# F|EU|TU|RE

**THE FUTURE OF EU-TURKEY RELATIONS:
MAPPING DYNAMICS AND TESTING SCENARIOS**

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# EU-Turkey Relations and Irregular Migration: Transactional Cooperation in the Making

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is twofold. First, to outline the relationship of the EU and Turkey in the field of irregular migration and present the main drivers that underpin the relations from 1999 to 2017. While acknowledging that emphasis on irregular migration is given particularly post-2011, the paper argues that the dynamics characterising the relationship between Turkey and the EU do not change significantly in the pre-and post-2011 period. Secondly, the paper presents the most likely of the three scenarios- conflict, cooperation, and convergence- in the area of irregular migration drawing from the drivers of the past and present in the EU, Turkey, but also the Southern neighbourhood and beyond. The paper argues that though conflict is unlikely, equally so is convergence, with a model of transactional operational cooperation more likely and reflective of EU-Turkey relation on irregular migration management.

## ÖZET

*Makalenin amacı iki yönlüdür. İlk olarak, AB ile Türkiye arasındaki ilişkiyi düzensiz göç alanında özetlemek ve 1999'dan 2017'ye kadar olan ilişkilerin temelini oluşturan temel itici güçleri sunmak. Özellikle 2011 sonrası düzensiz göç üzerine vurgu yapıldığını kabul eden makale, Türkiye ile AB arasındaki ilişkiyi karakterize eden dinamikler, 2011 öncesi ve sonrası dönemde önemli ölçüde değişmemektedir. İkinci olarak, bu makale, AB, Türkiye ve aynı zamanda Güney mahallesi ve ötesindeki geçmişin itici güçlerinden oluşan düzensiz göç alanlarındaki üç senaryo - çatışma, işbirliği ve yakınsama olasılığını en yüksek olasılıkla sunmaktadır. Bu makale, çatışmanın ve yakınsamanın muhtemel olmamasına rağmen, düzensiz göç yönetimi konusundaki AB-Türkiye ilişkisinin bir işlemsel operasyonel işbirliği modeliyle olduğunu öne sürmektedir.*

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# Introduction

In his September 2017 visit to Athens, French Prime Minister Emmanuel Macron, noted in an interview with Greek newspaper Kathimerini (September 7, 2017) that *"Turkey has indeed strayed away from the European Union in recent months and worryingly overstepped the mark in ways that cannot be ignored. But I want to avoid a split because it is a vital partner in many crises we all face, notably the immigration challenge and the terrorist threat."* President Macron's statement is indicative of the European Union (EU)'s position on Turkey; despite the strained relations, Turkey remains an important partner on migration and security.

The EU-Turkey relationship as regards irregular migration has had periods of stagnation, slow progress, fast-forwards and steps backwards. As this paper will discuss, it is a relationship that is born out of geographical proximity, necessity on the EU side and an opportunity for Turkey. As numbers of irregular migrants' peak so does an interest in the relationship. When numbers drop, interests tend to wane.

The European Union (EU) has long faced migration[1] from across the Mediterranean and been a destination for asylum applicants, entering primarily through the countries situated at the external borders of the EU, namely Spain, Italy, and Greece with the last two being the principal recipients of irregular migratory flows. Since 2014 the EU is witnessing a shift both in numbers, as well as qualitative characteristics of arrivals including gender, age distribution and vulnerability/needs. In 2015, more than 1 million people sought irregular entry to the EU. Of those, 850,000 entered through the Greek-Turkish maritime border (UNHCR Operational Portal). The majority quickly transited through Idomeni (near the border with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) to the Western Balkans, *en route* to countries like Germany and Sweden. Most of 2015 and early 2016 were characterised by transitory movement from Greece to the Western Balkans and northern EU Member States, unilateral actions undertaken by Member States (e.g. reintroduction of border controls, suspension of Dublin for Syrians) and the challenge of what to do with those arriving in EU territory. The nationalities mostly included Syrians, Afghans, Pakistanis, Iranians, Iraqis, and Eritreans. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) repeatedly stressed that the overwhelming number of such arrivals originated from refugee-producing countries- with Syria being the clearest case- and could not be returned.

Mixed migratory flows, comprised of asylum seekers, vulnerable groups (women, children, and elderly) as well as economic migrants, pose a challenge for the EU, which has sought to address irregular migratory movement through the prism of security. Since the early 1990s the EU perceived migration as something that can be managed and controlled in a concentric circle-like approach: the countries of origin, transit, and the external borders of the Union, focusing on containment of irregular migration to the periphery and returns. However, those arriving in 2015 were overwhelming deemed non-returnable. Turkey, thus, acquired significance in 2015, as a country of destination and transit for people

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[1] For the purposes of this paper, 'migration' does not refer to persons enjoying the right of free movement (i.e. Union citizens and family members). Migration here specifically refers to the movement of third country nationals and unless explicitly stated, to the irregular entry and/or stay and transit to the EU and within the EU.

on the move but also a potential hosting country for those who could be deterred from undertaking the journey to Europe.

The question is how migration does affect or can impact the broader relationship between the EU and Turkey and which of the three scenarios- conflict, cooperation, or convergence- is likely to unfold in the future. This paper focuses on a specific focal issue; that of irregular migratory flows and how it they shaped and can shape the broader relationship between the EU and Turkey regarding migration. The convergence scenario in the EU-Turkey relations would lead to a revitalization of Turkey's accession process, harmonization with EU standards in the field of migration and asylum (see asylum paper) and would in turn mean that Turkey would function as an external border to the EU; with all the responsibility that would entail in the management of migration[2] including irregular arrivals. The cooperation scenario implies a similar approach to irregular migration and above all a mutual interest in managing irregular migration. To an extent, this scenario is unfolding today, through the EU-Turkey Statement of March 18th, 2016. However, cooperation is focused at the operational level, and is no longer reflected at the political level. The conflict scenario would mean a divergent approach in the management of irregular migratory flows; with Turkey turning a blind eye to movement towards the external borders of the Union and further instrumentalisation of its geographical position to increase 'pressure' on Brussels in achieving political gains. It would not lead to direct confrontation between the EU and Turkey but would undermine the partnership in the field of migration as it is currently unfolding.

The argument put forth is that irregular migration is a focal issue with a flimsy weight. Depending on the urgency felt within the EU cooperation is pursued with Turkey, mainly at the operational level, while Turkey seeks to transform the operational relationship into political cooperation.

The paper seeks to first identify the trends, actors and events driving EU-Turkey relations regarding irregular migration management, looking across four dimensions: the EU, Turkey, neighbourhood, and global arena. Though the original focus was from 1999 till 2017, it is the period from 2009 onwards when irregular migration emerges as an issue between the EU and Turkey. Secondly, the paper analyses the impact of these drivers on the relationship and finally propose a likely scenario (convergence, cooperation, or conflict) for the future, factoring in potential trends that may impact the relationship (e.g. a new migration crisis, militarisation of migration management, Turkey's EU membership, Turkey's visa regime). The paper draws from secondary and primary research undertaken, in Athens, Brussels, Berlin and Ankara in the spring and early summer of 2017. Interviewees requested anonymity for both themselves and their organisation, thus, where needed only the broader area of work is identified (for example national law enforcement agencies, European Institutions etc.).

The first section outlines how irregular migration is approached from both sides (EU and Turkey). The second section proceeds to identify the drivers in the EU-Turkey relation on irregular migration, starting from 2009 until 2013. Though the focus of the project is from 1999 onwards, for irregular migration

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[2] Migration management encompasses a wide range of policies pertaining to entry, stay and/or exit, including border management, control of irregular entries/exits as well as combatting smuggling, organized crime etc.

the period of interest is much narrower, starting from 2006 and acquiring prominence from 2011 onwards. Thus, we look at the previous years to understand whether and how the relationship changed and identify those drivers that remain salient, as well as new one for the recent period 2014-2017 and the current relationship. The paper concludes with a mapping of the trends that could potentially affect the relationship in the years to come. Finally, we propose the future scenario, which is one of operational cooperation, with an added transactional element that could sustain the partnership even during divergent levels of engagement.

# 1. Domestic constraints vs. migration diplomacy

## 1.1 Domestic constraints as determinants of migration policy in the European Union

Since the 1990s, more and more attention is paid to "the perceived and real costs raised by refugee protection" (Lavenex, 2001) with irregular migration and asylum increasingly interlinked. The change can be attributed to many factors with perhaps the most prominent being : (a) The creation of the Schengen Area in 1995 abolishing that internal border controls and creating a common visa policy; (b) the Gulf War of 1990-1991 and the Yugoslav wars of 1991-2001 that generated the first refugee and irregular migratory flows to the EU; (c) the gradual increase in irregular economic migration from Eastern European countries; and (d) societal and economic insecurity attributed to undocumented migration.

In 1999 under the Tampere Agreement, the EU acquired shared competence over immigration, which was the first step towards the gradual development of a common European migration and asylum policy space. The groundwork was the creation of an area of freedom, security and justice, which was introduced by the Treaty of Amsterdam (May 1999) where for the first time the free movement of persons within the EU (Schengen Implementing Convention) would be assured"in conjunction with appropriate measures with respect to external border controls, asylum, immigration and the prevention and combating of crime." (TFEU, Art 3) The Treaty intrinsically linked the internal with the external dimension, the abolition of internal border controls with strong external borders. From the Tampere program of 1999 to the 'Proposal for a comprehensive plan to combat illegal immigration and trafficking' released in 2002 and since, irregular migration is approached not just as an issue of border control but also as an issue that should be controlled and managed. Thus, for the past twenty years, a particular policy frame has emerged whereby migration "is increasingly dominated by security concerns, in which migrants and asylum-seekers are inherently depicted as a threat [...] (and) the result is a restrictive stance on human mobility, in which the overriding concern is to stem irregular immigration" (Carrera, den Hertog and Parkin, 2012: 17). Irregular migration is linked with societal and economic security alongside traditional security perspectives. At the same time, migration is also linked with core European values such as human rights and individual freedoms. This dualistic approach underscores the policies on irregular migration. Both security and human rights are attributed weight depending on the internal concerns and needs of Member States. The significance of the approach rests on the continuous efforts of the EU to export to the immediate neighbourhood and beyond this dualistic approach,

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externalizing migration management while seeking guarantees for protection of human rights. The externalization of migration management is conditionally applied to different countries, depending on their geographical position, role in migration (transit, sending, and destination) but also relationship with the EU. Nonetheless, the strength or weakness of the relationship is heavily dependent on the internal dynamics in the EU, as evident during the Syrian crisis. Political divisions, the financial crisis, elections as well as security concerns have all shaped the domestic agenda and in turn the significance of irregular migration.

In other words, irregular migration, as an issue, is important but becomes critical only when the number of people on the move towards the EU appear to the domestic audience (policy makers, citizens) as excessively high or when irregular migration is prominent in the public discourse (Burns & Gimpel, 2000). Precisely due to the reliance on numbers and how they are perceived, there is not always a continuum in the value placed in the relationship with a partner country nor on irregular migration as a policy priority. Irregular migration-similar to asylum- does not affect all Member States equally, nor in the same way. The South-eastern migratory corridor is evidence of this. There is a structural imbalance in the EU regarding the responsibility for external border controls as well as in the asylum system (see Focal issue: asylum), which has had an impact also in the relationship with Turkey.

Mixed migratory flows enter and transit from Turkey en route to the EU. These mixed movements include economic migrants, short-term circulatory migration, forced migrants such as refugees and asylum seekers. It is becoming gradually more difficult to distinguish between these different groups, which makes the return of irregular migrants a challenge. In that respect, Turkey's role becomes critical both in terms of border security but also in the return/readmission of undocumented third country nationals.

## 1.2 Turkey's Migration diplomacy

If for the EU irregular migration is predominantly a security issue regulated by domestic constraints, for Turkey it has been an opportunity both in upgrading its legislative framework but also in becoming a critical partner country for the EU. Turkey, with its critical geographic position at the crossroads of Asia, Europe and Africa, was, as early as the 1990s, recognized as a crucial strategic partner in the management of irregular migrant flows (Dimitriadi, 2017). Turkey has long been a country of destination for immigrants mainly coming from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, as these new immigrants see Turkey as a gateway to a new job, a new life, and a stepping stone to employment in the West (İçduygu, 2009; Danis et al., 2009). The country's importance increased since the collapse of the Soviet political system and its satellite regimes in central and eastern Europe, with Turkey becoming (once again) a hub for international mobility, migration and traffic "acting as a 'corridor' between Europe and 'third countries' in Asia (as far away as China) and even Africa, and as an almost compulsory point of transit between the Russian and Ukrainian plains and the eastern Mediterranean" (Perouse, 2004:58). In fact, Turkey is acknowledged as a crucial transit country for irregular migration in the literature as early as 1995 to this day (indicatively see İçduygu, 2004; IOM, 1995; Kaytaz, 2016; Bloch, 2014) however, its role as a destination country should not be ignored. It is the interplay between destination and

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transit that attributes weight to its role in the South-Eastern corridor, so long as Turkey has the potential to become EU's external border. As Turkey's role as a transit and receiving country grew, issues of international migration in general, and irregular migration, became vital in in defining the trajectory of Turkey's accession process to the EU (Özçürümez & Şenses,2011).

The Turkish government rather early on developed migration diplomacy, i.e. attempted to instrumentalise its role as a country of origin, destination, and transit for mixed migrant flows, particularly in relation to the EU. Of the 322,438 apprehensions in Turkey in the period 1995-2001, one third came from bordering countries and mostly Iraq and Iran, with the rest originating from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan (Fargues, 2004). This is a trend that continues to this day and one of the reasons why Turkey is important to the EU for irregular migration.

Turkey's accession process to the EU, domestic and international pressures such as the crises around Turkey's neighbourhood in the period 1999-2009 induced changes in the country's legislative framework. Particularly the pre-accession and accession processes have been instrumental in initiating the legislative, institutional and policy related reforms. Since 2001, the legislative and institutional framework on migration and asylum drastically changed. The main motivation behind this change was fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria including political reforms and *acquis communautaire* adoption. The reforms that were held between the 2001–2004 periods led to the opening of accession negotiations in 2005. Between 2008 and 2011, when the draft of the new Law on Foreigners and International Protection (Law No. 6458, date of enforcement 1 April 2014) was prepared, Turkey undertook a series of reforms complying with EU norms and regulations (Tolay, 2015).  Although the EU accession process has been a critical driver, this process of 'Europeanisation' of Turkish migration and asylum policy was also born out of a domestic need to address the increasing migratory pressures that Turkey was facing.

Turkey used the opportunity of the EU accession and the accession requirements to address this need for transformation while creating a negotiating ground on the technical and political agenda with the EU. As migratory pressures mounted and migration as a topic acquired salience in the EU post-2011, Turkey utilized its position as a destination and transit country and emerged as a critical, as well as viable, partner on migration cooperation with the EU.

## 2. Drivers in the period 2006-2014

The relationship, particularly before 2011 can best be characterised as occasional cooperation. Limited interest from the EU side towards the South-eastern migratory corridor meant that Turkey was a useful but not critical partner. Participation of Turkey in fora like the Budapest Process, a multilateral consultative forum of more than 40 governments focusing on irregular migration management, allowed for the establishment of dialogue but also early discussions on important issues for the EU, such as the signing of Readmission Agreements. Nonetheless, in the period until 2011, operational and political discussions on migration at high level took place on a bilateral level, between Greece and Turkey (as well as other Member States like Italy).   Until the Arab Spring of 2011, for the most part, Member States under pressure at the external borders were left to fend for themselves and develop bilateral

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cooperation with countries of transit and origin. The emergence of the South-eastern migratory corridor brought about a series of changes both within the EU and in Turkey, functioning as a stepping stone for future cooperation. The period prior to 2011 also serves in understanding how the relationship is likely to evolve in the future, since there is a certain continuity on how migration is approached by both sides and the South-eastern corridor will likely continue to generate mixed migratory flows.

## 2.1. The South-eastern migratory corridor

The emergence of the South-eastern migratory corridor between 2006 and 2010 can be attributed to many factors, foremost the political turmoil in the neighbourhood and beyond. As a migratory route, it facilitates the passage of persons from the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia and Sub-Sahara Africa to Southern Europe. The geographical proximity of Greece and Turkey, the vast land border of Turkey with countries of origin and/or transit for mixed migratory flows and the extensive maritime border of Greece mean that border controls on either side are difficult, challenging, and costly. In 2006, 60,000 apprehensions took place at the Greek-Turkish maritime border[3], heralding the emergence of the South-eastern migratory corridor. The period of 2006—2010 saw continuously high numbers of apprehensions for irregular entry and/or stay as well as exit (to Italy). However, according to an official in Athens[4], the subject of irregular migration from Turkey to Greece did not make it to the highest political level (European Council) and remained in the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) meetings. This was confirmed in an interview with a senior official who noted that the European Commission was not focused on irregular migration in the period 2005-2008. Rather, irregular migration was not a priority at a political level before the Arab Spring and events of 2012.[5]

Two further factors encouraged the cooperation between the EU and Turkey:  Firstly, the unwillingness of Greece to register apprehensions in the EURODAC database, which in turn facilitated intra-EU mobility of asylum seekers. As the South-eastern corridor saw a steady increase in mixed migratory flows, the infrequent registration of apprehended migrants, resulted in their secondary movement to other EU Member States and submission of asylum claims. Border management relied mostly on the bilateral cooperation between Greece and Turkey, which had not proved particularly successful in the period until 2014.

## 2.2. The bilateral cooperation between Turkey and Greece

Iraqi nationals are one of the first nationalities to enter the EU through the Greek-Turkish maritime border. Several reports between 2007 and 2009 (e.g. Human Rights Watch, 2008) criticize Greece of human rights violations and *refoulement* practices to Turkey. Although operationally, cooperation was lacking, Greece and Turkey had long ago signed Readmission Agreements. As a part of a broader framework of EU migration policy, countries that seek to join the EU need to develop readmission agreements, an indicator that they are opening cooperation with third countries in the field of irregular

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migration. In 2001, Turkey began to sign and negotiate readmission agreements with various countries including Syria (2001) and Greece (2001) (Özçürümez and Şenses, 2011). There is a significant gap between the signature and the implementation of a readmission agreements. In the case of Greece and Turkey, the readmission agreement of 2001 has been implemented partially only since 2011-2012, coinciding with the closer cooperation between the EU and Turkey. Until then, Turkey imposed a *de facto* limitation on the third country nationals it accepted, granting permission for return only for countries it shares direct geographical borders with. In fact, a noticeable change is evident since 2011, partly due to the interest of the Commission in the situation on the Greek-Turkish border, partly due to the operational cooperation developed under FRONTEX (see below), but also because Turkey succeeded in concluding bilateral readmission agreements with many of the critical countries of origin, e.g. Pakistan. Turkish officials are acknowledging that among the readmission agreements that have been signed and ratified, the one with Syria has been the most effective one until the Syrian War started. Ineffectiveness of the Greece-Turkey readmission agreement is argued to be related to the disputes between the Turkish border officers and their counterparts on the origin of the third country nationals. One Turkish officer argued that the Greece-Turkey Readmission Agreement is barely working because of the ineffectiveness of the system to return irregular migrants from Greece. To an extent, the limited implementation of the bilateral Readmission Agreement made an EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement (henceforth EURA) even more imperative and clearly showed the need for an EU approach (rather than bilateral) towards Turkey.

## 2.3. FRONTEX

In 2009, the European Commission issued a mandate to FRONTEX to proceed with the sign up of an operational agreement with Turkey. FRONTEX's interest on Turkey was dual. On the one hand, it was the obvious transit country, effectively constructing the Greek-Turkish migratory corridor to the EU. On the other hand, FRONTEX sought early on to position itself in the South-eastern external borders of the Union and, according to a LEA staff, the Greek-Turkish border[6] was also a test-case for FRONTEX, with Turkey deemed a viable partner in operational cooperation (in contrast to Libya). Until 2012 FRONTEX was not perceived entirely positively in Turkey. It was assumed that an asymmetrical relationship was embedded in terms of decision-making and operational capacity, as Turkey was not a member state to the EU. Turkish officers argued that this asymmetry between Turkey and Greece in terms of access to decision-making mechanisms was problematic.

The negotiations between FRONTEX and Turkey continued until 2012, with the document relegated from a Working Agreement to a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that offers operational capabilities in the Turkish borders following an official request from the Republic of Turkey. The MoU further includes risk analysis (TURAN: Turkey Risk Analysis Network) and exchange of data. Nonetheless, while negotiations are taking place, operational cooperation is established gradually and steadily. Crucially, the operational cooperation is independent of the political relations between Greece and Turkey

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[6] Interview with Law Enforcement Agency staff, Athens, March 2017.

and EU-Turkey, but facilitates the bilateral diplomatic discussions in relation to border security. Interviewees in Brussels and Athens acknowledged that the presence of FRONTEX in Greece and the willingness of the Agency since its early days to cooperate with Turkish authorities contributed in bringing gradually the issue of irregular migration from Turkey to the EU on the agenda. As noted by a former official in Brussels, most Member States had no knowledge of the legal framework or operational practices of Turkey in the field of irregular migration. Many also had limited knowledge of what was taking place on the Greek-Turkish border. The deployment of FRONTEX changed this.[7]

From an EU perspective, FRONTEX is a positive driver in the EU-Turkey relationship on irregular migration and one that has proven resilient even amidst political tensions in recent years. This was confirmed in the discussion with the Agency. FRONTEX in 2016, acquired a new and expanded mandate giving it the right to set up missions in any country that shares borders with the EU and is willing to host FRONTEX officers. The Agency is likely to apply a strict interpretation to the mandate and stick to the immediate neighbourhood, where it has also acquired certain expertise over the years. The mission of FRONTEX, after all, is to ensure the protection of the Schengen area. However, from the perspective of Turkey FRONTEX is evidence of an imbalanced partnership: an EU agency assists with the development of migration management policies and procedures in line with EU standards, in a country that is not a member of the EU and increasingly unlikely to be one soon. This imbalance, which at presents does not hamper the operational cooperation, may in the future function negatively rather than positively-particularly if Turkey abandons its desire for EU membership.

## 2.4. Southern Neighbourhood: The Arab Spring

The uprisings of 2010-2011 posed a particular challenge for the EU. While in theory the EU sought to encourage normative change in the region, it had also showed a willingness to support autocratic rule in exchange for adoption of EU migration management policies (including but not limited to detention facilities in the region and returns).

Turkey's Foreign Minister, at the time, Ahmet Davutoğlu (2013a: 866) identified this process as a political "earthquake" in the Middle East, but it was also an opportunity for Turkey to pursue a new role in the region. In accordance with this change, Ankara had to reconsider its "zero problems with neighbours" strategy, which entailed a combined approach to cooperative security relations and economic interdependence (Davutoğlu, 2013b). Turkey's open-door policy towards the Syrian refugees could be interpreted in different ways. A multiplicity of drivers such as humanitarian driver, religious driver, political driver, and ethno-cultural driver can be taken into consideration to explain the major assumptions of the policy makers in Turkey. Another important driver in this regard, which is often overlooked, is Turkey's quest for becoming a soft power in the region that has radically changed Turkey's official

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[7] Interview with former senior official, EU Institutions, Brussels, January 2017.

discourse on becoming a country of immigration. Stephen Castles and Miller (2009: 213) refer to Joseph Nye's concept of soft power[8] asserting that a state's immigration policies can also contribute to its soft power, its ability to achieve foreign policy and security objectives without recourse to military or economic means of persuasion. Moreover, they give the examples of having foreign students as a source of soft power and treatment of immigrants to affect a state's reputation.

The Arab Revolutions enabled the Turkish foreign policy to take on a new role in the "new" Middle East with serious implications since Turkey's assertive foreign policy and its willingness to play a role in establishing order in the Middle East led to the 'open-door' policy at the early stages of the Syrian migration. The Arab Spring and its aftermath, offered Turkey the opportunity to further instrumentalise (successfully for a period) its geographic position but also position as a hosting country of refugees and destination for economic migrants. The new Law on Foreigners and International Protection signified a willingness of the ruling government to turn the Turkish state into a soft power, with migration and especially an open-door policy to migrants and refugees as an important element of its foreign policy.

The instrumentalisation of the idea of being a country of immigration is also obvious in the efforts of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in organizing the Global Migration Forum under the auspices of the UN in Turkey in Autumn 2015 to present Turkey as "the most courageous and generous country of immigration" welcoming then more than 2 million Syrian refugees (Kirişçi and Karaca, 2015). Turkey's shift from a security-centred approach to a rather humanitarian approach seems to relate to its assertive foreign policy as well as to the Justice and Development Party (JDP) religious drive in the region. This approach allowed Turkey to present itself as a model country in its neighbourhood, seeking to play a regional mediator role and contribute to the solution of humanitarian problems through diplomacy.

While for Turkey the Arab Spring was an opportunity to advance its position as soft power in the region, for the member states and European Commission it became a catalyst for internal changes but also the realization that the focus should be in the neighbourhood especially since 'Brussels [ref to the European Commission] noted the shift in Turkish foreign policy and the *de facto* open- door policy of the early days'[9]. The different approaches to the Arab Spring did not result directly in neither conflict nor cooperation. However, the Turkish approach to the migratory flows because of the changes in the region, shifted the balance between the EU-Turkey by elevating Turkey's importance in the management of irregular migration.

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[8] Nye (2011: 20-21) defined soft power as, "the ability to affect others to obtain preferred outcomes by the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuasion and positive attraction." In this regard, Nye (2004: 11) suggests that there are three building blocks for a country's soft power that coexist within a multi-actor environment: a. culture; b. political values; and c. foreign policies of a country, which need to be operationalized in line with the contextual realities.

[9] Interview with senior official, EU Institutions, Brussels, February 2017.

## 2.5. EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement

A concrete step in the relationship moving forward in 2013 was the signing of the EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement (officially on 1 September 2014, EURA). As most steps in the field of migration, the EURA was linked for Turkey with membership to the Union. Turkey declared that without a visa facilitation process and other steps towards a visa free regime, the readmission agreement will not be signed, initiated, or implemented (İçduygu, 2011). EU Commissioner for Home Affairs Cecilia Malmström, with the Turkish Minister of Interior Muammer Güler signed the EU-Turkey readmission agreement and initiated, jointly with the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu, the EU-Turkey Visa liberalisation dialogue on 16 December 2013. The entry into force of the readmission agreement was critical on the accession process of Turkey, whereas for Turkey the EURA was a pathway to achieving visa liberalisation. The EURA serves as a good case study in understanding the different needs of the two partners. Turkey had expressed concerns about transforming into the 'dumping ground' of Europe (Dervış et al, 2004: 33), implicitly recognizing that the readmission agreement transferred the responsibility for return of third country nationals to Turkey. The 'carrot' in signing the EURA was the start of the visa liberalization dialogue, which was the incentive for bringing Turkey to the negotiating table. The visa liberalisation dialogue from the perspective of Brussels was to have a beneficial effect since it promoted the harmonisation of Turkish legislation and administrative practices with the EU acquis and standards. It is an exchange that remains incomplete to this day. In 2016 the full implementation of the EURA came into play, yet in the framework of the EU-Turkey Statement most returns still take place under the bilateral readmission agreement between Greece and Turkey. Visa liberatisation has also not progressed and as noted by an interviewee in Brussels, in hindsight it was a mistake to link accession negotiations with migration cooperation because it encouraged further Turkey's instrumentalisation of migration in relation to the EU[10].

## 3. The period 2014-2017: a cautious rapprochement

The period from 2014 until 2017 is one of significant cooperation between the EU and Turkey on irregular migration. The overwhelming increase in arrivals of mixed migratory flows necessitates reaching out to Turkey bringing about an "unprecedented rapprochement" (Adam, 2016). Turkey's willingness to accommodate the EU in managing irregular migratory flows facilitates the rapprochement as does EU willingness to link migration to Turkey's accession process. It is further facilitated by a discourse grounded in panic. The image of millions that would attempt to enter the EU through Turkey has been consistently painted by politicians and policy makers in the EU[11], reaffirming the need for cooperation. This acquires an institutional aspect also, when in late 2014, the European External Action Service,

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[10] Interview with senior official, EU Institutions, Brussels, March 2017.

[11] For example see former Greek Minister of Shipping Statement available at : http://www.reuters.com/article/greece-immigration/greece-says-in-danger-zone-from-influx-of-syrian-iraqi-refugees-idUSL5N0R516420140904 and the recent statement of EU Commissioner on Migration available at: http://greece.greekreporter.com/2017/03/23/three-million-migrants-waiting-to-cross-into-greece-says-eu-commissioner-avramopoulos/

already involved with the negotiation and implementation of the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM), acquires a division dedicated to Turkey, highlighting the significance of the country.

## 3.1. The refugee 'crisis' of 2015

The year 2015 proved to be a game changer for both the EU and Turkey as regards migration. The former found itself in the uncomfortable position of having to adhere to the values and norms it advocated abroad, while Turkey was able to improve its negotiating position with the EU while at the same time maintaining the moral high ground, through its hosting of 3 million Syrian refugees.

The critical member state in the EU paving the way for closer cooperation was Germany. Turkey's role in the irregular migratory corridor was highly underestimated in Germany and "there was a level of ignorance regarding Turkey's policies in the area of migration [...] [I]t almost felt as if Turkey was suddenly discovered as a transit country for irregular migrants"[12]. Furthermore, the refugee crisis also made painfully obvious to German leadership that Turkey was using its position to put pressure on the EU by *de facto* allowing border crossings[13]. At the same time neither the European Commission nor member states like Germany wanted to show support for the raising of fences on EU soil. The alternative solution was to encourage and support measures outside the Union, initially looking to Turkey but also North Africa and the Sahel region. The EU-Turkey Statement should thus be seen as part of a period of "radical experimentation" (Parkes, 2017:10) in the EU, which is ongoing. It should be seen as a period where the 'transactional' element was reintroduced (previous case was the EURA) in the partnership.

In October 2015 the Joint Action Plan was announced. The second section of the Plan is dedicated to preventing irregular migration with both sides committing to various steps, including exchange of liaison officers through FRONTEX, strengthening information exchange but also with Turkey committing to "in line with the Visa Roadmap requirements, pursue the progressive alignment of Turkish visa policy, legislation and administrative capacities notably vis-à-vis the countries representing an important source of illegal migration for Turkey and the EU" and "Step up cooperation and accelerate procedures in order to smoothly readmit irregular migrants who are not in need of international protection and were intercepted coming from the Turkish territory in line with the established bilateral readmission provisions."[14]. The Joint Action Plan was originally announced *ad referendum* and stayed at that level for almost two months because political negotiations continued between the EU and Turkey, regarding incentives[15].

Turkey's incentive for partnering with the EU was the commitment in re-energising the accession process through a high-level dialogue and opening of new negotiation chapters. The rapprochement with Turkey was heavily encouraged and facilitated by Germany, as evident also in the political visits to Turkey of the Chancellor but also of senior members of the administration. The EU-Turkey Statement

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[12] Interview with journalist based in Istanbul, Berlin, March 2017.
[13] Interview with senior researcher, German think-tank, Berlin, March 2017.
[14] http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-15-5860_en.htm
[15] Interview with senior official, EU Institutions, Brussels, April 2017.

of March 18th, 2016, is the culmination of both the German and EU efforts in addressing the influx at the Greek-Turkish border. It is an effort that starts in the late 2000s, throughout which both sides utilised migration as a bargaining tool over and during the membership negotiation process between the EU and Turkey (İçduygu and Aksel, 2014: 361) as well as over the electoral win of the JDP in the latest General Elections of 1 November 2015.

## 3.2. Rise of far-right populist parties in Europe and Islamophobia

Though the refugee 'crisis' was an event that pushed the EU and Turkey to cooperate far more closely than ever before, the rise of populism appears to be driving them further apart. Some Member States have repeatedly expressed concerns about partnering with Turkey on managing irregular migration, while others are increasingly facing pressure from populist and far right parties on the rise. The Turkish government on the other hand, appears sceptical of both the model of migration management - aware that in the end it shifts the burden of responsibility to Turkey - but also of the model of integration the EU seeks to export. Growing scepticism against diversity has also posed obstacles for Turkey's quest for Europeanization (Kaya, 2016). Diversity has become one of the challenges perceived by a remarkable part of the European public as a threat to social, cultural, religious, and economic security of the European nations. There is apparently a growing resentment against the discourse of diversity, which is often promoted by the European Commission, the Council of Europe, many scholars, politicians, and NGOs (Kaya, 2017).

Additionally, Islamophobic discourse has recently become the mainstream in the West (Kaya, 2011, and Kaya, 2015b) with social groups expressing their distress resulting from insecurity and social-economic deprivation, through the language of Islamophobia; even in those cases which are not related to the actual threat of Islam. The growth of Islamophobia has also immediately found resonance in the political discourse of the Turkish political elite and had shaped how migration policies are presented. An example is a recent speech by President Erdoğan who on 24 June 2016 noted that:

> "The European Union is reluctant to accept Turkey as a full member due to its Islamophobic motives… The EU bloc's bad humanitarian and immoral approach to immigrants has led to a serious debate about the trustworthiness of the European Union".(Daily Sabah, 2016)

Erdoğan's scepticism towards the European leadership has amplified in the last few years. His political style is also based on populism, which seeks to divide the nation between "pure people" and "corrupt elite", or between "good" and "evil", or "believers" and "infidels", or the "majority" and the minority", or "friends" and "foes".

The rise of populist far right discourse but also far-right parties, aside from everything else, is also transforming migration policy in the EU. The case of Germany is a clear example of such transformation. A country known for its asylum system and high recognition rates, it has shifted course since 2016. Domestic concerns over the integration of the refugees coupled with the rise of the AfD (Alternative for Deutschland) have resulted in family reunification *de facto* put on hold for approximately two years for most cases and particularly for minors close to adulthood and fewer positive recognition of asylum

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applications from nationalities like the Afghans and Nigerians. Asylum and irregular migration are intertwined and for countries with no external borders neighbouring transit and/or origin countries, it is usually asylum policies that are affected in effort to show a hardened stance on irregular migration.

The rise of populism on both sides is affecting how migration is approached already in 2016-2017 but also the future. The EU is looking more outward than ever before, seeking to deal directly with the countries of origin, while Turkey (internally at least) appears frustrated with the European demands that rightfully appear contradictory but also unfair to Turkey (Toley, 2015: 53-54).

## 3.3. The countries of origin in the neighbourhood and beyond

Though the immediate events (Arab Spring) in the neighbourhood functioned as drivers for the cooperation to move forward, there is an added dimension to the EU-Turkey cooperation linked with countries of origin and transit. Partnerships are already the crucial tool of deterring and attempting to reduce irregular migration and they will acquire more importance in the future. As returns of rejected asylum seekers and economic migrants increasingly become the focus of migration management around the globe, migration diplomacy will likely be utilized by countries around the world both to achieve returns but to also accept returnees.

As the EU is increasingly utilizing foreign policy tools to address irregular migration, it looks beyond its immediate borders and neighbouring countries. Instead, the situation in countries such as Afghanistan, the cooperation with Pakistan, Iran, Niger, etc are now part of the agenda at the highest level, with the EU-Turkey cooperation piloting a relationship model effectively put forth in the Migration Compacts: mutual partnerships with benefits for both sides tailor made to the needs of the partner countries and the EU. For Turkey the tailor-made approach included re-energizing the accession negotiations (see also asylum paper). For other countries it will include more financial and development aid, military assistance or political support for the regimes. Should the EU be successful it will reduce its dependency on the immediate neighbourhoods. Turkey, at present, is a crucial partner in achieving a higher rate of returns and it has been far more successful in establishing a model of cooperation with countries like Pakistan than the EU. Afghanistan is another example.

Part of Turkey's pursuit of an influential role among Muslim nations, its growing clout in Afghanistan can be used to gain leverage over the EU on irregular migration, since Afghanistan is a critical source country for mixed migratory flows and the main priority country to the East on readmission /returns of rejected asylum seekers. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Afghanistan after the presidential elections in 2014 marking a new beginning in the cooperation between the two nations. It played a crucial role in mediating the safe departure of the Vice President Dostum following allegations of misconduct, and has hosted several conferences on Afghanistan. EU's success with Afghanistan is more limited. The EU 'restart' approach towards Afghanistan is evident in the Joint Way Forward, put forth on October 2 2016. The document is overwhelmingly focused on return and readmission of Afghan nationals. The Joint Way Forward paved the way for the increase in returns of Afghans, from countries such as Germany, Finland, and Sweden. Human rights organisations have heavily criticised the deal for failing to see that reintegration for Afghan nationals is not possible nor sustainable, at a

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time when the security of Afghanistan is deteriorating rather than improving (see Amnesty International 2017). However, the Joint Way Forward with Afghanistan was, among other issues, a way for the EU to begin independently pursuing direct returns to countries of origin so as to reduce the dependency on countries of transit.

In other words, rather than rely on transit countries to undertake the returns, the EU seeks to do the job itself. It is a long-term project and in the unlikely scenario that is fully successful, it will reduce the importance of transit countries and thus, their negotiating position.

## 3.4. The Eastern dimension

Admittedly the eastern dimension is less influential in the EU-Turkey relationship on migration than the Southern neighbourhood. It has not directly affected the EU-Turkey relationship, though it has the possibility of creating disruptions for the EU side. Although irregular migratory flows affecting EU-Turkey relations do not originate from the eastern neighbourhood so much as the south, Russia is a country of importance to both the EU and Turkey that carefully watched the refugee crisis of 2015-2016 unfolding. Russia has been accused of using migration as a destabilisation strategy towards Europe[16], particularly in reference to the Syrian conflict. Though not   Russia was criticised (similarly to Turkey) for instrumentalising its geographical position in allowing temporary passage of irregular migrants to Norway and then Finland, to destabilise the EU and extract concessions over economic sanctions imposed against Moscow for its actions in Ukraine (Higgins, 2016). Looking at the coverage of the crisis in 2016, Russian media regularly portrayed Turkey as a country that threatens the EU with the possibility to allow passage to the continent for more refugees or at times reminding the EU of its ability to do so[17]. The possibility of visa liberalisation for Turkey is presented as a victory for Turkey but as risky choice for the EU. Interestingly, the portrayal of the EU-Turkey relationship on migration as one of 'necessity-interest' is not different from how the two sides (EU/TR) discuss the partnership. Russia also links migration with security threats and the argument against visa liberalisation was that it would make it easier for terrorists with Turkish passports to cross the EU borders.

The one area where Russia has been vocal in its opposition is the usage of military instruments in migration management.  Both Russia-and at a later stage- Turkey objected to the naval cooperation between Frontex and NATO in the Aegean (Parkes, 2017: 53). The mission is officially tasked with combatting smuggling initially through risk assessment and intelligence gathering. It brought NATO into an area that is not part of its expertise nor role but also raised concerns for Russia whether the mission was used to monitor Russian activities around the Black Sea. This militarisation of migration by the EU will likely continue to attract the interest and concern of Russia with Turkey appearing to increasingly share that concern.

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[16] BBC (2 March 2016) Migrant crisis: Russia and Syria 'weaponising' migration, available at: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35706238
[17] See  https://iz.ru/news/602946 and https://iz.ru/news/605856

## 4. Trends

The historical analysis has shown that the relationship on irregular migration between the EU and Turkey is predominantly shaped by two persistent drivers: EU's concern over number of arrivals on the one hand and Turkey's interest in visa liberalization and EU membership on the other. Since 2011, the broader instability in the Mediterranean region has also revealed the imbalance between policy and norms from an EU perspective. Particularly the response to the Syrian refugee crisis has altered the way the EU is perceived in Turkey. The drivers discussed in the paper have in different periods produced divergence, cooperation and in the aftermath of the attempted coup in Turkey a rift, which on mi of disinterest in furthering the cooperation or moving beyond operational cooperation.

### 4.1. Militarisation of migration management

Irregular migration is changing, mostly from the perspective of the EU. This is evident from the gradual incorporation of the military and the need to manage instabilities further away from home and is a critical driver for the future relationship with Turkey. At present, NATO's involvement in anti-smuggling operations in the Aegean Sea is one of the most contentious aspects of the rapprochement between EU and Turkey. The German government had initially proposed joint patrolling in the Aegean between Turkey and Greece to counter smuggling, with the German Chancellor stating that "the narrow sea channel separating Greece and Turkey was in the hands of the smuggling rackets". The proposal was rejected by Greece, and the deployment of NATO was put forth by the German Chancellor as a viable alternative[18] with the purpose of curtailing the sea crossing and loss of life at sea. Initially, Turkey welcomed NATO's involvement. A member of NATO, Turkey would be part of the decision-making process. Nonetheless, by October 2016, Turkey was calling for an end to the mission, arguing that NATO has been less effective than portrayed[19]. Turkey is concerned that NATO would acquire a more permanent presence and role in the Aegean, and increasingly unwilling to allow even NATO forces to patrol part of its maritime border. The presence of NATO in the Aegean, initially a positive driver, has the potential to transform into a negative one. The EU is very much in favour of NATO presence in the Aegean, attributing the reduction in arrivals partly on the operation, with Turkey against the continuation of the NATO operation and having formally requested its termination in 2017. Discussions in late 2017 between NATO and FRONTEX for further cooperation raise the prospect not only of continuing the operation but potentially expanding it. If this happens, it will likely be met with resistance from Turkey.

### 4.2. A new migration crisis

There were two types of 'crises' in 2015. One was a crisis of numbers, with a million refugees entering the EU. The second crisis was a political crisis, largely a result of unilateral actions undertaken by Member States. The latter, is unlikely to repeat itself in the face of current internal dynamics (elections, rise

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[18] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/08/germany-and-turkey-agree-deal-to-help-ease-refugee-crisis

[19] Herszenhorn D.M. 2016. Turkey seeks end to NATO patrols in Aegean Sea, available at: https://www.politico.eu/article/turkey-seeks-end-to-nato-patrols-in-aegean-sea-migration-crisis-refugees/

of populism). It is impossible to fathom a repetition of the de facto open corridor from Greece to Sweden, Germany, and Austria via the Western Balkans. This does not mean that a crisis in numbers is unlikely, originating from the south-eastern corridor. As it has been noted previously in the paper, for the EU concerns over irregular migration are tied to numbers- how high they are or appear to be. Though the EU will strive to contain it outside its own borders using a mixture of military means and diplomatic/political/economic incentives, already evident in Libya and Niger, it cannot at present do the same for the South-Eastern corridor. An influx from countries like Iraq, Egypt, or even Jordan and Lebanon would place the Greek-Turkish border once more at the centre. Would Turkey be a reliable partner? In a recent visit to Greece (December 2017) President Erdogan highlighted that the EU has failed to meet its side of the deal. Resettlement from Turkey is low, the money promised by the EU has not arrived in full, while Brussels continues to ask for strong border controls, fair treatment of migrants and integration prospects for refugees. For Ankara, there is limited reciprocity on offer but also a weakening of its bargaining position. As the focus shifts to the Central Mediterranean route and Libya, Turkey and Greece are no longer on the agenda of EU leaders for irregular migration. A new crisis would change this but considering the experience of the past, it seems likely that Turkey would be more hesitant in a partnership with the EU unless it could yield significant concessions on issues outside migration.

## 4.3. Visa regimes

Turkey's visa regime was indicated by several interviewees as a factor in Turkey's establishment as a transit country. After 2002 with a motivation to support a neo-liberal approach on its foreign policy Turkey aimed at extending its liberal visa policy towards its neighbours. Turkey already had a visa free travel for most of its neighbouring countries such as Iran- a source country for migrants. Concerns were raised on how visas would be given to the nationals of neighbouring countries that were on the Schengen negative list during the pre-accession process. AKP government taking in office from 2002 onwards brought a new dimension on Turkey's visa policy. Part of the harmonization efforts in the early 2000s was the alignment with the visa policy of the EU member states. Between 2002 and 2005 Turkey was five countries short of full alignment with the Schengen negative list. From 2005 Turkey underwent a gradual reversal of the policy, and in 2009 Turkey abolished the visa regime with neighbouring or regional countries, such as Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Russia, and Saudi Arabia, which usually are under strict visa regulation in the EU (Vukasinovic, 2011). Turkey made these changes as the EU accession process was perceived as a very long-term objective (Kale, 2011) (see also asylum paper). However, this reversal was repeatedly mentioned by interviewees in Athens but also Berlin as a pull factor for irregular migrants seeking to transit to the EU prior to 2013, and one of the main factors for the pressure at the Greek-Turkish maritime and eventually land border.

At the expense of de-aligning its visa regulations with the European legislation and de-Europeanizing its foreign policy making processes, the main motivation of Turkey was "mainly economic gains from more integration in the region yet its liberal visa regime brought the construction of a new Schengen area in the Middle East under discussion" (Elitok and Straubhaab 2010: 7). Currently, despite the criticisms from the EU, Turkey continues to apply its liberal visa policy to its neighbouring countries and

the countries that it considers having economic interests as priority. This policy aims at enhancing economic, social, and cultural relations between the countries involved in visa free travel. However, this liberal visa regime is open to direct influence of the political developments, such as the Russian fighter plane incident in 2015. After Turkey shot down its fighter jet, which was later claimed to be an accident by Turkey, Russia lifted visa free travel to Turks. As of 2017, Russia declared that visa free travel for Turkish citizens will be reconsidered. Turkey reciprocates to decisions relating to visas immediately.

The direction of Turkey's visa policy, with countries of origin and/or transit of migrants and refugees is a driver that affects Turkey's attractiveness to migratory flows. This in turn, partly shapes Turkey's position on migration in relation to the EU.

## 4.4. Turkey's prospects of EU membership

To a considerable extent, irregular migration between the EU and Turkey has been used to either acquire or discuss other issues in the political and economic agenda. Concessions on migration management from Turkey in 2016 were reciprocated with the opening of chapter negotiations, and re-energising of accession talks. However, looking back at the different periods and drivers identified, for a way forward both sides need to be on the same level: Turkey wanting membership in the EU and the EU interested and able to move in that direction, or the EU in need of assistance with irregular migratory flows and Turkey willing and able to provide it. Timing, is everything.

The cooperation between the EU and Turkey has had positive influence on Turkey's migration policies that have become more liberal and humanitarian because of its past willingness to join the European project as well as of the quest for becoming a soft-power. Turkey's migration policies were designed on a political basis with contradictions stretched between the process of Europeanization and the process of de-Europeanization. The former process was depicted as a process leading to the formation of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection. The latter process was depicted with references to Turkey's changing visa regulations as opposed to the EU's visa regime, and to the Turkish state neo-Ottomanist and Sunni-Islamist foreign policy aspirations in the region.

On July 15th 2016, an attempted coup sparked the beginning of an increasingly sour relationship between the EU and Turkey. The attempted coup has had particularly impacted the Greek-Turkish relationship, crucial in maintaining control over the South-Eastern corridor. A significant number of Turkish citizens (including members of the military) have sought asylum in Greece, entering irregularly through the land and sea borders. The provision of asylum, as well as the decision by the Supreme Courth prohibiting returns of Turkish citizens irrespective of their asylum status On April 2017 the European Parliament called for a formal suspension of Turkey's EU membership bid. Though no formal decision has been made, the membership bid is now effectively frozen. If we accept that this has been the main incentive for Turkey to adopt EU policies, standards and norms regarding the management of irregular migration, the convergence scenario looks highly improbable for the future. On the other hand, what is perceived as unwillingness on behalf of the EU on the issue of membership, can function as a negative reminder for future cooperation in the field of migration.

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# Conclusion

Irregular migration is not perceived in the same way by the EU and Turkey. For the EU, it is an issue of (in)security, a 'threat' to be addressed ideally before the EU external borders, in the countries of immigrants' origin and transit. Turkey, due to the accession process, has had to not only accommodate the model exported by the EU but also 'Europeanise' its migration management by bringing institutions, practices, and legal framework in line with EU standards and requirements. It has not been an entirely smooth process, since diverse levels of engagement drive it.

At present, further cooperation in the field of irregular migration appears to be a priority for neither side. For the EU, the immediate focus has shifted away from Turkey, to the Libyan-Italian waters. The assumption is that the EU-Turkey Statement will hold, and the numbers of immigrants will remain low and manageable in the Aegean. Turkey appears willing to function as a gatekeeper, despite repeated statements to the contrary. The EU appears willing to sidestep its disagreement on critical issues with Turkey, acknowledging the country's importance in the region on migration. It is in neither side's interests to cease cooperating and geography, is a compelling driver in the establishment of partnerships. The Mediterranean is likely to remain a critical area for mixed migratory flows for decades to come. The rise of islamophobia, far right parties and populist discourse impacts how migration is discussed, approached but also the weight it acquires in the internal political agenda. The more it gains in prominence, the more non-EU countries can use their position and willingness to accept returns and undertake border controls as leverage in partnering with the EU.

Furthermore, the current state of cooperation is understood differently in Brussels and Ankara. For Brussels it is operational cooperation that can continue irrespective of Turkey's accession progress or lack thereof. In other words, a cooperation that is based on civilian and /or military agencies and is entirely focused on maintaining dwindling numbers on irregular border crossings. As the period prior to 2014 has shown, the EU can undertake operational partnerships without significant political engagement, utilizing agencies like FRONTEX. For Turkey, the EU-Turkey Statement and the framework of cooperation (from the implementation of the EURA to NATO deployment) were indicators of political engagement and were in fact tied in with the visa liberalisation and overall accession process. The different approaches of the partnership and its end goal, mean that that convergence is highly unlikely. Though the EU will try to become more self-reliant on migration, though this is a long-term project for decades to come. Even if ultimately successful, dependency on Turkey will not reduce in the coming years, making cooperation more likely.

What is then the likely scenario for the future? Operational cooperation with highs and lows. This is the current state of relationship and one likely to continue. Two critical factors have the potential to incorporate elements of conflict in the partnership, a result of divergent interest on irregular migration management.

From the EU side, what the past twenty years have shown is that the South-eastern migratory corridor (and irregular migration overall) attracts the focus of European leaders and Brussels only when the numbers appear and/or are high and Schengen area at 'risk'. This makes the EU a fickle partner in

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relation to Turkey, at times willing to offer more (e.g. EU-Turkey Statement) and at times willing to offer less (e.g. period 2009-2011).

Turkey, on the other hand appears disappointed in its expectations of the benefits of partnering with the EU. At present, for example, cooperation rests on a *vis a vis* that Turkey feels has not been met (the visa liberalisation) and is unlikely to be given the current state of the EU-Turkey relationship. Additionally, the militarisation of migration management and the gradual establishment of such an approach in the Aegean, is likely to be a point of concern and disagreement (conflict scenario) in the future.

In order to maintain operational cooperation even amidst diverse approaches and interests between the partners, it is clear that the inclusion of a transactional element is needed. The transactional element in the cooperation was already introduced to the relationship with the EURA and the parallel start of the EU-Turkey Visa liberalisation dialogue. Similarly, the transactional element has underpinned the EU-Turkey Statement. It allows the EU and Turkey to maintain a different focus on irregular migration depending on numbers and weight attributed to the South-Eastern migratory corridor, while preventing a breakdown of the operational cooperation. It allows for Turkey to function as a gatekeeper to the EU in exchange for certain benefits and for the EU to reduce irregular arrivals beyond the external borders. It is a scenario that allows for variations in the commitment of either side though it is not necessarily the easiest, since it requires that both sides give and take on an almost continuous basis.

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Assoc. Prof. Dr. Başak Kale is a faculty member at the Department of International Relations, METU. She is also coordinating METUMIR Migration Studies at the JMCE CES, METU. For FEUTURE she leads the research and deliverables on the focal issue asylum. She also contributes in the research and deliverables on irregular migration, Work Package 6 on Migration.

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Dr. Tinatin Zurabishvili coordinates FEUTURE WP6 activities in Georgia.

# ABOUT FEUTURE

FEUTURE sets out to explore fully different options for further EU-Turkey cooperation in the next decade, including analysis of the challenges and opportunities connected with further integration of Turkey with the EU.

To do so, FEUTURE applies a comprehensive research approach with the following three main objectives:

1. Mapping the dynamics of the EU-Turkey relationship in terms of their underlying historical narratives and thematic key drivers.
2. Testing and substantiating the most likely scenario(s) for the future and assessing the implications (challenges and opportunities) these may have on the EU and Turkey, as well as the neighbourhood and the global scene.
3. Drawing policy recommendations for the EU and Turkey on the basis of a strong evidence-based foundation in the future trajectory of EU-Turkey relations.

FEUTURE is coordinated by Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Wessels, Director of the Centre for Turkey and European Union Studies at the University of Cologne and Dr. Nathalie Tocci, Director of Istituto Affari Internazionali, Rome.

The FEUTURE consortium consists of 15 renowned universities and think tanks from the EU, Turkey and the neighbourhood.

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