. In the third part, the place of Turkey's pro-active foreign policy preferences in the light of "axis shift and neo-Ottomanism" debates, Arab Spring with refugee crises and the July 15, 2016 failed coup in Turkey are analyzed in order to draw a framework for Turkey-EU relations under the current AK Party government.

Turkey's EU Path: Dynamic and Reciprocal Process

In order to understand the flow of Turkey's path to becoming a member of the EU, there are certain points to be taken into consideration. It is necessary to underline that the EU membership process should not be seen as simply one side demanding and other fulfilling. Therefore, (i) neither Turkey nor EU have static structures, (ii) Turkey and the EU relations are reciprocal, not one-sided.[2] Turkey and EU relations are more than a process created by the involvement of two sides. Since the population of Turkey is 99 percent Muslim with a Muslim populated hinterland, Turkey's EU path becomes more significant in terms of structure and characteristics. On the other hand, the EU has 28 member states, and every single one has its own internal and foreign policy preferences along with strong historical ties among themselves and the other global actors such as the U.S. Thus, from Turkey's perspective being a member of the EU might mean broadening its ties but at the same time it presents a challenge for the different cultural norms and values. When it comes to the perspective of the EU, Turkey's membership directly addresses internal challenges that the EU has been facing such as a multi-cultural society and peaceful coexistence with no more extremist or populist discourses.

Considering geographic positions, Turkey borders with the EU but at the same time has long borders with the Middle East and Caucasus. Therefore, the identity, ethnicity, religion and way of thinking of people in Turkey and the EU might differ from one to another. The EU has been facing serious structural crises based on its established values such as combining different cultural identities under an umbrella with peaceful coexistence. Turkey also has been facing several problems such as the flow of migrants, terror attacks and a coup attempt against the democratically elected president and government.

The candidacy status for the EU membership was one of the most significant milestones in the history of Turkish foreign affairs, but Turkey faced serious political uncertainty under the coalition governments and economic crises at the same time

Briefly, Turkey-EU relations require dynamic understanding in order to understand the forty-year history and to frame possible future alternatives. In order to avoid over-generalization of the problem in defining Turkey-EU relations, it is necessary to have a multi-dimensional understanding to evaluate historical and current developments. Failing to do this would only result in baseless and endless discussions.

Regarding today's EU member states it is necessary to underline that members have religious and identical affinity with clearly defined economic and political common interests among themselves. When it comes to the position of the EU regarding Turkey's membership, the issue directly addresses internal debates such as enlargement fatigue, rise of rightist populist discourses and fiscal problems especially after the 2008 global economic crisis. Therefore, with regard to the relationship between Turkey and the EU, it is necessary to point out that the EU should not be seen as the one that perpetually lectures and Turkey is the one that sits in the position of student but rather that both sides can contribute to the future vision of each other.

Background of Turkey-EU Relations

Since 1959 Turkey has been on one of the longest tracks to becoming a member of the EU starting with the application for association to the European Economic Community. Turkey's EU journey officially started with the signing of the Ankara Agreement (The Association Agreement) with the European Economic Community in 1963 and continued until its application for full membership in 1987. The Ankara Agreement was believed to be beneficial for both sides with Turkey and European Economic Community establishing a customs union which would pave the way for full membership in the following process. Relations between Turkey and European Community were *de facto* suspended by requirement of the European Parliament due to an interruption of the democratization process following the coup, which took place on September 12, 1980.[3] Towards the end of 1980's the democratic environment in Turkey started to be restored and Turkey applied for full membership to the European Community in 1987. However, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the position of Turkey was about to be redefined since one of the major threats to Europe "expansion of Communism" collapsed. Although the so called transition period of Turkey was completed

Leading world channels, such as BBC, TV5, CNBC Europe and CNN ran live broadcasts of the details of the EU Summit discussing Turkey's membership process in 2004.

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with the Customs Union Agreement in 1995 after twenty-two years from the initial application, Turkey was not mentioned among the candidate countries at the EU Summit of Heads of State and Government in Luxemburg, but was still considered in the enlargement context in 1997. In the following two years, progress reports were prepared and candidacy status was recognized for Turkey at the Helsinki Summit in 1999.

The candidacy status for the EU membership was one of the most significant milestones in the history of Turkish foreign affairs, but Turkey faced serious political uncertainty under the coalition governments and economic crises at the same time. Under such circumstances, the AK Party gained majority seats in the parliament thereby winning the election held on November 3, 2002. This was the beginning of the longest, single party period in the history of Turkey with the AK Party gaining a majority status in the parliament in five successive free and fair democratic elections. In the 2002 election statement of the AK Party, it stated that the "AK Party considers the full membership to the EU as a natural outcome of our modernization process and adaption of political and economic harmonization have utmost importance."[4] The EU target of the party mentioned in the election statement was followed by serious reform packages in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. In this context, progress reforms paved the way for the December 2004 European Council's decision that Turkey "sufficiently" meets the political criteria and accession talks could

begin on October 2005. It should be underlined that many scholars of the field defined Turkey's reform initiatives from 2002 to 2005 as a "silent revolution."[5] Reform packages between 2001 and 2004 can be summarized as follows: legal protection of social, cultural and political rights of all Turkish citizens irrespective of religious and ethnic identity, role of the military in politics gradually decreased, rights regarding freedom of expression extended. It should be noted that the above mentioned reforms touch on vulnerable points of Turkey, such as recognition of the Kurds and conflictual relations between secular and conservative circles.[6]

However, Turkey's reform momentum slowed down in 2005 due to the full EU membership of Cyprus, government changes in Germany and France, elections and social changes in Turkey. The AK Party government established the ministry for EU Affairs in 2011 in order to show that the EU was still on the agenda as Turkey's future foreign policy target and to deal with the reform processes. Turkey and the EU launched a dialogue on visa liberalization for Turkish citizens and signed the Readmission Agreement in December 2013. Lastly, due to the flow of refugees from the East to Europe, the EU member states faced crises and could not manage the process economically, politically or socially. Therefore, the Readmission Agreement between Turkey and EU became a key tool in 2016 for Turkish citizens' visa-free travel to EU in exchange for refugees coming from the East to be controlled and hosted within the borders of Turkey.

Significance of Europeanization and Modernization for the First AK Party Government

When the AK Party first came to power in November 2002, the country was politically, economically and socially in uncertainty. Turkish democracy and political history faced a number of complexities such as the coup d'état on February 28, 1998, devaluations, coalition governments and terror threats. Therefore, it was almost impossible to make a prediction about the future of the AK Party and indeed of Turkish democracy at the same time. The protection of territorial integrity and the fear of Islamization of the country were perceived as the main threats to the newly established republic in 1923. The territorial integrity was a dominant factor because the Turkish Republic was a continuation of the Ottoman Empire, which was divided into portions on its demise. Therefore, the newly established Turkish Republic could not risk further divisions in its defined borders and so gave primary attention to the role of the army for the unification of the country. The army had a role not just to provide security of the country against threats that would come from outside, but also had responsibility for protection of secular unity with the utmost importance for Europeanization and modernization of the country.

In the light of these realities, the AK Party had to provide a democratic environment that could drive Turkey to the level of developed countries with the reforms and initiatives required by the EU for full accession. AK Party was defined as a political party with clear Islamic roots.[7] Therefore certain doubts were raised not just inside but also outside of the country regarding future foreign policy preferences. In the name of the AK Party, it was significant to illustrate the party had more to do with modernization and democratization of the country rather than prioritizing Islamic preferences. Therefore, members of the party preferred to be known as conservative democrats. However, it should be underlined that democratizing the constitution and institutions did not automatically mean that the AK Party would be able to make the citizens satisfied and happy. Integration of the global economy with liberal policies, to get support from both internal and external business sectors in order to get legitimacy from different segments of the society were essential steps that were taken. In short, it might be said that democratic reform and the EU accession was considered as the best guarantee for the political survival of the party while predecessors such as the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*) and the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*) that were far more Islamist in nature were banned by the Constitutional Court for threatening the secular nature of the Republic.[8]

> **In the name of the AK Party, it was significant to illustrate the party had more to do with modernization and democratization of the country rather than prioritizing Islamic preferences**

Therefore, on Turkey's path to the EU, it was necessary to meet the requirements of the Copenhagen criteria as an EU membership objective, to increase democratization standards in the areas of human rights standards, civil democracy and the free market economy as well. The reform packages passed in the parliament between 2002 and 2005 might be listed as follows: strengthening freedom of press, reducing detention period, securing freedom of association, abolishment of the death penalty, lifting of the state of emergency, amendments regarding crimes of torture, making it difficult to close a political party, allowing for broadcasting in different languages, extension of freedoms on prayer areas of citizens with different religions and beliefs, civilization of the national security council, ratification of the Universal Conventions of Human Rights.[9] There were more reforms but these were the most significant ones that had direct impact on political and social grounds. The reforms and initiatives of the AK Party strengthened the democratization process in Turkey and the integration process with Europe. It should be noted that the EU was an external trigger for reforms but at the same time, the AK Party showed a strong will to implement the requirements of the Copenhagen criteria and democratization. Therefore, it can be argued that the first four years in particular of AK

Party rule was the period in which Turkey and members of the EU reciprocally kept their promises and followed combined policies.

Influence of Governmental Changes in Germany and France on Turkey's EU Membership Process

Germany and France have been two major actors shaping the destiny of the EU. The enlargement issue has been one of the key issues on which it would have been difficult to convince the entire EU member states without the political will of both Germany and France. Germany in the time of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder was one of the actors that supported Turkey's membership and tried to persuade the entire EU member states in favor of full membership of Turkey in 2004.[10] In one of his speeches, Gerhard Schröder supported Turkey's full membership with these sentences; "There are two reasons for us to vote in favor of Turkey, the first; Turkey has been promised for forty years that, if it fulfills political criteria, membership talks will start and promises should be kept in international politics.[11] Regarding regional dynamics as a second reason he said "we all see how unstable the Middle East and Asia are. Turkey has a unique situation in the region as regards Europe's interests."[12] Some argued that Schröders' move in favor of Turkey was mainly because of upcoming elections in Germany, in order to get votes from Turks who lived in Germany. However, the core motive behind his statements could also be considered as Turkey's geographic position and multi-cultural character along with efforts of the AK Party illustrated a clear will to join the Union with all reform initiatives.

According to the elections results, Christian Democrats returned to power, Merkel became the German Chancellor and policy toward Turkey changed direction. Instead of having Turkey as a member of the Union, Merkel offered an alternative strategy with "privileged partnership" by arguing that Turkey does not fit into the EU because it is culturally different.[13] Here at this point, it is necessary to look at the factors that influenced a German policy shift towards Turkey's EU membership. These factors can be examined under two pillars: internal and external. When it comes to the internal factors, it might be argued that they are related with the skepticism of the German public opinion caused by economic concerns, the issue of immigration and integration issue of Turks who have lived in the country for more than forty years. On the other hand, the so called enlargement fatigue of the EU, Eurozone fiscal crises, and the incompatibility between European and Turkish identity can be included in the category of external factors that caused the German policy shift regarding Turkey's EU membership.[14]

For France, in the period of Jacques Chirac, the French position on Turkey's EU membership was not explicit. However, when Nicholas Sarkozy came to power

the attitude of France toward Turkey's EU membership was more evident. Sarkozy declared French opposition in his electoral campaign, while offering a different kind of partnership similar to Merkel, under the name of the "Mediterranean Union" that would include Turkey to shape regional issues.[15] Sarkozy admitted that the EU enlargement and Turkish inclusion would kill

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the very idea of European integration; consequently France blocked five chapters dealing with finance and economics in 2007.[16]

Influence of the EU Membership of Cyprus on Turkey's EU Accession Process

When the AK Party first came to power in 2002, there were critical milestones which made the future of the country prosperous. The EU membership of Cyprus was one of the factors that disappointed Turkey and the AK Party. Until 2003, there were numerous attempts to resolve the conflict on the island however, 2003 was the year that the EU included itself to the conflict as one of the key actors. Turkey was aware of the fact that the Annan Plan was the one that could settle the conflict if Northern and Southern residents of the island both accepted it. On the other hand, Cypriots were aware that once membership process to the EU was completed, there would be no one who would force the revision of the statute of the island. In this respect, it is necessary to point out the 2002 Seville European Council Summit conclusions regarding the future of the island.[17] Even though the idea of reunification of the island and support for the efforts of the Secretary-General of the United Nations[18] were mentioned in the text, the division of the island became more complicated with the EU membership of Cyprus.

The main purpose of the AK Party was to unite the island under the Annan Plan since Turkey had no power to change the flow of the process especially after membership of Cyprus to the EU. Under the shadow of the efforts of the newly established AK Party government, the referendum took place on April 24, 2004, to decide the destiny of the island. Even though the Cypriot President of that day Tassos Papadopoulos seemed to have neutralized his position regarding the referendum, in his speeches he gave the message that a "no vote" would be in favor of Cypriots.[19] In the end, as expected, the island joined the EU, Cyprus became a member of the Union including Turkish Cypriots. However, implementation of the Community *acquis* was suspended in the North,

which prompted the view that Greek Cypriots were unfairly rewarded despite the fact that they rejected the Annan Plan which the Turks accepted. As Drevet argued, the Turkish side was unfairly penalized and international embargo against the Northern part of the island was not lifted.[20]

The Referendum Results on the Annan Plan Held on April 24, 2004

Sides	Turnout	Yes	No
Greek South	88 percent	24.2 percent	75.8 percent
Turkish North	87 percent	64.9 percent	35.1 percent

Source: BBC News (April 25, 2004)[21]

After the results were formally published, the then Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan prepared a report for offices in Cyprus and stated that elimination of unnecessary restrictions and barriers that isolate Turkish Cypriots should be lifted mainly because of the positive contribution of the Turkish North to the goal of reunification.[22] Nevertheless, the report of Annan was vetoed by Russia, so that it was not even discussed in the United Nations Security Council session.

In the end, Turkey did not get the result it hoped for, to solve the issue of Cyprus before becoming a full member of the EU. Turkey was aware of the fact that once Cyprus was accepted as full member to the EU, Turkey's EU accession process would get tougher. There were two main outcomes of the Cyprus EU membership; firstly the AK Party government did not get the expected support from the EU despite reforms made in Turkey and support for the Annan Plan. Secondly, the attitude of the EU, to accept Cyprus as a member state before the resolution of the conflict in the island, directed Turkey to search for alternatives other than the EU promises. It is necessary to underline that the Turkish membership process to the EU depended and oversimplified upon Turkey's recognition of Cyprus. The issue of Cyprus turned out to be an issue of the EU rather than the UN.

Blocked Chapters in the EU Accession Process of Turkey

The EU membership of Cyprus in 2004 was followed by the official start of EU accession negotiations with Turkey. Therefore on July 2005, the additional protocol extending the Ankara Agreement to the new member states that acceded to the EU in 2004 was concluded by an exchange of letters between Turkey and the EU Presidency with the Commission. Turkey, by signing the Additional Protocol explicitly stated that it did not recognize The Republic of Cyprus by any means.[23] This action of the Turkish Government as expected had numerous repercussions for Turkey's EU path and the AK Party government was aware that more sanctions could be created in the following process.

As expected the EU froze eight chapters by referring to Turkey's non-implementation of the Additional Protocol to its Customs Union Agreement that specifies the opening of Turkish ports and airports to Cypriot flagged vessels and flights.[24] It should also be noted that it was decided that unless Turkey implements the Additional Protocol, no chapter would be provisionally closed.

As mentioned above, France blocked the opening of a further five chapters in 2007, but Cyprus also vetoed the opening of a further six in addition to its veto over the energy chapter as a result of the dispute with Turkey over oil exploration rights.[25] Those six chapters were mainly about Freedom of Movement for Workers, Energy, Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, Justice, Freedom, Security, Education and Culture, Foreign Security and Defense Policy. While France lifted its block on chapter 22, which is about Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments It can be considered that the reform process of Turkey was interrupted for several political reasons. Until now, since Turkey formally began the EU accession process 12 years ago, just Science and Research chapter out of 35 has been opened and provisionally closed.

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Current Situation in Accession Negotiations (until June 30, 2016)	
In Turkey's accession, negotiations 16 chapters were opened and one chapter was provisionally closed. – 14 chapters are blocked due to the political decisions of the EU Council and Southern Cyprus. – Although the screening process of 33 chapters had been completed in 2006, screening reports of 9 chapters have not yet been approved by the Council. Therefore, opening benchmarks for these chapters have not been communicated to Turkey officially. 2. Chapter: Freedom of Movement for Workers 13. Chapter: Fisheries 14. Chapter: Transport Policy 15. Chapter: Energy 23. Chapter: Judiciary and Fundamental Rights 24. Chapter: Justice, Freedom and Security 30. Chapter: External Relations 31. Chapter: Foreign, Security and Defense Policy	There are 7 chapters for which the technical opening benchmarks (OB) were officially communicated to Turkey: 1. Chapter: Free Movement of Goods (4 OB) 3. Chapter: Right of Establishment and Freedom to Provide Services (1 OB) 5. Chapter: Public Procurement (3 OB) 8. Chapter: Competition Policy (6 OB) 11. Chapter: Agriculture and Rural Development (5 OB) 19. Chapter: Social Policy and Employment (2 OB) 29. Chapter: Customs Union (1 OB) – Although none of the chapters can be closed provisionally due to the Additional Protocol, "Enterprise and Industrial Policy" and "Trans-European Networks" chapters are technically ready to be closed. – Moreover, it has been confirmed by the Commission that Turkey has undertaken 7 closing benchmarks (CB) of 5 chapters. 6. Chapter: Company Law (1 CB) 20. Chapter: Enterprise and Industrial Policy (1 CB) 21. Chapter: Trans-European Networks (1 CB) 28. Chapter: Consumer and Health Protection (1 CB) 32. Chapter: Financial Control (3 CB)

Source: Republic of Turkey Ministry for EU Affairs[26]

Turkey's Pro-Active Foreign Policy Preferences: Position of "Axis Shift" and "Neo-Ottomanism" Debates on the EU Accession Process

The success of the AK Party between 2002 and 2005 in passing reform packages and democratization initiatives illustrated that a so-called Islamic-oriented political party was able to practice and harmonize democracy with its party program. At the same time, developments in the EU membership process of Turkey helped to build political and economic stability in the country. The political and economic steadiness of the AK Party has been combined with strategic and methodological principles especially in the process of forming a foreign policy. However, in the light of these reasons, it might be argued that there was a certain deceleration and a reciprocal loss of motivation in Turkey's EU accession process. The hesitant attitude on the part of the EU directed Turkey to search for a diversification of alternatives to illustrate that the EU membership was not the only choice but there were other options such as to create strong relations with neighbors, other regional and global powers along with developing regional initiatives. The pro-active diplomacy that AK Party followed was defined by Davutoğlu as follows:

Turkey's engagements from Chile to Indonesia, from Africa to Central Asia, and from the EU to the Organization of Islamic Conference will be part of a holistic approach to foreign policy. These initiatives will make Turkey a global actor as we approach 2023, the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Turkish Republic.[27]

Turkish foreign policy vision in the Middle East was similar to policy preferences in the Balkans or in Africa with the new discourse and way of diplomacy channels resulting in the spread of Turkish soft power in the region. Furthermore, pro-active and pre-emptive peace diplomacy aimed to take precautions before the emergence of conflict. Newly established and applied foreign policy required the concepts of high-level political dialogue, economic integration, interdependence and multi-cultural coexistence. The other approach that the AK Party followed was known as "rhythmic diplomacy" this aimed to have a more active role in international organizations and global issues. These policy perspectives and preferences gave tangible results such as Turkey becoming United Nations Security Council non-permanent member in 2009-2010 term. Turkey also built peace-building initiatives in Balkans with trilateral mechanisms, played third party arbitration role in different parts of the world and the number of signed visa-free agreements between Turkey and other Middle Eastern and African states increased gradually.

After having such a visible and rising position not just on the regional scale, but also on the international scene, various voices rose from the EU questioning whether Turkey had given up Europeanization and turned its face to Ot-

toman heritage territories. Turkey's foreign policy preferences started to be called an "axis shift" by the EU and the U.S.[28] Additionally, there was another term produced –"neo-Ottomanism"– to define the existence of Turkey in Ottoman heritage territories with several political and economic instruments. A Serbian orientalist writer, Darko Tanaskovic, has often used the term

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"neo-Ottomanism" to show his discomfort with Turkey's existence in the Balkans. He published a book under the name of "*Neo-Osmanizam: Doktrina i spoljnopolitička praksa*" (Neo-Ottomanism: A Doctrine or a Foreign Policy Practice). Tanaskovic was one of the first intellectuals who used the term "neo-Ottomanism" and he was suspicious about policies practiced and instruments preferred by Turkey in the Balkan region also using the phrase "return of Turkey to the Balkans."[29] Hence, along with the debate of shift of axis in Turkish foreign policy making, arguments based on neo-Ottomanism nourished the same perspective that the pro-active foreign policy strategy of Turkey was the one that ought to be controlled.

The Arab Spring and an End for Diplomatic Initiatives

There has been an ongoing conflict in the Middle East and North Africa for more than six years. There was a clear will of people to have freedom and democracy instead of long-term oppressive regimes. However, peaceful demonstrations yielded to the armed conflicts and the so called Arab Spring consequently turned into a long-term social, political and economic catastrophe. At this stage, Turkey faced a difficulty on the regional basis in that the AK Party was more ready to use diplomatic channels rather than managing armed conflict. Therefore, the AK Party had to review its foreign policy priorities in the Middle East and searched to create global alliances to manage emerging conflicts.

The AK Party first decided to side with those who were against oppressive regimes and demanded freedom, democracy and to be represented in the Arab world. In the case of Tunisia and Egypt there were signs of a transition to democracy, but still it was not clear what was going to happen. Along with the domino effect and the spread of demonstrations to Syria, the AK Party tried to persuade Assad to democratize the country but with his refusal of diplomatic means, good relations broke down. Armed conflict started in the borders of Syria between those who demanded freedom and the supporters of Assad with

The UN General Secretary Antonio Guterres (R) and the leaders of the Turkish and Greek Cypriots, Mustafa Akıncı (L) and Nikos Anastasiadis (C) issuing a joint statement on the Cyprus crisis in January 2017.

AA PHOTO / MUSTAFA YALÇIN

ISIS later joining in the conflict. It might be said that AK Party's zero problem policy with neighbors, depending on diplomatic persuasiveness and being a model in the Arab region, came to an unavoidable end. In such an environment Turkey had to redefine its position not just in the minds of people who were on the streets in search of their freedom but also the formal relations with the regimes who refused to leave the power and Western countries which were not sure about the position of Turkey. At that point in time the EU members started to loudly argue whether Turkey's foreign policy was shifting back to the West after a drift to the East.[30]

It is necessary to note that although the AK Party government in 2011 took on the side of democratization of the region, it was difficult to create a constant policy in an unbalanced and unstable environment. Once Turkey turned its face to the EU, there were several voices raising their certain concerns

about the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms together with Gezi Protests. The EU member states criticized Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for being a "dictator" along with claims of corruption. The European Parliament passed a resolution in the aftermath of Gezi Protests pointing out various concerns such as the disproportionate and excessive use of force by the Turkish police in its response to the peaceful and legitimate Gezi Protests and called Turkish authorities to guarantee and respect the rights of all citizens of freedom of expression on Twitter and YouTube.[31]

> **Together with the Syrian crisis, the national security of Turkey and Turkey's relations with the EU member states became highly interrelated issues**

However, in 2013, another crisis emerged including Turkey. The conflict in Syria was out of control and different armed groups took over several areas in the country. Largely because of the insecure environment the Turkish border of Syria was also under the threat of terrorist attacks and at the same time it was believed that the flow of refugees, due to the open door policy of the AK Party government, carried insecurity inside Turkey.[32] This open door policy of the AK Party was criticized with claims of governmental support to ISIS, and numerous international media outlets held Turkey responsible for its unwillingness to cooperate in the fight against ISIS. Additionally, it was claimed that Ankara supported ISIS in order to prevent the formation of a Kurdish geopolitical corridor in Northern Syria.[33] Even though Ankara explicitly rejected such claims and in 2013 a cabinet decision recognized ISIS as a terrorist organization,[34] Turkey faced serious allegations on the international stage. At the same time, the EU offered political dialogue, to develop closer cooperation against ISIS and its funding networks, as well as building counter-terrorism dialogue with Turkey by emphasizing the control of borders in order to prevent the transition of foreign fighters.[35]

The Refugee Crisis: The Readmission Agreement and Visa Liberalization for Turkish Citizens

The regional instability started to have negative effects not just on Turkey's domestic security but also security, politics and economy of the EU at the same time. It is necessary to underline that together with the Syrian crisis, the national security of Turkey and Turkey's relations with the EU member states became highly interrelated issues. Accordingly, Turkey put new security arrangements in place to reduce the risks and developed an integrated border management model in border security. This model aimed to coordinate and cooperate with the EU in the border related issues as part of Turkey's EU ac-

cession process.[36] It is important to mention that Turkey's visa liberalization process with neighboring countries before 2010 was an important element for further social and economic integration on a regional basis, however once the wave reversed, the AK Party government had to give up what was proposed previously about lifting borders with neighbors. Under the shadow of foreign fighters and migrant flow from the Middle East to Turkey and from Turkey to the West, the EU member states and Turkey met again to discuss what could be done in order to control the flow of people prioritizing security concerns.

The readmission agreement came into question in response to the visa liberation for Turkish citizens that was first signed between the then Home Affairs Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom and the then Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu, adopted as a roadmap to facilitate Turkish nationals travel to Schengen countries, and partly entered into force on January 1, 2014.[37] However, at the same time, according to the conditionality principle of the EU that was designed to protect irregular migration flow to the EU member states, the readmission agreement had to be fulfilled by Turkey. The readmission agreement legally binds Turkey and the EU member states that are part of the Schengen area. According to the reciprocity principle, the agreement concerns both readmission of migrants using Turkish territory to the EU and migrants who pass from the EU to enter Turkey illegally. The agreement includes three main groups of migrants that are going to be returned to Turkey.[38] Two of these groups are Turkish nationals who have either entered the EU border area through Turkish territory in irregular or illegal conditions or entered the EU legally but have overstayed their legal duration of stay.[39] The main concern for the Turkish side is about the group of migrants who are third country nationals using Turkey as a transit country to enter the EU illegally. According to the readmission agreement, Turkey would accept back third-country nationals who have entered the EU illegally having transited through Turkey. Accordingly, Turkish authorities require the EU to present proof and documents clearly showing that the migrant in question has passed from Turkish territory. After readmission, Turkey will repatriate illegal migrants to their country of origin according to bilateral agreements which it has established with those countries. The main purpose of readmission agreements is to create solutions to the "irregular migration" problem outside of the European borders and to capture and provide a return for migrants before they enter into the borders of the EU.[40] According to the agreement, Turkey has committed to the readmission of citizens of other countries illegally entering the EU countries to be readmitted to Turkey.[41] If it is necessary to look at the history of visa liberalization for Turkish nationals, it might be seen that more than 35 years ago Turkish nationals were introduced to visa requirement starting with Germany following the request of the Turkish government to prevent political asylum for Turks after the military coup which took place in September 1980.[42] However in the following process, the other EU member states started to practice visa regulations.

Starting from 2015 when the conflict in Syria became more complex in terms of position of civilian population, migrants tried to reach safer areas not just in Turkey, but also the Aegean Islands and the EU member countries. Once the EU member states realized it was a huge burden economically, politically and socially, especially on the eve of elections in the Netherlands, France and Germany, the heads of those states did not want to stay alone with an uncontrolled migration flow. As a result, the EU requested Turkey to put the readmission agreement into full force and the Joint Action Plan was adopted on November 29, 2015. According to the plan, Turkey accepted to have all irregular migrants from Turkish territory to the Greek islands in the Aegean region starting from March 20, 2016. On the other hand, it was decided that for every Syrian citizen who was resettled in Turkey a Syrian refugee should be taken to the EU countries through legal channels. It is also stated that 72,000 refugees will be taken by the EU countries while the destiny of rest of the Syrians would continue based on voluntary acceptance by member states. Reference to the burden sharing principle, the EU promised to provide additional support of three billion euros by the end of 2018, in addition to the previously promised three billion euros, in order to provide the necessary services to the Syrians harbouring in Turkey.

Turkey first expected the EU to side with the democratically elected president, government, members of parliament and will of the people rather than focusing on the destiny of the prosecution and jurisdiction procedures of plotters and perpetrators

Even though Turkey fulfilled the criteria in a short period of time and the European commission sent a proposal to the European Parliament and the Council asking to lift visas for Turkish nationals, there has been an ongoing debate about five remaining points:

- Adopting further measures to prevent corruption,
- Aligning the legislation on personal data protection with EU standards,
- Concluding an operational cooperation agreement with Europol,
- Offering effective judicial cooperation in criminal matters to all EU Member States,
- Revising legislation and practices on terrorism in line with European standards[43]

Kati Piri, Turkey Rapporteur in the European Parliament, said that visa-free travel for Turkish nationals is not possible in the short term unless Turkey will be able to fulfill these five remaining benchmarks.[44] The point that could not be agreed on is about the definition of terrorism. The EU claims that the defi-

nition of terrorism in Turkey has a narrow scope that causes violations of basic rights and liberties. It should be noted that the AK Party government is mainly concerned about the issues of security and threats against territorial integrity especially in the southeastern part of the country and limiting the activity of members of FETÖ, who attempted a coup against the democratically elected president and government as well as members of Turkish Parliament.

July 15 Coup Attempt in Turkey and the Volatile Relations with the EU

The July 15, 2016 was one of the crucial turning points in the history of Turkish democracy. In the first place, the failed coup looked like it was planned and organized by FETÖ members in the Turkish Army, but after security investigations it became clear these plotters also had a strong network within other significant institutions of the country.

In this sense, the position of Turkey and the EU towards the coup plotters differs from each other. Although the EU prioritizes values such as democracy, will of people guaranteed under free and fair elections, the rule of law, and protection of fundamental rights -which are all entrenched in Article II of the Treaty with the EU,[45] Turkey was disillusioned by statements given in the immediate aftermath of the coup attempt. The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini stated, "Turkey must respect democracy"[46] in the aftermath of the failed coup rather than declaring her support for democratically elected president and government of Turkey. Therefore, regarding the perception of the coup attempt, it might be argued that there is a certain discrepancy between Turkey and the EU. While AK Party considers itself legitimate in fighting against members of FETÖ, the EU evaluates the post-coup attempt by prioritizing rule of law, prosecution standards and processes of the plotters. Meanwhile, there is a specific attention to Turkey as "important partner and candidate country" in the European Parliament resolution, there are still serious criticisms regarding actions in the aftermath of July 15, 2016 failed coup process in the areas of democracy standards, respect for human rights, rule of law, freedoms and universal right to fair trial.[47] In addition to these, the precautions and declaration of state of emergency issues are criticized, hence discussions about possibility of reintroduction of the death penalty and the arrests of journalists, police, bureaucrats, judiciary members are other critical and problematic areas that the EU takes into account.

When it comes to the expectations and subsequent disillusionment of Turkey there are several points to be mentioned. In this respect, Turkey first expected the EU to side with the democratically elected president, government, members of parliament and will of the people rather than focusing on the destiny

of the prosecution and jurisdiction procedures of plotters and perpetrators. Another point of disillusionment was about the hesitant attitude of the EU member states in the aftermath of the coup and having no official visit for a long time at the level of state leaders of the EU members. The issue of double standards of the EU member states, that Turkey voices frequently, can be seen in their response to the failed coup process followed by terrorist attacks in Istanbul, Ankara and many other cities of the country.[48] After the Paris terrorist attacks, leaders from the EU and different parts of world came together to illustrate that they were strong together, but in the case of Turkey the heads of EU member states could not go further than stating "strong condemnation."

The relationship between Turkey and the EU under AK Party governments has been uneven but at the same time demonstrated that continuity of dialogue has been given prior attention

Another point of tension between Turkey and the EU member states emerged in the referendum campaign process of Turkish ministers in different cities of Europe. Even though the EU member states were informed and necessary permission was given by the local and required authorities in different EU member states to organize meetings with Turkish citizens, several of those were cancelled. For example, the plane of Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu was not permitted to land in the Netherlands, while Dutch police and local authorities did not allow Minister of Family and Social Policies, Fatma Betül Sayan Kaya, to enter the Turkish consulate in Rotterdam due to security reasons and several other groundless excuses. Current troubles between Turkey and the EU illustrate that there is a search for a new political balance in both Turkey and the EU.

Turkey-EU Relations: Neither Marriage, Nor Divorce but Engagement

As has been examined in this work, the relationship between Turkey and the EU under AK Party governments has been uneven but at the same time demonstrated that continuity of dialogue has been given prior attention. It might be argued that Turkey and the EU relations are more historic and valuable rather than simply being a tool of daily politics. In an unstable global international atmosphere, while politics among nations change from one day or from one case to another, Turkey-EU relations should be taken into consideration in the context of long-term politics. Turkey-EU relations including AK Party governments have dynamic and reciprocal characteristics. Therefore, it is necessary to consider Turkey and the EU as significant actors keeping in mind certain structural differences such as identity, culture and religion.

Any positive development between the two sides does not mean everything will be trouble-free in the future, but at the same time periodic downs will not mean that the EU path of AK Party governments will come to an irrevocable end

In the aftermath of the first AK Party government, Turkey has been following multi-dimensional and pro-active foreign policy preferences to provide stability and peaceful coexistence at regional and international levels. Since Turkish foreign policy has historically and traditionally prioritized relations with the EU, despite certain ups and downs at different times, there has always been a continuation of the relations so that it might be defined as "an engagement but neither marriage nor divorce." It is also important to point out that AK Party governments have always cared about the principle of reciprocity in their relationship with the EU. Accordingly, any positive development between the two sides does not mean everything will be trouble-free in the future, but at the same time periodic downs will not mean that the EU path of AK Party governments will come to an irrevocable end.

Turkey's EU Path: Endless Journey or the One that Should be Coped with?

Turkey has been knocking on the doors of the EU for more than 40 years, waiting to be taken into. In addition, Turkey has been undergoing full membership negotiations under AK Party governments for more than 12 years which is the longest time span for such a process in the history of the EU. In order to define the protracted position of Turkey in the EU accession process, it might be argued that what the AK Party should do is focus more on democratization, taking care of freedoms, and establishment of peace, economic development and providing safety in the country. In short, to prefer a vision-oriented approach instead of a result-oriented one is going to contribute to the development of the social, political and economic well-being of the country. It is important to point out that changes in Turkey–EU relations cannot be isolated from regional and international developments and practices.

Internal Check-balance Mechanism to Provide Unity in Diversity or Populist Rightist Policy?

The EU is a successful international organization in terms of creating common political and economic strategies among different European nations. "Unity in diversity" is the term that best describes the main motivation of the EU in

bringing together different actors under the roof of the union. Even though today's member states resemble each other in terms of geographical positions, cultural and identical structures, there are ongoing discussions over the future enlargement strategy of the union. The rise of rightist and extremist tendencies in the level of politics and society of the EU member states, negatively affect the EU's establishment idea of unity in diversity, multi-cultural society and peaceful coexistence. Euro-sceptic understanding believes that Turkey's accession to the EU would have costs and create burdens culturally, politically and economically. In order to sustain relations between Turkey and the EU, instead of short-run political interest, long-run policy preferences might contribute to the social, economic and political interests of both sides. ■

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