
Security Challenges in Relations between Turkey and the European Union

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Abstract:

Purpose: The aim of the article is to analyze the security problems that have emerged between Turkey and the European Union in recent years. The subject of the research was to gain extensive knowledge about contemporary relations between Turkey and the European Union. This goal was achieved by trying to analyze the most important factors determining the Turkish and Union foreign policy.

Approach/Methodology/Design: IDI research was used in the study. These methods include conducting in-depth interviews with the government officials, as well as representatives of the international institutions responsible for the foreign policy. Moreover, CAWI techniques were used in the study. The study was conducted at the turn of 2018 and 2021.

Findings: Turkey plays a key role in the security of the European Union. Currently is hosting about 4 million refugees. Moreover, Turkey has been a major transit route for European jihadists heading to the Middle East. However, Turkey is exploiting the migrant crisis and the jihadists to gain political concessions. It wishes to soften the EU's sanction against its policy in the potentially oil-rich regions of the eastern Mediterranean.

Practical implications: The results of this research may prove very useful in the context of ongoing academic discussions on the terrorist threat in the region and the dynamics and development of events in the Middle East. The article may indicate what policy should be implicate toward Turkey.

Originality/Value: The article attempts to fill a gap in the literature on the subject. Research approach may clarify the essence of the relationship between Turkey and the European Union. Thus, the results of these studies may prove very useful in the context of the ongoing academic debates surrounding the role of Turkey in the region and what is its dynamics and the interest toward the Europe. Project may indicate what policies should be adopted by the Western countries in relation to Turkey. Besides, it is unlikely that future developments in the Middle East will lead to the end of the war in the region, and therefore this analytical work will remain important for many readers, including scholars, who want to broaden their knowledge and understand the role of Turkey in international relations.

Keywords: Energy security, terrorists, Turkey, European Union, European integration, foreign policy.

JEL codes: Q48, F50, H56.

Paper type: Research study.

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1. Introduction

In last three years, we have witnessed rapid changes in relations between Turkey and the European Union (EU). Turkey is increasingly beginning to be seen as a threat to the security stability of Europe. Problems between Turkey and the EU reached a boiling point in 2020. Turkey has threatened to relocate refugees and send back jihadists to Europe. Also, Turkish government increased its military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean and began drilling for hydrocarbons. Tensions in the region soon revealed cracks in the EU's handling of Ankara. Germany favors a more moderate approach toward Turkey based on recognition of its growing power, while France is pushing for stricter measures to curb Turkey's position in the region. In its December conclusions, the European Council threatened to impose sanctions on Turkey, but refrained from announcing them (Arikan, 2006; Kujawa, 2012a).

The aim of the article is to analyze security problems that have arisen between Turkey and the EU in 2019-2021. What are the consequences of Turkey's policy for the security of Europe? Will Turkey completely limit its cooperation with Western partners, will it become more unpredictable? And finally, whether Turkey's policy will not lead to an open armed conflict? The article was organized as follows. The first chapter presents conditions of EU-Turkey relations. The second part will present the dispute between Turkey and the Union over energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean. In the next chapter, I will focus on Turkish and EU refugee policy. In the final stage, I will analyze Turkey's policy towards jihadists. The last chapter contains conclusions and recommendations for EU.

2. Methodology

The verification of the main research questions will be done based on specific methods and techniques. Due to the nature of the topic, the author used an analytical-descriptive research methodology. Their first stage included collecting publications in scientific journals and books in English or Turkish. The information and data in the paper were collected from the national library in Ankara and Berlin. There was also a discussion on Turkish politics with members of the COST group leading the project "Heritage of Islam: Narratives East, West, South, North of the Mediterranean". Interviews with politicians were also conducted in 2019 and 2020. The material collected was drawn from books and articles and analyzed using a mix of qualitative and quantitative means of analysis. This research metric will allow an analytical approach to the topic and draw conclusions, which will help in analyzing causal relationships in the context of EU-Turkey relations.

In the second stage, a content analysis of European Union source documents was conducted. Additionally, the research focused on the analysis of existing sources in foreign languages, especially official government documents. These include

documents on EU-Turkey relations, Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), and official documents of the Turkish state. To verify the research objectives in the third stage, the author discussed the preliminary assumptions with the opinions of experts at the Turkish symposium: ‘Turkey in the Aftermath of the Failed Coup Attempt’ at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA (June 20-23, 2017).

Moreover, in the fourth stage of the research, the author conducted field research in Turkey (Çanakkale, Ankara, Istanbul). During the study trips, experts and government officials, think-tank experts and academics from Turkey were interviewed. In this way, the methodological principle of the case study was fulfilled, according to which it is necessary to obtain, through a wide range of research techniques, a comprehensive research material, all to make a reasonably complete and insightful analysis. The methods thus adopted will allow for an interdisciplinary examination and provide a basis for drawing conclusions about the impact of the past on current and future relations between Turkey and the EU.

3. Literature Review

The literature on EU-Turkey relations is extremely rich. However, most researchers focus on the process of Turkey's integration with the European Union rather than on the political aspect of security in Turkish-EU relations (Kanbur, 2013; Balcer *et al.*, 2007; Szymański, 2012; Terzi, 2010; Çarkoğlu and Rubin, 2003). Direction of these studies were driven by the agenda of the Turkish government, which especially in the first years of its government (2002-2006) was heavily involved in the European integration process. However, in recent years the policy vectors of the Turkish government have changed. It has become clear that the chances for Turkey to join the EU are illusory or even impossible.

Also, the topic of economic relations between Turkey and EU were a very popular among researchers. One of the most important publications dealing with this issue is the work prepared by A. Çarkoğlu and B. Rubin titled “Turkey and the European Union: Domestic Politics, Economic Integration and International Dynamics” (2003), B. Hoekman, S. Togan, “Turkey: Economic Reform and Accession to the European Union” (2005), or S. Aydın-Düzgit, A. Duncker, D. Huber, E. Keyman and N. Tocci “Global Turkey in Europe: Political, Economic, and Foreign Policy Dimensions of Turkey's Evolving Relationship with the EU” (2013).

In the academic publications the security issues between Turkey and the EU are mainly discussed in the context of NATO (Crews, 1990; Gürkan, 1980). Finally, the issue of security based on Turkey's relations with the EU is addressed in the article prepared by Tarik H. Oğuzlu: “Turkey and the European Union: The Security Dimension” (2002). Another important publication about this topic has been prepared by Harun Arıkan “Turkey and the EU: An Awkward Candidate for EU Membership?”

(2006). The above works are extremely valuable and deepen the discussion on Turkey's importance for the Union. Especially, the authors argue that Turkey's inclusion in the EU is important for its security role. Moreover, they present estimates of the potential benefits of Turkey's inclusion in the Common European Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) and the costs of its exclusion, which fundamentally shape EU policy toward Turkey. This publication, however, addresses this issue and presents Turkey and its struggles to implement counterterrorism law and comply with European Union civil rights standards. They do not touch the security problems between Turkey and the Union in recent years.

4. Conditions

In 1959 Turkey began to apply for the membership in the EU for the first time. However, it officially applied for membership in 1987. Significant progress in relations between Turkey and EU began during the rule of the center-left Prime Minister, Bülent Ecevit (1999-2002). Finally, in 1999 the EU accepted Turkey's candidacy for membership. Besides, the problem of serious reforms was undertaken by moderately Islamic Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Especially in the first years of his rule (2002-2007), many democratic reforms were carried out in Turkey under pressure from the UE (Davutoğlu, 2010). In the following years, Turkey's implementation of reforms weakened significantly. At this time, Turkey began to change its foreign policy vectors. It began to focus on the Middle East and cooperation with Russia.

Despite this slow pace of negotiations, Turkish public opinion still supported Turkey's membership in the EU (Ergan, 2020). The poll results show that Turkey's EU membership is wanted by most supporters of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). In 2021, 46.4% of them see Turkey's future in the EU, while 38.6% were against it (Table 1).

Table 1. *Opinion of political party supporters on Turkey's membership in the European Union*

<i>Political Parties in Turkey</i>	<i>Yes, Turkey should become a member of the EU</i>			<i>No, Turkey should not become a member of the EU</i>		
	<i>July 2019</i>	<i>Dec. 2019</i>	<i>Jan. 2021</i>	<i>July 2019</i>	<i>Dec. 2019</i>	<i>Jan.2021</i>
AKP	34,5%	52,8%	46,4%	43,6%	32,7%	38,6%
CHP	61,4%	54,2%	77,0%	22,3%	42,1%	20,7%
MHP	38,8%	51,2%	60,4%	52,1%	44,1%	36,9%
HDP	72,4%	72,1%	88,5%	25,9%	24,0%	6,9%
IYI Parti	62,8%	44,7%	61,2%	29,7%	53,3%	29,9%
SP	25,0%	52,4%	52,9%	75,0%	47,6%	23,5%
Others	70,0%	81,8%	44,4%	30,0%	18,2%	33,3%
Average	47,3%	53,7%	58,4%	35,7%	34,7%	30,5%

Source: <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/cumhur-ittifakinda-catlak-yaratan-anket-iste-o-oranlar-1822942>.

5. Turkey's Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean: 'Blue Homeland'

One of the main problems that the EU has recently faced in its relations with Turkey is the competition for influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey is increasing its military presence in this area (High Representative, 2021). In March 2019, the Turkish Navy conducted its largest ever "Sea Wolf" exercise, deploying 131 warships in the Mediterranean and Black Seas. In addition, since January 2020, Turkish authorities have been drilling for offshore deposits off the eastern and western coasts of Cyprus on behalf of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which is recognized only by Turkey (Gürcanlı, 2020).

Turkey's high level of activity in this region is related to the maritime strategy adopted by the President of Turkey, known as the "Blue Homeland" or "Mavi Vatan" (Duran *et al.*, 2020). It consists of building up a military force that is no longer just to defend the homeland, but to respond beyond its borders if necessary (Denizeau, 2021). Moreover, the goal of this military doctrine is to make Turkey completely independent of foreign energy sources and turn Turkey into an energy exporter (Leal-Arcas and Grasso, 2015). In recent years, the Turkish navy, has received significant funding from the Turkish government. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the defense budget increased by 86 percent between 2010 and 2019, 27 percent of which was in 2017-2018. Turkey is currently designing and building its own frigates, landing ships, light aircraft carriers, and oil and gas exploration ships (Sönmez and Üstün, 2021; Matalucci, 2019).

Map 1. Turkish perspective on West Mediterranean Sea. The map indicates the territory of Turkey (red) and the territorial waters of Turkey according to the Turkish government (blue)



Source: <https://www.finansajans.com/son-dakika-mavi-vatan-olayi-nedir-mavi-vatan-sinirlari-neresidir-ne-zaman-basladi-neden-onemli-h26469.html>.

However, the implementation of the Blue Homeland doctrine leads to tensions with the EU. In particular, the Cypriot authorities make claims to these bodies of water. They believe that Turkey's drilling is illegal. Due to unauthorized drilling in Mediterranean waters off the coast of Cyprus, the Union has declared these activities illegal under international law (Kujawa, 2012b; World View, 2019; Matalucci, 2019). The position of Greece and Cyprus (EU member states) is supported by the Union and by France. The EU foreign ministers have adopted a legal framework to enable sanctions in relation to Turkish drilling. It will allow sanctions to be imposed on persons or entities responsible for drilling for hydrocarbon exploration and production carried out without the consent of Cyprus in the country's territorial sea, exclusive economic zone, and continental shelf. The restrictions were intended to cover persons or entities that provide financial, technical, or material support for drilling, as well as persons or entities associated with them. Ultimately, the Union decided to abandon this idea (Elinas, 2020; Erciyas, 2020).

Map 2. Maritime jurisdiction supported by EU member states



Source: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27>.

5.1 Perspectives

It seems that Turkey will not change its policy towards the Eastern Mediterranean. It has become a priority for the Turkish president to make Turkey completely independent from foreign energy sources, especially Russia. Such an attitude helps the president to strengthen his position not only on the international arena, but first and foremost at home. In recent years, Turkey has been struggling with serious economic problems, the value of the lira has fallen dramatically, inflation and unemployment have increased (Boehlke, 2020). The bad macroeconomic results make the AKP government turn its attention to the Aegean and the Mediterranean

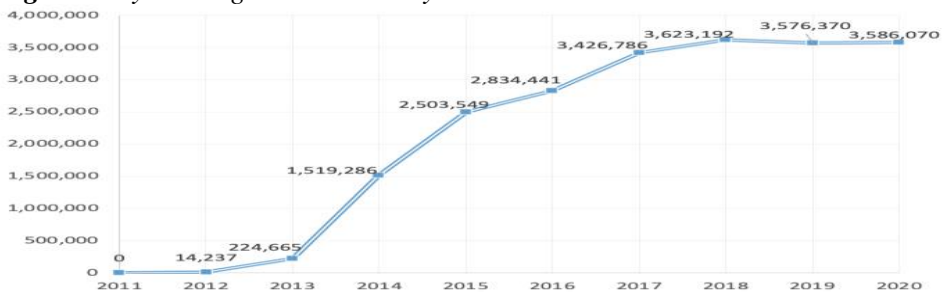
Sea, which have been neglected in its foreign policy for years. Its policy in this region is supported by most Turkish society. According to poll conducted in 2020, 75.4 percent of them support Turkey's seismic research in the eastern Mediterranean (Yeni Şafak, 2020).

Greece which represents the interests of the EU in the region, is also facing similar dilemmas as Turkey. It has been struggling with serious economic problems for years. Exploitation of rich (estimated €100 billion) offshore hydrocarbon reserves could alleviate the country's debt and make Greece a significant energy supplier to Europe. These reserves would also greatly improve Europe's energy security by reducing its dependence on Russia and would significantly strengthen Greece's geopolitical role. Therefore, it is unlikely that Greece will change its position towards Turkey. It will continue to push for sanctions against this country (Ellinas, 2020). France, whose companies (including the Total and ENI consortiums) are involved in a gas extraction project off the coast of Cyprus, is also in favour of this course. Germany, on the other hand, will advocate a more moderate stance, as it may fear the reaction of the Turkish diaspora in its country. They are also bound to Turkey by trade agreements (Germany is an important exporter of goods to Turkey) (Rubtsova, 2017). The outbreak of an open conflict could thus put them in a bad light (Pierini, 2020).

6. Refugees in Turkish-EU Relations

The refugee problem is also a source of tension between Turkey and the EU. Turkey's geographic location makes it a key player in the flow of people from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East to Europe. It experiences all the effects of wars in the region. At the beginning of the war in Syria (2011), Ankara had an open-door policy. It has decided to accept refugees for several reasons. First, Turkish authorities initially believed that Bashar al-Assad's regime would fall, and Syrian refugees would return home (Kujawa, 2011). Second, the vast majority of Turkish citizens were in favor of helping the refugees out of solidarity with "Muslim brothers". As a result, Turkey has become a place of political asylum for more than 3.6 million people (Figure 1) (Directorate, 2021).

Figure 1. Syrian migration to Turkey



Source: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27>.

In 2016, the situation changed. Thousands of refugees decided to enter European countries. In response to the migrant crisis, the Union authorities decided to visit Turkey and solve the problem. In 2016, Turkey and the Union came to an agreement. It was agreed that all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands will be returned to Turkey, but for every Syrian who returns to Turkey from the Greek islands, another Syrian will be resettled from Turkey to the EU. Also, the EU agreed to accept more refugees, liberalize the visa process for Turkish citizens, help improve refugee conditions in Turkey, and speed up the disbursement of the €3 billion allocated under the Turkey Refugee Facility. As a result of this agreement, the number of refugees arriving in Greece has decreased (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Interior, 2021).

In the following years, the number of refugees steadily increased. The Turkish authorities stressed that they were unable to handle another influx of thousands of refugees from Syria on their own. It demanded much more support from the Union - than was agreed in the 2016 agreement with the EU - and repeatedly threatened to open the borders for refugees towards Europe. Turkey's patience ran out in March in 2020. After several months of threats, Turkey's president said his country would no longer guard the gates of Europe and would not stop migrants who remained on Turkish territory under the 2016 agreement with the EU.

As a result, Turkey opened its European borders to refugees in March 2020. Ankara ordered Turkish police, coast guard and border guards not to stop the flow of refugees by land and sea to Europe, especially after the climax of the Syrian regime and Russian attacks on Idlib. However, three weeks later, Turkey closed its borders to refugees after several meetings with European leaders. The German chancellor told the Turkish president that EU was ready to increase the European refugee fund. Finally, the coronavirus pandemic completely stopped the resettlement of Syrian migrants from Turkey to EU member states (Oğuzlu, 2018).

The Turkish president's stance on refugees has changed for several reasons. First, he began to lose support in the country. In the 2020 local elections, his party lost 2 million votes (Euroactiv, 2019). One of the main reasons for the decline in his support is seen as the growing discontent in Turkey over the failure to solve the refugee problem. His party's supporters were initially open to accepting refugees. They showed strong solidarity with Syrians for religious reasons. However, over the years, they became increasingly affected by the economic crisis. Thus, economic factors play a key role in the Turkish perception of Syrian refugees (Karimov *et al.*, 2020). According to a KONDA poll conducted in 2019, 59 percent of Turks favor closing the border to refugees (Independent, 2019). However, this does not mean that Turkish citizens demand their displacement. Such views are represented only by the extreme

nationalist MHP (Nationalist Movement Party), which enjoys 10 percent support in the country.

One of the Turkish president's ideas to solve the migration problem is to establish a buffer zone in northern Syria where refugees can be resettled. Initially, EU countries were skeptical about this initiative. In 2020, Turkey decided to bring about the buffer zone itself. As a result, Turkey conducted operations in northern Syria.

However, the establishment of the so-called security zone did not have the expected effect. According to the research conducted by the Turkish-Business Confederation (Türk-İş Konfederasyonu) in 19 provinces in Turkey, mainly in Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, and Gaziantep, where asylum seekers and illegal immigrants live, 44.2 percent of them did not want to resettle in this region (Evrensel, 2021).

In addition, the research carried out in 2017 by the Humanitarian Development Foundation (İNGEV) and IPSOS indicates that 52 percent of Syrian refugees see their future in Turkey, while 44 percent of them said they never thought of leaving the country. Moreover, some 74 percent of Syrians who fled their war-torn country to seek a better life in Turkey have said they wanted to obtain Turkish citizenship (Haber Turk, 2018).

One reason for this stance is the tightening of refugee laws, especially in the US and EU, and the rise of far-right parties in Europe. Another reason is that migration routes are becoming more dangerous, and refugees do not want to be stuck in camps for many years. Therefore, they prefer to stay in Turkey where they feel safe (Düvell *et al.*, 2021; Yezdani, 2017).

6.1 Perspectives

Turkey's position on refugees is not expected to change in the coming years. It will continue to put pressure on EU countries to bear the cost of keeping the refugees (Michalopoulos, 2020). However, there is no doubt that over the years Syrians will become more and more inclined to stay in Turkey and will cease to be such an important element of Turkey's pressure on the Union.

However, the situation may change due to the deteriorating condition of the Turkish economy during the pandemic (Budak, 2020). There will be growing dissatisfaction towards the refugees, which may lead to the outbreak of national conflicts. In turn, EU countries will pressure Turkey to keep refugees within its borders. They are terrified about the next wave of refugees and the reaction of their society, so they are willing to pay Turkey more to hold them. They are unable to develop a common migration policy and cannot come to an agreement on accepting refugees. This is especially relevant for Central European countries that do not agree to accept

refugees. They believe that the main burden of accepting refugees should be borne by Western European countries and Turkey (Euroactiv, 2019; Diez, 2005).

7. Problems with European Jihadists

Another problem that is growing in relations between Turkey and the EU is the issue of deportation of European jihadists fighting in ISIS. Since the inception of the organization, Turkey has been a major transit route for European jihadists heading to the Middle East. An estimated 5,500 European jihadists have fought in Syria (Scherrer *et al.*, 2018). According to UN international law, countries should take responsibility for their citizens. Meanwhile, Turkey has been criticized for not doing enough to prevent them from traveling to Syria. In 2013, Human Rights Watch accused Turkish authorities of allowing militants to enter northern Syria to join the fight against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. In addition, the report said that the militants received medical care in Turkey and that Turkey provided the militants with money and weapons (Sokollu, 2014).

Turkish authorities reject these allegations and blame EU countries. They claim that European countries allowed jihadists to enter Turkey and then demand that Turkey make it harder for them to enter Syria. It is also taking preventive measures. According to Turkish media reports, more than 4,000 people have been denied entry into Turkey because they are believed to be radical Islamists. According to a Turkish government report, 1,100 Europeans have been arrested in Turkey (Warrell *et al.*, 2019). European countries, on the other hand, are very reluctant to allow citizens who went to fight on the side of ISIS in Syria to return. They fear public reaction and legal challenges to dealing with these citizens. They very often strip them of their citizenship and insist that citizens imprisoned in Syria or Iraq face local courts.

However, Turkey does not agree to this solution. As a result, EU countries are making individual agreements with Turkey. For example, according to a 2014 agreement with Turkey, France took back many jihadists who were sent back from Turkey. A similar agreement was also made between Ankara and Berlin. However, not all countries are willing to accept their citizens. Many of them remain in Turkish prisons. They have become a tool of pressure on the EU countries. In 2021, the Turkish president announced to release all jihadist prisoners and send them to Europe. This was in response to the sanctions on Turkey that the Union proposed because of the drilling off the coast of Cyprus (Dodman, 2019; Michalopoulos, 2020).

7.1 Perspectives

Soon, the Turkish authorities may continue to threaten to send back European jihadists to their homelands. Such threats will occur if Turkey's interests in the region are in danger. This concerns especially the extraction of deposits in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea. In turn, European states, fearing the reaction of public

opinion in their own countries, will soften their stance towards Turkey (Lehne, 2016; Desai, 2005).

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

There is no doubt that Turkey has changed its foreign policy vectors toward European Union in the last decade. It wants not only to be a regional player, but also a significant global state. The course taken by Turkey's leadership is becoming increasingly contrary to EU interests on many different levels. Turkey has used its regional military advantage to aggressively assert claims over disputed, potentially oil-rich regions of the eastern Mediterranean. It is exploiting the migrant crisis and the jihadists to gain political concessions. However, this does not mean that Turkey's pressure can be successful. The pressure will weaken as the refugees themselves become more and more satisfied with their living conditions in Turkey. This situation may change due to the economic crisis, which is increasingly being felt by Turkish citizens and the economic situation will shape the attitude of Turks towards refugees.

It seems that the proposal of imposing sanctions on Turkey supported by Greece and France will not bring the expected results. It will only strengthen the anti-European political discourse and sentiments in Turkey. It may also deepen the economic crisis in Turkey. However, such a solution is not beneficial for the EU either. It may force not only refugees to emigrate, but also Turks themselves. Therefore, maintaining economic stability in Turkey is also in the interest of the Union. Both Turkey and the Union are dependent on each other. Therefore, it is in the Union's interest to enter a working partnership, within the framework of which they will cooperate on some issues and compete on others. To this end, a road map needs to be drawn up.

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