

THE STATE AND FUTURE OF TURKEY AND GERMANY RELATIONS THE POLITICAL BACKDROP

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Abstract

This paper analyses the complex and intertwined relationship between Germany and Turkey. The profound and multi-dimensional relationship between the countries is surveyed with a specific eye on the political ebbs and flows of the last thirty years. The paper specifically focuses on the domestic political agendas of the two countries, and puts their bilateral relationship as well as their respective relationships with the EU to the fore. Different political parties in Germany, how they view Turkish- German and Turkey- EU relations, how they position themselves vis-à-vis German

Turks, and German governments' policies are described in an historical manner in order to shed light into the intricacies of the relationship. The economic and the security issues are deliberately left out for the two adjacent papers part of this project. Based on a thorough understanding of the domestic and international dynamics that have shaped this relationship, the paper builds 3 scenarios for the future of the political relations between these two Allies, explaining the likely benefits and the costs of these specific scenarios as well.

Key words: Turkey, Germany, politics, Turkey – EU relations, immigration.



**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
FOUNDATION** For Freedom.

Turkey

Introduction

Relations between Turkey and Germany dates back to 18th century, when an agreement on Friendship, Shipping and Commerce was reached between the Ottoman Empire and Prussia, and the the first ambassador, Ahmet Resmi Efendi was assigned to Berlin in 1763.¹ Sultan Abdulhamit the 2nd and Wilhelm the 2nd's positive relations, the Ottoman and German Empire's military and economic cooperation lasted well into the World War I. The young Turkish Republic was also sympathetic to Germans, and the memories of German scientists and professors fleeing from Germany and coming to Turkey in 1930s, founding Chairs in Universities, are stories that Turks proudly cite. High level visits and economic relations amongst two countries continued in 1950s and in 1961, Turkish workers, parents, some grand-parents of today's (German-Turks) emigrated to Germany under the labour agreement between the two countries. Today, close to 3 million people with Turkish background live in Germany, half of them with the right to vote for Turkish general and presidential elections.²

Relations between these two allies are complex and profound. Domestic matters in each country affect bilateral

relations, and the regional organizations as well as the global agenda complicates the dealings between them. While Germany continues to support Turkey's European and NATO ally role today as well as in the 1970s and 1980s, since the end of the Cold War, relations became more complicated. This paper describes the ebbs and flows of these relations, taking into account the political players in Germany and their concerns vis-a-vis Turkey and Turkish politics. A brief explanation of the German political parties and their stance on immigration, citizenship, Turkey-EU relations is followed by a short explanation of the mostly newly founded institutions to deal with issues related to the Turkish population in Germany. These descriptions and explanations provide a base to grasp the intricacy of the relations before the chronological survey of the relations. The sequence of events are important to understand the transactional nature of the interactions especially in the Merkel-Erdoğan period (since 2005), while the political party stances are important to understand the changes in the discourse towards Turkey. Based upon this understanding of the German political scene, three scenarios for the future of the relations are set forth and evaluated.

Political Parties in Germany and their stance towards migration/immigration, the EU and Turkey- EU Relations

There are 6 political parties in the German parliament Bundestag as of December 2020. Christian Democratic Union of Germany (Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands - CDU)/Christian Social Union (CSU); Social Democratic Party (SPD), Liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP), Die Linke, and Die Grüne/Bündnis, (the Greens) and the Alternative for Germany (AfD).

The central conservative CDU has been in power since

2005 under the leadership of Merkel.³ CDU led Germany under Helmut Kohl's leadership from 1982 to 1998. CSU, the Bavarian sister of CDU, stronghold of conservative politics, has led all Bavarian governments from 1962 to 2008.⁴ CDU and CSU cooperate on the federal level and form a Unity group in the federal parliament. CDU/CSU usually support migration policy since it responds to Germany's labor force needs and improves economic growth. In 2012, CDU/CSU started the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign

1 The embassy of Turkey in Berlin. Büyükelçilik Tarihi ve Önceki Büyükelçilerimiz. [Embassy History and Former Ambassadors]. <http://berlin.be.mfa.gov.tr/Mission/MissionChief-History>

2 Deutsche Welle. (2020, July 30). Almanya'da 2,8 milyon Türkiye kökenli yaşıyor. [2.8 million people of Turkish origin live in Germany]. <https://www.dw.com/tr/almanya-da-28-milyon-t1%C3%BCrkiye-k%C3%B6kenli-ya%C5%9F%C4%B1yor/a-54385723>

3 Turhan, E. (2013). The 2013 German Federal Elections: Key Determinants and Implications for German-Turkish Relations. "Merkel-popular in 2013 – although 3rd term (54 % of the vote if people could elect the Chancellor directly)". (p. 3).

4 Turhan, E. (2013). The 2013 German Federal Elections: Key Determinants and Implications for German-Turkish Relations. (p. 5); See also: Deutsche Welle. (2010, October 9). Germany and Turkey agree to work harder on integration. 2010- German President Christian Wulff, who said on the 20th anniversary of German reunification on October 3 that Islam was "now part of Germany". <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-and-turkey-agree-to-work-harder-on-integration/a-6097261>.

Professional Qualifications Act, to facilitate the immigration of highly qualified people. In terms of dual citizenship, in 2013, CDU/CSU rejected the idea of dual citizenship, since they believe that naturalization is a commitment to Germany and its values, and German citizenship is a question of loyalty to the German state.⁵

The other majority party in Germany, Social Democratic Party (SPD) is one of the oldest – existing political parties and led Germany under the leadership of Gerhard Schröder⁶ from 1998 to 2005.⁷ It has also been the main coalition partner of the CDU from 2005 to 2009 and since 2013. While SPD is the political party that most German Turks voted for, it lost this support⁸ especially after the high profile SPD member Sarrazin's controversial book printed in 2010, that claimed immigration has had negative effects for Germany's society and economy, and blamed genetic factors for Turkish population's in the German school system.⁹ Yet, SPD is torn between those who welcome refugees and immigrants and those who oppose more immigration.¹⁰

The party that received most of the votes following the CDU/CSU and the SPD, Alternative for Germany (AfD), is the German version of the parochial parties that are gaining support all over Europe since the economic crisis of 2008. The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) founded only 7 months before the 2013 elections, entered the parliament in 2017 and by 2019, AfD was represented in all 16 states. AfD's adoption of an explicitly anti-Islam policy came in May 2016 and its 2017 election manifesto had a section on why "Islam does not belong to Germany".¹¹ Yet the election manifesto, as expected from an election manifesto read that "moderate" Muslims who accepted integration were "valued

members of the society".

The fourth political party in the German Parliament, the Liberal Free Democratic Party, appeals to professionals and high income electorate. The party regained its long-held seats at the Parliament in 2017, which it lost in 2013 when its votes fell under the 5 % threshold. FDP espouses liberal values and liberal economic policies.

The Green Party's popularity increased in 2011 when anti-nuclear movement strengthened after the Fukushima nuclear disaster, and its historical win came when Green Party candidate became the Baden Württemberg's PM the same year.¹² The Green Party of Germany is not novel to Turkish audiences since Cem Özdemir, German MP of Turkish descent, was the party's co-chair from 2008 to 2018. Die Linke- the left party won 9.2 % of the votes in the 2017 elections, a decade after merging of the leftist parties Party of Democratic Socialism and Labor and Social Justice- the Electoral Alternative. It is mostly popular in the former East Germany states.

German political parties' views on the EU and Turkey-EU relations are predictable once the parties' ideological stands are understood. Surely the older parties such as the CDU and the SPD have different fractions within them and depending on the global and regional balances their leaders' preferences may change but their overall stance on EU and Turkey-EU relations can be anticipated.

While the CDU/CSU supports European integration, Turkey is considered a border state. In 2004, Merkel argued that, Turkey, because of its geographical position, population,

⁵ Turhan, E. (2013). The 2013 German Federal Elections: Key Determinants and Implications for German-Turkish Relations. (p. 6).

⁶ Gerard Schroder, the former head of the SPD and the Chancellor, launched a labor market reform, which was bought in by CDU/CSU and the FDP but created an upheaval within the SPD.

⁷ Turhan, E. (2013). The 2013 German Federal Elections: Key Determinants and Implications for German-Turkish Relations. (p. 4).

⁸ Turhan, E. (2013). The 2013 German Federal Elections: Key Determinants and Implications for German-Turkish Relations. On other reason for SPD's loss of popularity is its leader Peer Steinbrück's being the top earner in the Bundestag in 2013. (p. 4).

⁹ Turhan, E. (2013). The 2013 German Federal Elections: Key Determinants and Implications for German-Turkish Relations. "In 2009, 50.2 % of German Turks voted for SPD". (p. 6); See also: Szabo, S. F. (2018, March). Germany and Turkey: The Unavoidable Partnership. Foreign Policy at Brookings. "According to a 2016 poll, 64 to 69 % of the Turkish German population supported SPD compared to 6.1 %, and 13.4 % Greens, 9.6 % Die Linke". (p. 6).

¹⁰ Szabo, S. F. (2018, March). Germany and Turkey: The Unavoidable Partnership. Foreign Policy at Brookings. (p. 6).

¹¹ BBC. (2020, February 11). Germany's AfD: How right-wing is nationalist Alternative for Germany? <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37274201>

¹² Turhan, E. (2013). The 2013 German Federal Elections: Key Determinants and Implications for German-Turkish Relations. (p. 5).

national and cultural identity, economic and political structure, is an obstacle to the European political union.¹³ Merkel's position towards Turkey's membership changed through time, and the 2013 election program of the CDU/CSU dropped the "privileged partnership" concept that has been used almost for a decade by German conservatives.¹⁴ The "privileged partnership" excludes the prospect of full-membership, positioning Turkey as a strategic ally that cannot be ignored, yet always short of a "true" European. Whatever that might mean to parties is actually non-relevant, since the problem lies in its stark contrast to Turkey's decades long position and will to become a full member of the EU.

The Social Democrats are staunch supporters of the European Union, seeing it essential for a "social" Europe. The SPD sees the need for the EU to reform itself, not only for Turkey but all enlargements, therefore Turkey's accession is not a problem in itself.¹⁵

The liberals are also pro-Turkish membership to the EU, not only because of the business interests of both sides, but also because of Turkey's strategic importance. While the mentioned parties pursue a *pacta sunt servanda* policy they do remind Turkey's failing rule of law, human rights and democratization record often since Turkey's image as a modern Muslim country is integral to their support.

The Left Party supports Turkey's accession to the EU with a careful eye on the conditionality of democratization, yet also

warns the EU not to see Turkey as a "gendarmarie of the West against the Islamist terrorism".¹⁶

The Greens see Europe as a multicultural community, and equate Europeanization as democratization and modernization processes along with multicultural diversity. Arguing that they are against a cultural war to keep Turkey out of the EU, they conclude that for them, the EU is not part of a Christian cultural bloc.¹⁷

The AfD is consistent in its exclusionary stance towards Turkey, as clearly shown in the co-leader Alexander Gauland's attack on the then Federal Commissioner for Immigration, Refugees and Integration, Aydan Özoğuz (SPD).¹⁸ Gauland proposed to send Özdoğan back to Anatolia, a prime example of similar far right political parties.

German political parties' discourses on Turkish immigrants flare up during election times, when citizenship laws are being discussed or when Islamist groups commit terrorist acts.

It should also be noted that in order to alleviate the fiery relations during those years, Germany introduced new mechanisms such as the German-Turkish Strategic Dialogue (2013), for bilateral cooperation between governments on fighting terrorism and extremism, security, regional and international issues.¹⁹ In 2019, a Federal Foreign Office Department that only deals with domestic political aspects of German-Turkish relations is founded.²⁰

¹³ Düzgüt, S. (2011). "Avrupa Birliği-Türkiye İlişkilerine Postyapısalcı Yaklaşım: Almanya Örneğinde Dış Politika ve Söylem Analizi". ["Poststructuralist approach to the EU-Turkey Relations: In Germany and Foreign Policy Discourse Analysis Case"]. *Uluslararası İlişkiler*. [International Relations]. Issue 8, Number 29. (p. 57).

¹⁴ Turhan, E. (2013). *The 2013 German Federal Elections: Key Determinants and Implications for German-Turkish Relations*. (p. 7).

¹⁵ Düzgüt, S. (2011). "Avrupa Birliği-Türkiye İlişkilerine Postyapısalcı Yaklaşım: Almanya Örneğinde Dış Politika ve Söylem Analizi". ["Poststructuralist approach to the EU-Turkey Relations: In Germany and Foreign Policy Discourse Analysis Case"]. *Uluslararası İlişkiler*. [International Relations]. Issue 8, Number 29. (pp. 59-60).

¹⁶ Ermağan, I. (2012). *Avrupa Birliği Bağlamında Türkiye-Almanya İlişkileri*. [Turkey-Germany Relations in the Context of the EU]. (p. 85).

¹⁷ Düzgüt, S. (2011). "Avrupa Birliği-Türkiye İlişkilerine Postyapısalcı Yaklaşım: Almanya Örneğinde Dış Politika ve Söylem Analizi". ["Poststructuralist approach to the EU-Turkey Relations: In Germany and Foreign Policy Discourse Analysis Case"]. *Uluslararası İlişkiler*. [International Relations]. Issue 8, Number 29. (p. 63).

¹⁸ Open Democracy. (2019, July 29). *Merkel's dilemma: Germany's polarising 'Turkish issue' returns*. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/merkels-dilemma-germanys-polarising-turkish-issue-returns/>

¹⁹ Turhan, E. (2013). *The 2013 German Federal Elections: Key Determinants and Implications for German-Turkish Relations*. (p. 7).

²⁰ Turhan, E. (2019). *German-Turkish Relations Revisited. "The European Dimension, Domestic and Foreign Politics and Transnational Dynamics"*. (p.22).

Germany and Turkey in the last 30 years

Germany founded its foreign policy on commitment to European integration in the aftermath of the World War II. German- French partnership was the defining aspect of how the EU worked, and how they approached to Turkey as a potential member during the Kohl- Mitterand (1990s) and Schröder- Chirac (2000s) years. With the end of the Cold War, Turkey's geographic importance waned and its human rights record became more of an issue with the German policy makers, specifically with Helmut Kohl's CDU.²¹ In 1994, this tension was reflected to arms trade between the two countries, Germany stopping the shipment arguing that the weapons it sells to Turkey are being used against international agreements. In 1997, the EU did not include Turkey amongst the candidates for full membership along with the Central and Eastern European countries as well as Cyprus. This resulted in a heated discussion over Turkey's full membership prospects between Mesut Yılmaz and Helmut Kohl, and resulted in suspension of political dialogue between the EU and Turkey until 1999. Kohl's previous remarks that the EU is the fruit of a Christian culture, therefore Turkey was not fit for membership did not help the matters. Between the 1997 Luxembourg Summit and the 1999 Helsinki Summit, when Turkey was finally granted the full candidacy status, three regional crises revealed Turkey's geopolitical importance to its European partners. The first one was the capture of Abdullah Öcalan, the head of the Kurdish terrorist organization PKK, in the Greek Embassy in Kenya after his attempts to stay in Italy; revealing that the EU was not particularly impartial in the Kurdish issue. The crises in Nagorno-Karabakh and Bosnia and Kosovo and Turkey's role in mediation and peacekeeping efforts, reiterated Turkey's strategic importance in security of the larger European geography.²² In the meantime, the German Chancellor Kohl left his seat to Gerard Schroder in 1998

and incoming Social Democrat (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, SPD) - Green (Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen) coalition was more sympathetic to Turkey's EU membership.

Following the 1999 Helsinki Summit, Turkey's EU accession process started, and until 2005 Turkey went through major political reforms that changed the 1982 Constitution that was the fruit of a military coup.²³ However, the golden age of Europeanization for Turkey was coming to an end. 2005 was the year when the CDU came back as the major coalition partner under Angela Merkel presidency. At the time, Merkel considered Turkey as a threat to European political unity, and constructed Turkey's membership as a challenge to the European Union as a political project.²⁴

In 2006, only a year after Turkey's accession negotiations started with Turkey, European Council suspended negotiations on 8 chapters because of the unresolved Turkey – Cyprus issues, in 2007 French President Nicholas Sarkozy vetoed opening of new chapters, and up until 2013 continued to do so on 5 chapters.²⁵

In the face of these developments, the Turkish establishment was also losing its appetite for Europeanization. One of the reasons for this loss of appetite was the heightened security threat perception of the military when the PKK took up arms again and peace in the south-east crumbled. As the PKK carried out attacks, the military vocally criticized those EU reforms which restricted armed intervention in the region. The chief of staff declared that the 'Turkish Armed Forces would continue its war against the PKK despite its restricted powers'.²⁶ The government was prompt to respond to the military's demands, and the Anti-Terror Law was amended to include a more comprehensive definition of terrorism.²⁷

²¹ Szabo, S. F. (2018, March). Germany and Turkey: The Unavoidable Partnership. Foreign Policy at Brookings. (p. 2).

²² Eralp, A. "Turkey and the European Union," in Lenore G. Martin and Dimitris Keridis, eds., The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy (Cambridge MA & London: MIT Press, 2002). (pp.63–83).

²³ For a detailed survey of the political reforms and the institutionalization of Turkey- EU relations, see Alemdar, Z. (2008). Turkish Civil Society and the European Union: Domestic Politics through International Organizations. VdM Verlag Muller. The Turkish political system went through a period of critical reforms between 1999 and 2004. During that time, 34 articles of the constitution were amended and nine reform packages were implemented.

²⁴ Düzgüç, S. (2011). "Avrupa Birliği-Türkiye İlişkilerine Postyapısalcı Yaklaşım: Almanya Örneğinde Dış Politika ve Söylem Analizi". ["Poststructuralist approach to the EU-Turkey Relations: In Germany and Foreign Policy Discourse Analysis Case"]. Uluslararası İlişkiler. [International Relations]. Issue 8, Number 29. (p. 57).

²⁵ For how the Republic of Cyprus' membership to the EU in 2004, affected the relations, see Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Declaration by Turkey on Cyprus". http://www.mfa.gov.tr/declarationby-turkey-on-cyprus_-29-july-2005.en.mfa

²⁶ Hurriyet Daily News. (2005, August 6).

²⁷ The new law prescribed harsher penalties for 'propaganda' and 'praise' of terrorism. This broader definition of terrorist acts was not in line with the Council of Europe Convention for the Prevention of Terrorism (CETS).

When the reform process came to a halt, the 2007 presidential elections in Turkey renewed discussions concerning the constitutive issue of secularism. In spite of criticisms, during the 2007 general elections the AKP won yet another landslide victory. Rights of minorities was another controversial issue at the time, high level efforts of reconciliation with Armenia started in 2005, yet murder of the Turkish Armenian journalist Hrant Dink in 2007, and hostile commentaries from the minister of justice at the time, Cemil Çiçek, stalled the process. Despite the football diplomacy in 2009 and the signing of the Zurich protocol to open the borders between the countries, Armenian issue continues to haunt Turkey's relations with European countries. The Ergenekon case breaking out in 2007 put Turkey face to face with yet another scandal in the judiciary.²⁸ The Light House Association Case (Deniz Feneri V.) in 2008 was another issue that complicated Turkey's relations with Germany and the line between the domestic and international politics blurred. The German branch of the Turkish Islamic charity organization Deniz Feneri was found to have embezzled donations that were meant for poverty-stricken Palestinians, Turkish slum-dwellers and refugees in Pakistan.²⁹ Given that the organization had support of high level Turkish bureaucrats and links with the Justice and Development Party, the opposition in Turkey was critical of the CDU, and especially Merkel for not taking a stance.

In 2010, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel proposed a "privileged partnership" with Turkey, a discourse her party supported for a while. Ankara, having always rejected this option, rejected this proposal. Another tense moment came in 2011, when the then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, appearing in Düsseldorf, urged Turks to "integrate" into German society, but not to "assimilate," and to teach their children Turkish first, German second.³⁰ While these types of tit for tat discourse became almost a normal in bilateral relations, 2011 was the beginning of the Arab uprisings and start of the refugee and asylum seekers started to come to the doors of the European Union. In the meantime, there

was no improvement in the Turkey-EU relations. The Cyprus impasse as well as French President Sarkozy's anti-Turkey stance did not leave any room for improvement. In May 2012, the European Commission launched "Positive Agenda" to overcome this stagnation, yet when it was Cyprus's turn to preside over the European Council, Turkey froze the relations with the Union between July and December 2012.

In early 2013, Germany was adopting a more positive towards EU's accession, the German-Turkish Strategic Dialogue Mechanism was launched. This was partly due to the fact that the German business world was for enhancing the economic dialogue with Turkey.³¹

Yet, in the summer of 2013, Gezi protests erupted. In face of the government's decision to demolish the only green space in Istanbul's social and cultural centre, Taksim, to build a shopping mall, protests that started in Istanbul grew and expanded all over Turkey. When the government intervened violently, Germany unilaterally vetoed the opening of Turkish Chapter 22 accession talks with the EU. This caused a serious rift between Ankara and Berlin, since Berlin grounded its veto inexplicitly on Ankara's reaction to the Gezi Park demonstrations. The German attitude contradicted the position of the European Commission (EC), which believed that "more than ever, [...] there is a need to push for the negotiations for new chapters being open." The bilateral tensions eased only after Germany lifted its veto on the Chapter 22 negotiations.

In the meantime, Erdoğan changed the Turkish election law to allow Turkish citizens abroad to vote in referenda and presidential elections in 2008, and for the August 2014 presidential election Turks were able to vote from their foreign countries of residence. Exportation of the political polarization in the Turkish homeland to host countries created serious problems for bilateral relations between Germany and Turkey.

²⁸ Ergenekon is argued to be a clandestine organization with strong ties to the military, which acts as a 'deep state' trying to govern the country as it pleases. The trial ended in July 2019, with the charge that there was no concrete evidence of the presence of an Ergenekon terrorist organization, and since a non-existent terrorist organization can neither have managers, members, or supporters, it is also not possible for it to commit crimes.

²⁹ Deutsche Welle. (2008, September 17). German Court Hands Down Jail Terms in Islamic Charity Scandal. <https://www.dw.com/en/german-court-hands-down-jail-terms-in-islamic-charity-scandal/a-3652266>

³⁰ You are Part of Germany, but also Part of our Great Turkey, Der Spiegel (Feb. 28, 2011), <http://www.spiegel.d/nternationala/urop/rdogan-urges-turks-not-to-assimilate-you-are-part-of-germany-but-also-part-of-our-great-turkey-a-748070.html>.

³¹ Turhan, E. Germany's Domesticated European Policy: Implications for EU and Turkey. (p. 152).

The refugee crisis provided fertile ground for German-Turkish relations. The Syrian War was mostly neglected by the Europeans until the refugees' tragedies became visible to the public eye. 850 Syrian refugees drowned off the coast of Lampedusa island of Italy in April 2015, bodies of 71 people were found inside an abandoned truck in Austria on 28 August 2015 and the body of the three year old Syrian boy Aylan Kurdi washed up on Turkey's Aegean shores in 3 September 2015. People fleeing from the Syrian war became a problem that the European policy makers could not ignore and had to act. Despite several European Council resolutions and conclusions, the European Union could not produce a policy for the refugees until Germany assumed leadership, and Merkel managed to transfer the solution of the refugee crisis to outside borders of the EU with the Turkey-EU deal. In October 2015, Chancellor Angela Merkel referred to Turkey as a key actor for the protection of the EU's external borders in October 2015 and advocated the opening of new chapters in Turkey's accession talks with the EU after a 2-year hiatus.³² From 2015 to May 2016, Turkish-German relations were restored because of the Migration Deal. During the 29 November 2015 EU-Turkey Summit, not only a joint action plan for the irregular migration flows was reached, but also a "reward package" for Turkey was announced. Merkel's diplomatic tours were successful in granting Turkey the launch of the accession talks on Chapter 17, which was blocked by Cyprus as well as the 3 billion Euro financial aid for Turkey for hosting the refugees.³³

Another incentive to Ankara for its gatekeeping role in the refugee crisis was the postponement of the critical Turkey Progress Report until after the 1 November 2015

general elections.³⁴ This was a particular sign about the transactionality of the Turkish - European relations, as the report that acknowledged the significant backsliding of democracy in Turkey was postponed upon Ankara's demand, in return for Turkey's cooperation for refugees.³⁵

In June 2016, when the Bundestag adopted a resolution recognizing the deportation process and death of Armenians in 1915 as a genocide, German-Turkish relationship went downhill again. Ankara banned German parliamentary delegations from visiting the Incirlik base hosting approximately 250 German troops as part of the anti-IS Coalition, demanding the German federal government distance itself from the Armenian resolution.³⁶ Although the ban was lifted when Merkel described the resolution as legally not binding, this tense period still ended with Germany's removal of its troops and equipment from the Incirlik base to Jordan in July 2017. During this period, there were also investigations into a Turkish organization in Germany, Federation of Associations of Turkish Democratic Idealists (ADÜTDF), that brings together the Turkish ultranationalist groups in the country.³⁷ This association was a source of concern for German politicians.³⁸ Yet, when a German Interior Ministry report that referred to the Turkish regime as a supporter of terrorist groups in the Middle East was leaked, the relations were severed further.³⁹

In July 2016, after the coup attempt was averted by the Turkish government, Ankara resented the European bureaucrats' late response to convey their support to the Turkish government.⁴⁰ During the rest of the summer, high level official visits by the European leaders kept Ankara

³² Turhan, E. The Struggle for the German-Turkish Partnership: Preventing the "Train Crash". (2016, December 4) E-International Relations. <https://www.e-ir.info/2016/12/04/the-struggle-for-the-german-turkish-partnership-preventing-the-train-crash/>

³³ Turhan, E. Germany's Domesticated European Policy: Implications for the EU and Turkey. (pp. 159-160).

³⁴ Saatçioğlu, B. (2020). European Politics and Society. (p. 11).

³⁵ Saatçioğlu, B. (2020). European Politics and Society. (p. 11).

³⁶ Turhan, E. The Struggle for the German-Turkish Partnership: Preventing the "Train Crash". (2016, December 4) E-International Relations. <https://www.e-ir.info/2016/12/04/the-struggle-for-the-german-turkish-partnership-preventing-the-train-crash/>

³⁷ The director of the Confederation of European Turks is a current member of the Parliament from the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) in Turkey.

³⁸ Deutsche Welle. (2020, November 11). Ülkücüler Almanya'da da yasaklanacak mı? [Will idealists be banned in Germany too?]. <https://www.dw.com/tr/ülkücüler-almanya-da-da-yasaklanacak-mi/a-55555541>

³⁹ Turhan, E. The Struggle for the German-Turkish Partnership: Preventing the "Train Crash". (2016, December 4) E-International Relations. <https://www.e-ir.info/2016/12/04/the-struggle-for-the-german-turkish-partnership-preventing-the-train-crash/>.

⁴⁰ On 15 July 2016, a group within the Turkish Armed Forces associated with the Fetullah Terror Organisation (FETO) attempted a coup to which several thousands of citizens, the Turkish parliament, government, police forces, and large segments of the military resisted. On 20 July 2016, the Turkish Government announced a State of Emergency for the entire country in response to the failed coup attempt.

busy. When the Turkish state's State of Emergency rules lead to dismissal of many civil servants as well as detention of around 35 thousand people including German journalists, and Ankara demanded extradition of hundreds of military officials who requested asylum in Germany, Turkish-German relations were stranded again. While Germany rejected the requests of extradition based on Turkey's weak rule of law and criticized the judicial system, relations with other European states deteriorated as well. Before the 2017 presidential referendum in Turkey, Turkish ministers' European visits estranged relations not only with German but Belgian, French and especially Dutch governments.⁴¹ Estrangement between Germany and Turkey became worse when Ankara compared Germany's ban on election rallies to "Nazi practices" and Germany's subsequent veto on the talks between the EU and Turkey on the Customs Union updates.⁴²

Yet Germany's veto on the CU talks became a source of contention amongst the European member states, and France reminded importance of Turkey's importance for Europe's economy and security issues.⁴³ Inevitable German-Turkish rapprochement came after several high level governmental visits between the two countries in September and October 2018, accompanied by business delegations from both sides.⁴⁴

Yet during the budget discussions of the European Union in 2018, Turkey's poor rule of law record became an issue,

and the Parliament and the Council decided that for the amounts put in reserve to be released, Turkey would need to make "measurable sufficient improvements in the fields of rule of law, democracy, human rights and press freedom."⁴⁵ The June 2018 dated General Affair Council decision not to open any new chapters in the membership process but also to tie the CU agreement modernization to Turkey's initiatives towards democratization and alignment in foreign policy towards the third countries did not get the results it aimed.⁴⁶ Turkey's Libya, Syria and Eastern Mediterranean policies conflicted with EU member states' preferences and Ankara did not shy away from using the refugees as a bargaining stick. Turkey opened its borders to Bulgaria and Greece, letting refugees pass through Europe in February 2019 following an airstrike by the Syrian regime near Idlib, killing 36 Turkish soldiers.⁴⁷ In March 2019 when Erdoğan visited Brussels, German politicians' comments were diverse. While the FDP's Alexander Graf Lambsdorff argued for Turkey's value as a border between Syria and Europe, CSU's member of the EP Manfred Weber argued that Turkey needed to improve its human rights record, and stop drilling off the coast of Cyprus.⁴⁸ Greens' position was critical towards the European Union itself as well, reminding Europe's responsibilities in human rights.⁴⁹ In March 2019, the European Parliament passed a symbolic resolution calling for the formal suspension of Turkey's accession bid.⁵⁰

In October 2020, in the midst of the Eastern Mediterranean crisis, the European Council launched a "positive political

41 McFadden, S.W. (2019). German Law Journal. "German citizenship law and the Turkish diaspora. It was not only the Turkish electioneering that provoked debate in Germany, but also the result of that constitutional referendum election, in which sixty-three percent of German-resident Turks voted for the proposed changes, as compared to just fifty-one percent in the total vote. German politicians from the ascendant right-wing "Alternative for Germany" (Alternative für Deutschland), invited the Turks who were in favor of authoritarianism to return to their own country where they could enjoy it all they wanted". (p. 85).

42 Turhan, E. (2019). German-Turkish Relations Revisited. "The European Dimension, Domestic and Foreign Politics and Transnational Dynamics". (p.14).

43 Hurriyet Daily News. (2017, July 7). EU divided over calls to block Turkey's bid. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/eu-divided-over-calls-to-block-turkeys-bid-117671>

44 Turhan, E. (2019). German-Turkish Relations Revisited. "The European Dimension, Domestic and Foreign Politics and Transnational Dynamics". (p.15).

45 European Parliament.(2018, October 2). https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0365_EN.html

46 Adar et al. (2020). SWP. Comment no. 48.

47 The Guardian.(2020, February 29). Erdoğan says border will stay open as Greece tries to repel influx. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/29/erdogan-says-border-will-stay-open-as-greece-tries-to-repel-influx>

48 Deutsche Welle. (2020, November 11). Alman siyasiler Erdoğan'ın Brüksel ziyaretini nasıl yorumladı? [How did German politicians interpret Erdogan's visit to Brussels?]. <https://www.dw.com/tr/alman-siyasiler-erdo%C4%9Fan%C4%B1n-br%C3%BCksel-ziyaretini-nas%C4%B1-yorumlad%C4%B1/a-52704041>

49 Deutsche Welle. (2020, November 11). Alman siyasiler Erdoğan'ın Brüksel ziyaretini nasıl yorumladı? [How did German politicians interpret Erdogan's visit to Brussels?]. <https://www.dw.com/tr/alman-siyasiler-erdo%C4%9Fan%C4%B1n-br%C3%BCksel-ziyaretini-nas%C4%B1-yorumlad%C4%B1/a-52704041>.

50 Deutsche Welle. (2019, March 13). European Parliament votes to suspend Turkey's EU membership bid. <https://www.dw.com/en/european-parliament-votes-to-suspend-turkeys-eu-membership-bid/a-47902275>

EU-Turkey agenda with a specific emphasis on the modernisation of the Customs Union and trade facilitation, people to people contacts, High level dialogues, continued cooperation on migration issues, in line with the 2016 EU-

Turkey Statement.”⁵¹ While the EU is always careful in underlining Turkey’s importance as an economic partner and its role in Europe’s security, it is obvious that there is no predictable timeframe for Turkey’s full accession to the EU.

Scenarios

The ebbs and flows of the last decade in Germany- Turkey relations are too fast to follow. Yet it is also clear that neither side can afford to break or even make a serious dent in the relations. Neither the economic, security but also the political bonds admit the parties to drift apart. Three scenarios as to how the Turco-German relations might shape up in the future; keeping the relations transactional, Germany taking a tougher stance on political issues, and scaling up the relations to new areas, all have potential benefits and costs. Yet, as in any relationship, it would be beneficial to take different look at the history of interactions, not repeat the trajectory of the past, and improve relations in light of the new necessities of the post-COVID era.

Scenario 1. Keep relations transactional

As discussed widely above, the last 15 years of relations, stamped by Erdoğan and Merkel, are transactional. While the national, regional and the international context changes the reactions for short periods of time, both sides are comfortable knowing that they would negotiate somehow.

The downside to this type of relationship is that it affects the public opinion too much, causing distrust amongst publics. During election times when leaders’ sustainability is at stake, discourse around relations becomes very tense, and may suscite reactions from ultranationalist groups. Another problem with this approach is that the same issues haunt the relations and there seems to be no end to tensions.

On the other hand, both sides knowing that they cannot afford to lose eachother and they would come to a negotiation sooner or later, the relations are versatile. Moreover, leadership and administrative changes may transform the relations and the broader bilateral agenda.

Scenario 2. Germany making rule of law and democratization a priority in bilateral relations

Germany’s focus on democracy within the region requires it imposes democratic norms and values on such a close partner as Turkey. All the political parties in Germany, maybe with the exception of the AfD, because of its intrinsicy Eurosceptic stance and parochial ways, demand and desire a Turkey where rule of law reigns and human rights is observed. Yet in a scenario where Germany tries to exert its influence over Turkey through political means to change its domestic policies, history of relaitons show that Turkey will react to this negatively since it would be an infringement upon its sovereignty. At this point in time, there seems to be no motivation for Ankara to change its policies since both sides collide in all areas of mutual interest in security.

Another downside of this scenario, would be that relations can actually turn to be very hostile, including unrest in societies. Whenever Germany makes strong comments about Ankara’s policies, relations gets tense as could be seen in the aftermath of 2013 and 2016.

Scenario 3. Scale collaboration areas up

The last, and best scenario is for both sides to find new issues to cooperate. While new issues exert their own presence because of the necessities of the era, being proactive and thinking about how to do so would benefit both parties. Bringing diversity to the decision making mechanisms of both countries’ foreign policy and teaming up about China’s future in the markets, transformation of the global supply chains, affected by the COVID 19, green economy, and digital cooperation would bring new issues to ponder.

⁵¹ Delegation of the European Union to Turkey. (2020, October 2). European Council conclusions on external relations, 1 October 2020. <https://www.avrupa.info.tr/en/eeas-news/european-council-conclusions-external-relations-1-october-2020-10390>

One challenge to this scenario might be the leadership of both sides, who might want to continue the transactional relations. Yet there are initiatives that bring together business groups and civil society and those can be fertile grounds to improve relations.

The benefit to this scenario is that this is already happening

whether or not the states require it or not. The global agenda imposes a different set of rules to all parties, that are yet to be written and Turkey and Germany have intrinsic ties that have the potential to do this. The fact that the COVID-19 vaccine was developed by a German-Turkish couple, both children of Turkish immigrants is probably the best case in point.



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THE STATE AND FUTURE OF TURKEY AND GERMANY RELATIONS THE POLITICAL BACKDROP

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