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Narratives of a Contested Relationship: Unravelling the Debates in the EU and Turkey

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Abstract

This paper outlines how narratives on European Union (EU)-Turkey relations changed over time since the 1960s and until the present. Applying a narrative approach, the paper aims to deconstruct a debate, which has been characterized by a plurality or even cacophony of stories by different actors. It presents the most influential narratives of EU institutions and Turkish political actors and traces their change over time as well as the dynamics between them. Based on a qualitative coding of a vast set of official documents from EU and Turkey (ca. 280 documents), it draws the following main conclusions:

- **Different in nature:** Turkish and European narratives vary considerably in their nature. Turkish narratives all share the same goal of full membership, while they have changing plots and different lines of argumentation. EU narratives differ both in their plot and in terms of the “finalité” of EU-Turkey relations.
- **Progressively divergent:** Since the 1960s, the number of narratives in Turkey and the EU has gradually increased and the debates have become more divergent.
- **Growingly conflictual:** While the study confirms that conflictual rhetoric is rather a recurring pattern and not new to the debates on EU-Turkey relations, the level of escalation on both sides in the last years has been considerably higher.

Overall, the research draws the conclusion that currently there is a combination of conflictual elements as well as arguments emphasizing the importance to cooperate with each other. Hence, the study’s results are in line with the main conclusion drawn by the FEUTURE project, namely, that the most likely scenario for the future is “conflictual cooperation”.

Özet

Bu makale, Avrupa Birliği (AB)-Türkiye ilişkilerine dair anlatıların 1960’lardan günümüze zaman içinde nasıl değiştiğini özetlemektedir. Yöntem olarak anlatı yaklaşımı uygulayan makale, farklı aktörlerin öyküleriyle şekillenen, çok yönlü ve çoksesli (hatta bazen kakofonik) denilebilecek bir tartışmayı masaya yatırmayı amaçlamaktadır. AB kurumlarının ve Türkiye’den siyasi aktörlerin en etkili anlatımlarını ortaya koyan makale, yalnızca bu anlatıların zaman içindeki değişimlerini incelemekle kalmayıp aynı zamanda aralarındaki dinamikleri de ele almaktadır. AB’den ve Türkiye’den çok sayıda resmi belgenin (yaklaşık 280 belge) kalitatif kodlanmasına ve analizine dayanan makalenin ortaya koyduğu temel sonuçlar aşağıdaki gibidir:

- **Özünde farklı:** Türkiye’den ve Avrupa’dan anlatılar yapıları açısından önemli farklılıklar göstermektedir. Türkiye’den anlatıların tamamı aynı hedefi paylaşmakta ancak kullandıkları kurgular ve argümanlar söz konusu olduğunda birbirlerinden ayrılmaktadır. Öte yandan AB anlatıları hem kurguları hem de AB-Türkiye ilişkileri için hedefledikleri “finaler” açısından birbirlerinden farklıdır.
- **Tedricen ayırıcı:** 1960’lardan bu yana hem Türkiye’deki ve AB’deki anlatıların sayısı giderek artmış ve hem de tartışma konuları giderek çeşitlenmiştir.
- **Giderek ihtilafli:** Çalışma, çatışma odaklı söylemlerin AB-Türkiye ilişkilerine dair tartışmalarda yeni bir fenomen değil, yinelenen bir olay olduğunu teyit etse de, son yıllarda bu tür söylemlerin her iki tarafta da artan seviyelerde kullanıldığını göstermektedir.

Sonuç olarak bu araştırma, günümüz anlatılarında çatışmalı unsurlar ile işbirliğinin yapmanın önemini vurgulayan argümanların birlikte baskın olarak yer aldığı sonucunu çıkarmaktadır. Bu nedenle, çalışmanın sonuçları, FEUTURE projesinin ortaya koyduğu ana sonuçla uyumludur. Diğer bir deyişle, AB-Türkiye ilişkilerinin geleceği için en olası senaryo “çatışmalı işbirliği” dir.



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1. Introduction¹

Like the relationship as such, the debate on the relations between Turkey and the European Union (EU)² has been marked by an oscillation between rapprochement and estrangement. Recently, however, the diplomatic crises and escalation of tension between Turkey on the one hand and various EU member states and institutions on the other seem to indicate an all-time low of the relationship. Against this backdrop, the aim of this paper is to deconstruct the discourses in Turkey and the EU by uncovering recurring patterns as well as specific features of the parties’ rhetoric. Taking up a narrative approach, it aims at outlining the collective stories Turkish and European actors have been telling on EU-Turkey relations since the early 1960s. By focusing on the way in which actors have experienced and chronicled the temporally connected, continuously interacting events of the past it seeks to investigate the present of the EU-Turkey relations with a new perspective and further explore the potential implications and clues for the future of the partnership.

The results of this paper are drawn from a uniquely comprehensive and qualitative analysis of a vast set of official sources from Turkey and the EU, which the authors coded systematically by means of a jointly structured codebook. With this strong empirical basis, it can contribute significantly to the existing literature.

In operational terms, as will soon become clear, this paper differentiates narratives by understanding their *plot* and *goal*. The elements and arguments constituting the plot of narratives, for example, can include the narrators’ perceptions of each other and other relevant actors. They can also comprise accounts of the existing settings and drivers of the relationship on different levels. In the case of EU-Turkey relations, specifically, the goals can range from full membership on the one end of the spectrum to alienation or distancing on the other. By identifying these goals, the paper also reflects on the ways the individual narratives link to different future scenarios of EU-Turkey relations, namely *conflict*, *cooperation*, and *convergence*³.

This paper claims that dynamics between the Turkish and EU narratives are closely interlinked with the course of the overall relationship. That is to say, the state of relations at a certain time determines the trends of convergence and divergence between Turkish and EU narratives and vice versa. For instance, if the actual set of events is favourable for both parties at the same time, the parties’ accounts on each other and the fate of their relationship itself are expected to be positive

¹ The authors would like to thank Betül Sakinir very much for her valuable contribution.

² Although the institution in question is addressed as “the European Union” throughout the paper for ease of reading, it should be noted that the text, depending on the historical period concerned, may also be referring to the European Economic Community, even though it may not be specified individually.

³ The *conflict* scenario sees Turkey’s membership to the EU clearly off the table and sees Turkey and the EU developing in different ways. In this scenario, Turkey is perceived as an estranged partner for the EU and vice versa. The *cooperation* scenario envisages Turkey and the EU engage in functional forms of cooperation, which can also be understood in the sense of a strategic partnership. The third scenario, *convergence*, indicates a fundamental change for the better with some form of membership for Turkey. This would entail significant progress of Turkey in fulfilling the Copenhagen Criteria and the Acquis. Differentiated forms of integration could also play into this scenario. For more information on the scenarios of the FEUTURE project, see Tocci, 2016.



and synergetic. Concurrently, corresponding and clashing narratives have different repercussions for the overall relationship. If the dominant narratives in the EU and Turkey share the same goal and there is a certain harmony of their plots, the relationship is more likely to develop in a positive direction because these collective stories are intrinsically constructive and persuasive; they alter the way the audiences perceive, interpret, and respond. It is also important to note that narratives themselves (although seem different) are inherently intertwined as they interact with and influence each other to a considerable extent over time.

The next chapter continues by outlining the narrative approach and the underlying definition of “narrative” employed in the study. It also introduces the operationalisation and dataset of the research. The third chapter presents the main results in the form of a set of dominant and relevant narratives identified for the EU and Turkey respectively. Finally, the fourth chapter maps out the dynamics between the said narratives over time and based on the previously presented results. The paper concludes by discussing the possible implications of the past and current Turkish and EU narratives for the future.

2. A Narrative Approach to the Analysis of EU-Turkey Relations

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This paper follows a constructivist approach, in the broadest sense of the word, while also bringing historical sociology into the analysis. It argues that presenting a static picture, an accurate portrayal of social reality “as what it really is” is beyond the bounds of possibility, since all knowledge on social reality is contingent on perception and experience. We are capable of broadening our analytical perspective through partially valid interpretations of segments of social reality (Katzenstein, 1996) but ahistorical, objective knowledge is not attainable.

As Browning puts it, “[i]n a complex and changing world, it is only through emplotting ourselves in constitutive stories differentiating the self from others that we are able to attribute meaning to the social world and to construct a sense of our own identity and interests” (2008: 11). Consequently, acquirement and performance of identity through stories are essential subjects in constructivist inquiry —whether they are anticipated as a product of social practice that has (semi-)causal effects on interest and behaviour (Adler, 1997; Katzenstein, 1996, Onuf, 1989; Wendt, 1992; Wendt, 1999), or as a constitutive intermediary between natural and social world (Campbell, 1998; Connolly, 2002; Linklater, 1998).

Following this constructivist insight, this paper acknowledges the temporal nature and subjectivity of cognition of social and political reality. It asserts that the reality is constantly re-constructed and re-negotiated among actors and that narratives are the conversational units of communication and mediation in story form within these intersubjective interactions. More importantly, it contends that action is only meaningful if it is conceptualized as a part of a story.

Moving beyond this view, however, this paper shares three main common grounds with the historical sociology of international relations (HSIR). First, it propounds that the present is an ever-changing, constructed phenomenon that is situated in a historical context (Hobson 2002: 8;



Hobson, Lawson & Rosenberg 2010; Lawson, 2007). It asserts that history does not consist of instances of independent cases but a flow of events that are connected by multiple patterns of causation (Mann, 1986). In other words, the present is not sealed off from the past but rather both shapes and is shaped by the past (Delanty and Isin, 2003: 1). Similarly, an analysis of the contemporary EU-Turkey relations can only be comprehensive if it traces the preceding narratives underlying the (often-heated) political debates on both sides. It is the aim of this paper to contribute to this endeavour.

Second, this paper maintains that agents and structures are connected in a complex way. Agents are constituted within social structures while they are also constitutive of processes of social change (Onuf, 1989; Katzenstein, 1996; Wendt, 1999). They have a formative role in and explanatory capacity for creation, realization, and resolution of social structures and should not be divorced from these structures in scientific inquiry. That being the case, overlooking the narratives and focusing solely on the actual interactions among actors would be a capital mistake when studying EU-Turkey relations. Such an approach would miss out the opportunity to map the actors' mind-sets and priorities with respect to the future. Hence, this underlines the relevance and importance of studying narratives of the involved actors of EU-Turkey relations.

Third, this paper asserts that, in social research, systemic variables and domestic factors are interwoven and employ no clear dichotomy. The international environment consists of states with multiple domestic identities, which together "constitute a social cognitive structure that makes threats and opportunities, enemies and allies, intelligible, thinkable, and possible" (Hopf, 2002: 16). That being said, the domestic identities in question are being reproduced partly in interactions with other states' identities. Here, the debate should not be on the relative importance and impact of domestic versus international determinants but the significance of identity and discourse in both approaches and the analytical tools to inspect these phenomena. In line with this assertion, the paper follows a comparative approach including both EU and Turkish discourses in its analysis. In addition, the qualitative study included codes reflecting the mutual perceptions of the Turkish and EU actors.

In light of these considerations, this paper uses narrative analysis, an approach that is traditionally used in cognitive sciences and psychology and puts forward a set of influential narratives identified in the discourses of various Turkish and EU actors. It focuses on elements of continuity and change within and among the stories told. Specifically, it is interested in how the narratives have emerged, developed, and interacted in response to key critical junctures and milestones of the relationship, whether they have disappeared or lost their relevance in time throughout the history or, in other cases, whether they have reappeared at some later point. Herewith, this paper sheds light on a complex and at times polarized debate and fills a lacuna in the growing body of research on EU-Turkey relations with its innovative, empirical, and comprehensive approach.

Traditionally, the term "narrative analysis" carries different connotations (Bamberg, 2012). It can be taken as a research *on* narratives, where narratives are the object of inquiry. It can also imply a research *with* narratives, where narratives are used as a mean to inquire another subject. In the



latter case, the narrative rather serves as a form of displaying the results of interpretative research (Biegon/Nullmeier, 2014). This paper is located at the intersection of these two interpretations. It first attempts to unveil different stories on longstanding bilateral relations that have been narrated by different actors in Turkey and in the EU. It also goes beyond that by looking for hints, iterative arguments and topics, or areas of enduring agreements and disagreements to outline potential elements for future stories.

While the definition of narrative adopted here is tailored to the paper’s specific research design and questions, it draws from the main approaches of narrative analysis, particularly those applying narrative analysis to political science⁴. When staying close to the literary origin of the term, narratives are defined as stories, displaying features such as *setting*, *plot*, *characters*, and *moral of the story*. While the setting refers to the context of a specific policy problem, the plot relates the characters or actors (e.g. heroes, villains, victims) of the story in various ways. Lastly, the moral of the story presents a policy solution. (See e.g. Jones et al., 2014)

Inspired by the referred approaches and adapted for the purposes of the FEUTURE’s research on EU-Turkey relations, narratives here are defined as *interpretations by political actors of the evolution, drivers and actors, as well as the goal (or finalité) of the EU-Turkey relations*. Thus, the narratives identified in this paper include interpretations of and arguments on certain notions, events, relations, self and other, and third parties relevant to the EU-Turkey relationship. Each of these elements might be depicted as hindering or as driving the relationship towards or away from a certain goal, or “visions for the future” (Kaplan, 1986). Herein, the plots of the narratives relate such interpretations and arguments to the desired end goal by establishing a logical process and elucidating details on the causality. In the end, the narratives are shared with specific audiences (Elliot, 2005) and commence the cyclical interaction between reality and perception.

Operationalization

This section aims at providing brief information on the operationalization of narrative analysis for this paper. More detailed, specific information on the codebook, data selection and collection, analysis tools, and document list can be found in the online annex guidance to this paper (available at <http://ukoeln.de/X46X6>).

Methodologically, the research is based on a narrative analysis of a vast set of documents from Turkey and the EU since the beginning of the 1960s until the end of 2017. These textual documents were manually coded by researchers from Middle East Technical University (METU) and University of Cologne, making use of a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) and a jointly structured codebook. Such software represents the ideal tool for narrative analyses like the one adopted here as it facilitates the comparative and systematic coding of patterns and notions over vast data sets.

⁴ See, among others, Czarniawska, 2004; Fischer/Forester, 1993; Hyvärinen, 2008; Jones et al., 2014; Kaplan, 1986; Kohler Riessmann, 1993; Roe, 1994; Shenhav, 2006. See also for an overview of narrative approaches in political science Patterson/Renwick Monroe, 1998; Gadinger et al., 2014.



Because narratives do not necessarily emerge as complete stories in the documents analyzed, the researchers coded the elements of plot and goal in the qualitative coding process. They identified a narrative by collecting and classifying individual data elements and organizing them into a complete story (Polkinghorne, 1995: 15). Thus, the researchers pursue the trajectory of the way actors think about the relationship and the respective self and other, in a constant effort to understand and reflect the stories as they are being told.

The narrative analysis intrinsically entails singularity and subjectivity of meanings and senses as it deals with the emergent and particular properties of the stories constructed and told by the subject(s) of the investigation. Further to that, any scholarly attempt that claims to unfold stories is bound to be a co-construction of a re-constructed reality. What is meant by this is that an analysis of narratives as socially situated knowledge constructions (Polkinghorne, 1995) is a meaning-making process itself, which includes the researcher alongside of the narrator under research (Gehart et al 2007). The researcher, of course, does not take part in this representation by filling in any gaps or adding individual commentary within the narrative, but rather by transmitting the story in a unique and reflexive manner.

From this point of view, the codebook for this research was structured jointly in a way that would ensure the comparability of results but still allow a certain degree of flexibility for the researchers to reflect the variances between the discourses of Turkish and EU actors. It was, therefore, developed as a mix of deductive and inductive approaches. The codebook included codes reflecting the plot and the goal but also codes referring to the actors' perceptions on the self and other, for example in terms of identity such as whether Turkey was perceived as “European”. As further elements of the plot, the codebook reflected the drivers and brakes of the relationship as described by the actors. These drivers forming part of the argumentations of actors were structured according to different thematic dimensions they relate to, namely politics, economy, security, energy & climate, migration, as well as identity & culture.

As for the data selection, on the basis of the previously published Working Paper “*Mapping Milestones and Periods of Past EU-Turkey relations*” by Hauge et al. (2016) and informed by the secondary literature, the authors chose 13 milestones from both European and Turkish perspectives as points of orientation for the selection of documents. In order to be able to track changes and increase the explanatory power of the results, documents from the years before and after such a milestone were also included.



Table 2.1 Overview of the data set

	EU	Turkey
Main types of documents analysed and actors (time frame: 1960-2017)	European Parliament: resolutions, selected debates European Council: conclusions, statements European Commission: reports, communications Speeches: by leaders of EU institutions	Presidents: speeches, presentations, statements Prime Ministers: speeches, presentations, statements Ministries of EU Affairs and Foreign Affairs: official documents on EU-Turkey relations Economic Development Foundation (IKV): reports, books, articles, newsletters, brief notes
Number of documents analysed	138	144

Source: Own compilation

The dataset was designed to be unique in its comprehensiveness and established through online sources and archives as well as institutional and governmental archives in the EU and Turkey. In total, it included 138 documents from the EU and 144 documents from Turkey.

The focus for the EU side was on the documents from the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council. European Council conclusions and statements⁵ reflect the position of the EU’s heads of state or government. The European Commission reports and speeches, as well as statements, were also included in the data set, and in particular, its yearly published enlargement strategies. For the European Parliament, especially, the published resolutions on Turkey represented the main source, as they reflect the outcome of deliberations in the debates, thereby reflecting the consensus reached among the EU parliamentarians – who themselves reflect the EU populations via their mandate. In addition, selected debates were included, however only with the aim of understanding the main lines of argumentation at certain points in time. They were not interpreted as the official position of the EU, given that the speeches by parliamentarians rather reflect individual opinions and party positions.

For the Turkish side, the document selection mostly relied on the speeches and presentations given by the President and the Prime Minister at the Turkish Grand National Assembly. More specifically, the President’s legislative year opening speech and the Prime Minister’s presentations of the government program and of the annual budget bill were collected for each selected year. This is because these documents were considered rich in references to the relations with the EU as well as to the state of relations with the third countries and institutions; domestic, regional, and global developments; and policy proposals of the government of the time. A special attention was given to the speeches of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as an actor, who has had a very strong influence over the contemporary Turkish narratives for the last 16 years. Finally, following

⁵ For the European Council, its Presidency Conclusions and Conclusions were analyzed for those milestones that fall into the period since its creation 1974. Similarly, the Commission only started to publish regular reports on the progress in Turkey since 1999, which is why before that date, speeches were included as well as individually published documents.



a consultation with the Secretariat General, a selection of documents issued by the Economic Development Foundation (IKV) as the oldest non-governmental institution with an aim “to inform the Turkish business world and Turkish public about European integration and Turkey-EU relations” (IKV, n.d.) were collected to reflect the non-governmental/business aspect of the Turkish narratives.

While employing textual data from official documents in order to make comparative and over-time observations on *collective stories*, the authors acknowledge that documents of official nature might be prone to bias, given that they might be formed pursuant or according to certain political deliberations and considerations. Such documents are texts that are “written with distinctive purposes in mind” (Bryman, 2012: 555; see also Atkinson/Coffey, 2010). Due to their official character, they might deliberately leave certain matters out, or be written in an ambiguous, indirect style. As will be elaborated, this is even more explicit for some parties and sort of documents. Legal documents or documents issued by the EU (such as decisions and resolutions) seem to have a more formal, institutional language than for example some speeches given by Turkish politicians. The former group of texts do not feature strong lines of argumentation as prominently as the latter – even on the subjects that are known to be dominant in the public debates. Interlinked with this aspect, due to the official character of the documents analysed particularly for the EU – which stems from the research aim to grasp and analyse the official position – certain arguments and perceptions do not feature as strongly in the results of this study as they would in the case of different sources. As one example, aspects that related to identity, religion or culture are likely to be underrepresented in such kind of documents when compared to the broader public debates. Such discussions on identity-related aspects can usually be situated in a spectrum between those that perceive Turkey as “a European country” and those arguments that reflect a perception of Turkey as “the Other”. The vast literature on this topic is another proof of the high relevance of this dimension of EU-Turkey relations⁶. Therefore, as has been outlined above, one focus in the coding process has also been on the mutual perceptions voiced by the different actors, which relates to this dimension in particular.

To overcome these mentioned limitations, the authors resorted to a triangulation of sources. They analysed different institutions and actors for each side and consulted the secondary literature as well as other primary sources, like speeches given to different audiences, while keeping the focus on the initially selected and coded documents. The authors are aware that such triangulation or different combinations of documents might also have a slight impact on the output. Having the EU as a party itself (not member states) vis-à-vis Turkey, however, they argue that this selection with a widened collection of documents from *the same years* and *individuals/institutions* on the original list is a helpful way to have a better grasp of the subject matter of this paper: narratives.

⁶ A few examples are: Aydın-Düzgit 2012, Casanova 2006, Rumelili 2008, See e.g. Aydın-Düzgit et al., 2017, Aydın-Düzgit et al. 2018, Cautres/Monceau 2011.



3. Past and Present Narratives from the EU and Turkey

There are many studies and academic contributions, which produced greatly on the discourses (Aydin-Düzgit 2015; Aydin-Düzgit, 2012; Çağatay-Tekin, 2010; Macmillan, 2013; Wimmel 2009), perceptions (Eralp/Torrun, 2015, Müftüler-Baç/Süleymanoglu-Kürüm, 2015) narratives (Levin, 2011), identity construction processes (Aydin-Düzgit et al. 2017; Aydin-Düzgit et al. 2018; Aydin-Düzgit, 2012; Casanova, 2006; Cautres/Monceau 2011; Ergin, 2010; Köroğlu, 2014; Lindgaard et al., 2018; Lundgreen 2006; Müftüler-Baç/Taşkın, 2007; Nas, 2001; Rumelili, 2008; Rumelili, 2011; Schneeberger, 2009; Yılmaz, 2016;), or historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire (Aydin-Düzgit et al. 2017; Kaya/Tecmen 2011; McDonald, 2012) with a focus on the EU-Turkey relations. Differently from previous research, this paper uncovers the European and Turkish narratives *jointly* with a comparative perspective, provides input for possible future narratives, and thus, establishes a link between the narratives and future scenarios for the relations.

Outlining the results of the empirical study, the below following two sections of this chapter present the main components of the EU and Turkish narratives respectively. They introduce and discuss each narrative individually by presenting its plot and goal and propounding the ideal-type scenario and the period(s) in history to which the said narrative relates the most. Thereby, the chapter traces the relevance of the narratives over time. Doing so, this chapter paves the way for the ensuing analysis of chapter 4, which addresses the relationship between the narratives in a comparative perspective.

A note of caution is due here. It is important to bear in mind that neither the plot nor the goal of a narrative is meaningful by itself. As one can see, for example, all the Turkish narratives introduced below have the goal of “membership”. On a first glance, one could, therefore, think that this would imply a certain harmonious tone from the Turkish side in line with the convergence or cooperation scenario. However, the conflictual elements within the Turkish narratives have gradually increased over time and in the last identified narrative, there are even implications and statements directly pointing to the conflict scenario despite the oft-repeated objective of joining the EU. Therefore, the elements of plot and goal need to be interpreted together vigilantly.

The following sections show that certain narratives are dominant or influential -or, contrary, irrelevant- in certain times in the history of the relationship since the 1960s. The authors base these propositions about the timing of the presented narratives on the empirical analysis, i.e. results of the coding of the set of documents presented above. The authors are, however, aware that proposing a clear-cut categorization or timeline of narratives is a difficult exercise as the results in terms of timing are inherently dependent from the dataset of this study and might vary in different kinds of sources had been chosen in a respectively different research design.

The presentation of narratives also quotes excerpts as representative examples. Although these quotes were chosen carefully, the authors would like to stress that this does not imply that the respective formulations stand for the viewpoints of all actors at a given time.



On a general note, the paper affirms that, at every given time, there are numerous compatible and conflictual narratives coexisting in a polyphonic chorus. This study can only demonstrate a small of part of the “orchestra of narratives” within the EU and Turkey. For the sake of bringing light in this at times cacophonous debate, this paper focuses on drawing frames for the most predominant narratives. It thus is not concerned with the secondary (counter or alternative) narratives that have been adopted by only a limited number of actors or prevail for a short-term period. To put it differently, the following sections do not provide information, for example, on the views of the Islamist/ultra-nationalist parties, who saw the European integration as a threat to Turkey’s traditional values or the critical Marxists, who rejected the western economic model and advocated modernization without Westernisation (Nas, 2001). They, for example, also do not touch upon the positions of the EU member states’ leaders, as this would require a different research design⁷. Thus, this paper should be understood as contextualization of a larger claim, where the introduced narratives -to a certain degree- have an ideal-type character and by no means are exhaustive and exclusive.

While acknowledging the unusually long time span of the research design and the interpretative nature of the data analysis method, this study first and foremost aims at stimulating and contributing to a critical reflection on an issue that has received relatively little attention in the study of EU-Turkey relations. It aspires to start a discussion on how the European and Turkish actors’ alternative presuppositions about each other, mutual relations, and drivers on different levels *might* lead to different scenarios for the relationship. Thereby, this study demonstrates only a share of the multiple narratives within the EU and Turkey but with the particular attention it simultaneously devotes to both parties, it provides a number of important insights, especially with regard to the link between the reconstruction or negation of reality and actual state of relations.

The following tables provide an overview of the goal and plot of the identified narratives in the EU and Turkey. They also display the scenarios and periods to which the identified narratives relate most.

⁷ The FEUTURE EU 28 country reports provide concise overviews of all the national debates of the EU member states: Online at: <http://www.feuture.uni-koeln.de/eu-28-country-reports/>



Table 3.1: EU Narratives

	<i>Membership</i>	<i>Special Candidate</i>	<i>Strategic Partner</i>	<i>Distant Neighbour</i>
Goal	Turkey’s accession to the EU	Turkey remains access candidate in an open-ended and long-lasting process.	Strategic Partnership with Turkey below membership.	Keeping Turkey out of the EU, freeze or suspension of the accession process.
Plot	This narrative argues for Turkish accession to the EU. In this view, the final goal of the association agreement and Customs Union with Turkey is a future accession. Arguments for a partial or differentiated membership could potentially also form a part of the plot. Different drivers motivate this goal of membership. This can be geostrategic or economic interests but also the prospect of contributing to Turkey’s democratisation via the enlargement procedure. The accession process takes the same steps as with any other candidate, based on the Copenhagen Criteria. Hence, Turkey can become EU member as soon as it fulfils the criteria. From an identity perspective, Turkey is considered a European country and thus eligible for membership.	This narrative argues that there are certain political and economic conditions that render Turkey a special candidate (or associate or applicant in earlier years). It includes references to hurdles such as Turkey’s difficulties to fulfil the Copenhagen Criteria but also the absorption capacity of the EU, also in light of Turkey’s large economy and population. In early years, it referred also to the economic gap between the Turkish economy and one of the member states. As regards the accession negotiations, this narrative rather follows the credo of “pacta sunt servanda” by not abandoning the process while at the same time stressing that negotiations with Turkey are “open-ended” and/or “long-lasting”. Thus, this often results in statements without a clearly formulated commitment to the end of the process, i.e. the final goal of accession.	This narrative is based on the perception of Turkey as an important geostrategic partner, which is also shared by other narratives. Based on this perception, it stresses the need for cooperation with Turkey. The argumentation relates to drivers such as from the economy, security but also political dimension. As for the form that the cooperation should take, this narrative can refer on the one hand to transactional forms of cooperation in certain policy fields (such as in the case of the EU-Turkey deal on migration). On the other hand, it can also opt for a more rules-based cooperation, such as an upgrade of the customs union. The ongoing accession negotiations with Turkey might not have to be stopped, but they are not a high priority.	This narrative sees Turkey as an estranged and distant, or even hostile neighbour, which may also not share the same democratic values as the EU. The “backsliding” of the democratic reform process, such as due to the military coups, moves Turkey away from “European” values. With its unreliable foreign policy, Turkey drags the EU into conflicts in the neighbourhood or it is even perceived an aggressor of conflicts, for example in terms of its regularly controversial role in Cyprus. This narrative may also include the concern that Turkey is no longer a stable partner of the “West”. From an identity perspective, representations of this narrative tend to perceive Turkey as “the Other”. As consequence for the concrete relationship, this narrative can include open threats by the EU abandon the accession process and/or to take sanction measures such as a freeze or suspension of relations.
Link to Scenarios	This narrative is linked to the convergence scenario as it argues for membership of Turkey.	This narrative is linked partly to the convergence scenario, given that the accession process is not abandoned. However, with regard to its emphasis on the open-ended character of negotiations, it relates more to the cooperation scenario.	This narrative is linked to the cooperation scenario. Accession is either not foreseen or the accession process and/or its conclusion are not a priority.	This narrative is linked to the conflict scenario as it entails a distancing and alienation from Turkey in many spheres. Concretely, it may result in an abandonment of the accession perspective or a freeze or suspension of relations.
Relevance/ Dominance	Membership was the dominant narrative in the 1960s and 1970s, but it declined in the 1980s. Its relevance was briefly revived in the debate around the milestone decisions on Turkey’s candidacy (1999) and the beginning of negotiations (2005). In recent years, debates on differentiated or partial membership emerged in expert and academic circles but do not yet form part of the EU’s official discourse.	With a few representations from the beginning, this narrative gained relevance in the late 1980s. It was ‘institutionalised’ at the European Council of 1997 which put forward a specific “European Strategy” only for Turkey. Elements of this narrative continue to be part of the EU’s discourse, also after the opening of accession negotiations in 2005.	Turkey’s geostrategic importance for the EU is a constant motif in the EU’s discourse. Due to the rejection of any concept below membership from the Turkish side, concepts of strategic partnership could not gain ground in the official EU discourse. However, statements and resolutions by the EU of the last years include references linking to a strategic partnership, such as the upgrade of the customs union or the EU-Turkey deal on migration.	The 1980s were the first phase with a dominance of the distant neighbour-narrative, following the military coup in Turkey. There were also instances of conflict later, such as in certain cases of disagreement with Turkey’s foreign policy and with regard to the human rights situation during the 1990s and up until the decision to grant candidacy status to Turkey in 1999. This narrative has gained highly in relevance in recent years, and particularly since the purges after the coup attempt of 2016.

Source: Own compilation



Table 3.2: Turkish Narratives

Source: Own compilation

	Westernisation	Europeanisation	Eurasianisation	Turkey as “the Heir”	Turkey as a “Great Power”
Goal	Membership	Membership	Membership	Membership	Membership
Plot	This narrative considers Turkey as a crucial part of “the West”, a form of alliance, which includes the EU along with other Western actors. Nourished by the insecurity and anxiety stemming from the bipolarity and nuclear armament at the height of the Cold War, this narrative places a great emphasis on cooperation, primarily with the NATO and the United States but also with a Europe-based institution such as the Council of Europe and the EU. It brings forward Turkey’s democratic, secular, liberal side and underlines the geopolitical and geostrategic importance of the country. In this context, Turkey is seen as an “asset” for the European integration, indicating that the Turkish membership to the EU is nothing but a rational decision that has benefits for both sides.	This narrative utterly emphasizes Turkey’s “rightful” place among European countries. It sees Turkey a natural part of the continental Europe for geographic and historical reasons but also because it asserts Turkey as a modern, civilized country that is integrated into the European economic and political system to a certain extent. This narrative argues that Turkey and the EU need each for strategic, as well as security-related causes. During the Cold War, this need mainly derives from the turbulent international environment but starting from 1990, it becomes more related to economic and political opportunities the new order offers and the challenges the parties facing together. Recently, examples of the said challenges include but not limited to the Syrian Refugee Crisis, terrorism, economic and financial instability, and energy challenges.	Emerging in the years immediately after the collapse of the USSR, this narrative draws a significant attention to the smaller, newly formed countries of Eurasia. It leaves Turkey’s one-sided foreign policy orientation toward the West aside and establishes Turkey as an influential regional power and a bridge between the West and the East. While acknowledging Turkey’s self-evident connection to Europe, it asserts that Turkey is not merely a European country but a key actor with historical, cultural, and geographical connections with countries from a wider region. Assuming that the EU would seek for political and economic or even integration with Eurasian actors, this narrative does not only see Turkey as a role model for these countries but also argues that Turkey’s much-delayed membership to the EU is the first step of the European project’s possible deepening and widening in the region.	This narrative essentially revolves around the so-called clash of the Turkish and European identities. As Turkey develops closer relations with the Middle Eastern and Central Asian countries and becomes more conservative under the AKP rule for the last 16 years, references to Turkey’s imperial legacy and allegedly organic links to Turkic dynasties seem to increase significantly. While this narrative envisages Turkey as the grandiose heir and highlights the glory of the former empires, it does not necessarily defend the idea of conflicting identities of Turkey and Europe. On the contrary, it often asserts that Turkey is European because of its Ottoman past and accuses the European counterparts of exploiting the historical divergences among parties. Even though it promotes greater engagement of Turkey with the countries were once a part the Ottoman Empire, it still lays great stress on Turkey’s objective of full membership to the EU.	This narrative envisages Turkey as a powerful political and economic actor with a pivotal regional role that entails various strategic opportunities. It pictures Turkey and the EU as equals, asserts that the accession negotiations should continue in a more transparent, impartial manner, and criticizes the EU for not showing the interest and respect Turkey deserves. It contains an explicit “Us” vs “Them” rhetoric, which gradually becomes more antagonistic in the light of the series of events that bring forward the differing and sometimes contradictory interests of the parties. While it does not abandon the EU membership objective of Turkey, it sustains that the EU and Turkey are at a crossroad, meaning that there is a certain need for a fundamental change in the EU’s attitudes towards Turkey in order to maintain the dialogue.
Link to Scenarios	This narrative links to the convergence scenario as it foresees EU membership for Turkey with a focus on Turkey’s rightful place within the Western alliances and institutions.	This narrative links to the convergence scenario as it foresees membership for Turkey with a focus on Turkey’s rightful place within the European alliances and institutions.	This narrative links to the convergence scenario as it foresees membership for Turkey with a focus on Turkey’s geostrategic importance in the Eurasian region. It furthermore envisages an EU enlargement towards Eurasia.	This narrative links to the convergence scenario as it foresees membership for Turkey. In the meantime, it occasionally addresses issues from the shared history of Turkey and Europe, which sometimes leads to controversy and conflict.	This narrative links to the convergence scenario as it foresees membership for Turkey but underlines the political and economic points of conflicts between Turkey and the EU at times.
Relevance/ Dominance	This narrative is dominant throughout the Cold War but especially during the 1960s and early 1970s. As the European integration institutionalizes and gains political significance and economic power, the EU’s importance for Turkey increases, leading to the emergence and rise of the Europeanisation narrative. This narrative’s dominance weakens gradually since the 1990s but it continues to be relevant to a certain degree.	While it is interwoven with the Westernization, this narrative can be identified as early as the 1960s. As Turkey becomes more and more engaged with the EU through different institutional mechanisms, Europeanisation narrative gains dominance. It seemingly reaches its peak with the legal and political harmonization processes successfully carried out by Turkey in the early 2000s. Despite the increasing criticism towards the EU, this narrative remains highly relevant.	This narrative emerges in the early 1990s and remains relevant for nearly a decade. With Russia and Iran (re)gaining power in the region and the EU showing little interest in further integration, the attention given to Eurasia eventually diminishes. Although there are several references to the Eurasian nature of Turkey and the country’s endeavour to have closer relations with the actors from the region in the recent years, this narrative seems to lose its relevance significantly.	This narrative can be traced back to the 1970s, to the National View of Necmettin Erbakan, who initially opposed to the idea of Turkey’s involvement in the European integration but later became supportive of the Turkish membership to the EU later. Initially, this narrative is neither common among different actors nor has noticeable influence in the face of the strong Euroenthusiasm of the time. However, it gains significance in the last decade under the AKP government.	This narrative appears at intervals starting from the 1990s but truly gains relevance in the last decade under the AKP government. Recently, its dominance is reinforced even further by Turkey’s relatively successful economic performance during the 2008 Financial Crisis, advancing military capabilities, and the alleged stability and competence the AKP has brought to the government with its continuous electoral success since 2002.



3.1. EU Narratives

The analysis of the documents for the EU institutions indicated that there are four main narratives: 1) *Membership*, 2) *Special Candidate*, 3) *Strategic Partner* and 4) *Distant Neighbour*.

Membership

According to the *Membership* narrative, Turkey should become a member of the European Union. In this view, Turkey's European character is stressed with the implication that it belongs to the group of countries eligible for EU membership. The most prominent example of this perception is the Commission president Hallstein's speech at the occasion of the signature of the Ankara Agreement in 1963, in which he repeated that: "Turkey is a part of Europe" (1963EU1).

The narrative's plot foresees several steps of the process of accession – starting with the establishment of the Customs Union and then following the regular application procedure and accession negotiations as with any other candidate, and with the goal of accession as *finalité* of the process. There are different drivers that motivate this narrative, such as geopolitical arguments stressing Turkey's importance for security in the region or the emphasis that Turkey is an important trade partner. The prospect of contributing to the democratisation in Turkey via the enlargement process is another regular element of this narrative's plot and relates to an overall vision of the Union's mission in the international system (as expressed in Art. 21 TEU).

The results of this study suggest that the Membership narrative was mainly prevalent in the official discourse of the European institutions during the first two decades of relations between Turkey and the European Economic Community (EEC), thus after the signature of the Ankara Agreement and in the 1970s. Commission president Hallstein claimed at the signature of the Ankara Agreement in 1963 that "[w]e are at the outset of an era of close cooperation (...) One day the final step is to be taken: Turkey is to be a full member of the EU" (1963EU1). Also, the resolutions of the EP during that time regularly pronounced membership as final aim of the association. In November 1963, for example, the parliamentarians declared that the Ankara Agreement "shall make possible a future accession of Turkey to the Community" (1963EU2)⁸. A resolution from 1970 argued in a similar vein that the most important aim of the association was "the full membership of Turkey in the Community" (1970EU1).

However, one has to interpret these statements against the international political context of the time. European leaders signed the agreement with Turkey's strategic value as a partner for the West in the international setting of the Cold War in mind. The agreement's text includes the aim to "preserve and strengthen peace and liberty" (Ankara Agreement 1963, Preamble). Hence, the goal was to firmly anchor Turkey in the Western hemisphere, which was shared by Turkey (see Westernization narrative below). The President of the Council of Ministers, Joseph Luns, put into words the mutual interests and motives of the agreement at the time: "For Turkey, this agreement effectively represents another proof that it is European in its nature. For our community, this

⁸ Like in this case, a small number of original documents of the EU was coded in German due to the fact that English only became an official EU language after UK's accession to the EU in 1973. Quotes from these documents were translated into English by the authors.



agreement represents recognition of the prominent position that Turkey assumes today in the free world (...)” (1963EU3).

Yet, the *Membership* narrative lost its impetus at the end of the 1970s and particularly after the military coup in Turkey of 12 September 1980. In this time, one can identify a rise of conflict elements in the discourse, as captured by the *Distant Neighbour* narrative. In that time, the Community institutions harshly criticized the human rights situation and the military rule. Even more, they temporarily froze the official relations. Considering these developments, it comes as no surprise that the official documents did not mention Turkish membership as explicitly as goal any longer in the 1980s.

When looking at the state of the European integration process in these years, one also needs to take into account the development of the Community itself towards a more political union. Consequently, the focus also moved away from a purely economic perspective on the relationship with Turkey. Consequently, the political sphere and democratic standards became more important (Öniş 2001: 113f). At the same time, the beforehand rather parallel development in economic and political terms between the Southern European states such as a Spain and Greece, which also had ambitions to join the Community, and Turkey started to drift apart (see also Eralp 2009: 155).

Also in most parts of the 1990s, the EU’s official statements also refrained from stressing Turkish membership as objective. Instead, there was a tendency to formulate Turkey’s general eligibility as well as the objective to complete the customs union, however without going into detail on the long-term perspective of relations. One example is the following quote: “The challenge for the years ahead is to establish the conditions for deepening this relationship, to the benefit of all our peoples” (1993EU1).

Notions of the *Membership* narrative reappeared in the EU’s official discourse in the years before and after the millennium when the European Council finally granted the candidacy to Turkey in its historic meeting in Helsinki in December 1999, and five years later when the European Council took the decision to open negotiations with Turkey. However, unlike in the first two decades analysed, there were now heated discussions on the topic and many voices rejected Turkish accession. Also, the European Parliament’s debates of October and December 1999 before the Helsinki summit show a high degree of polarization (1999EU4, 1995EU5). Thus, one can argue that the membership narrative at this time was (only) one among other challenging narratives, unlike it had been the case in the 1960s and 1970s when the official documents indicated some sort of harmony in terms of Turkey membership as final objective of the association.

In the years following the opening of the accession negotiations of 2005, a clear commitment towards the goal of Turkish membership cannot be found any longer in the EU’s official statements and reports analysed in this study. In the years after 2010, the documents by the European Commission merely included the argument that EU-Turkey relations could only be successful in an “active and credible accession process” (2011EU3) or that that the accession process “remains the most suitable framework” (2012EU3). After 2015, when the level of conflict in relations rose (see *Distant Neighbour* narrative below), even this formulation was not included any longer and the European Commission refrained from any statements on the future perspective. Thus, these



formulations on the necessity of a credible accession process, one could argue, were only a small remainder of the declined *Membership* narrative of earlier decades.

Given the current state of relations and a rise of conflict elements in recent years, the *Membership* narrative at the moment seems unlikely to become a dominant voice in the official discourse of the EU institutions in the nearer future again. However, one has to stress that the academic debate differs from the EU’s official discourse. There, in recent years, one can observe lively and intensive discussions on differentiated or associated forms of membership, which could provide a formula for Turkey’s relations with the EU. Some of these discussed concepts still link to the *Membership* narrative because they speak of some sort of membership (see e.g. Duff, 2013; Müftüler-Baç, 2017; Karakas, 2013; Ülgen, 2012). Although these concepts have not found their way in the EU’s official discourse yet, they might – even if not very likely – gain more relevance in the political discourse. Of course, only under the premise that there is a substantial and (positive) change of the conditions both in Turkey and in the EU in the future.

Special Candidate

The *Special Candidate*⁹ narrative adopts the perspective that Turkey has specific characteristics as well as difficulties in fulfilling the Copenhagen Criteria and implementing the *acquis*, which renders its association and candidacy different and more difficult when compared to other cases.

Already when Turkey became associated with the EEC in 1963, the agreement establishing the association had a special form and content due to the “financial, economic and social situation of Turkey” (1963EU2). Given the weakness of the Turkish economy at the time, the association included a preparation phase of five years and substantial financial assistance. The agreement with Greece, which had applied for association in the same year as Turkey, did not need such a preparation phase (1963EU3). The Turkish association was thus a *sui generis* agreement.

The *Special Candidate* narrative gained ground at the end of the 1980s and in parallel with the decline of the *Membership* narrative. Going beyond the argument of a gap between Turkey’s economy and those of the Member States, the narrative then also included the political dimension and emphasised that democratic standards in Turkey were not sufficient.

We also find several representative elements of this narrative in the Commission’s Opinion of 1989, by which it rejected Turkey’s application for membership:

“This [i.e. candidacy] presupposes first that the candidate country is considered capable (...) of bearing all the constraints and disciplines now applying to Member States (...) and second that the Community is in a position to cope with the problems which the integration (...) of the candidate into the Community would raise. In the particular case of Turkey, these two aspects are all the more significant in that Turkey is a large country (...) and its general level of development is substantially lower than the European average.” (1989EU2)

In addition, this quote includes the argument that the large population and size of the country represent a challenge to the Community. This argument is related to the term of “absorption

⁹ For better readability, this paper speaks of the *Special Candidate* narrative although in earlier decades Turkey was, of course, still an associate or applicant. Given that this narrative was particularly strong since Turkey has been a candidate, this terminology has been chosen as characteristic label for the narrative.



capacity” that has been used often in the case of the Turkish candidacy. The formulation was introduced by the European Council in its meeting of 1993 as forth criteria of the Copenhagen Criteria (1993EU2)¹⁰.

The Special Candidate narrative has been a strong voice in the official discourse particularly since the mid-1990s and it was finally cemented, or ‘institutionalised’, with the European Strategy that was offered to Turkey after the European Council of Luxembourg 1997. At this meeting, the Heads of State or Government decided that unlike the countries from Central and Eastern Europe, Turkey would not become accession candidate and would instead benefit from a dedicated strategy (1997EU1). A few days before this meeting, Commissioner van den Broek justified this kind of strategy by saying that “[i]t is only natural that Turkey should pursue its own path towards integration with Europe given that its historical experience has been so different from that of the countries of the former communist bloc” (1997EU2).

Two years after the Luxembourg meeting, there was a “positive turn” (Eralp, 2009: 157) with the decision of the European Council to grant the candidacy status to Turkey. In this historic conclusion, the European Council stated that “Turkey is a candidate State destined to join the Union on the basis of the same criteria as applied to the other candidate States” (1999EU1). This expression stressing the “same criteria” being applied to Turkey had been used already by the European Council in 1997 when it confirmed Turkey’s eligibility for accession but excluded it from the group of new candidate states (1997EU1). The wording appears particularly often in the EU’s official statements in the years between 1999 and 2005 and it proves that there was an effort to avoid the impression of a special treatment for Turkey.

A central notion is also the emphasis on the “open-ended” character of accession negotiations and that their outcome cannot be guaranteed. This was an expression used and repeated by all EU institutions in the context of the beginning of accession negotiations (see e.g. 2004EU10, 2004EU7, 2004EU4) and they stressed this particularly often in the case of Turkey. The European Parliament over the years further adapted this formulation by emphasizing the “long-lasting” character of the already “open-ended” process and underlining the “rigorous conditionality principle” based on Turkey’s commitment to reform (2012EU2).

For the period after 2005, the EU institutions did not really formulate a final goal for the EU-Turkey relationship explicitly in their official discourse. Therefore, one could argue that there has been a certain preference that Turkey remains in an “open-ended” accession process, without actually reaching the end of this process. The analysis of the European Conclusions shows that Turkey’s accession process was not on the agenda as it was rarely mentioned in the conclusions of the years between 2006-2015, even though negotiations had officially started¹¹. Of course, for the recent time period, this narrative needs to be interpreted against the background that the Turkish reform process and also the accession negotiations experienced a standstill – and later even a recess – quite soon after they had started in 2005 (see e.g. Tekin/Deniz 2018, forthcoming).

¹⁰ For example, in 2006 the EP called for the Commission to produce a report on the absorption capacity of the Union with regard to Turkey.

¹¹ In the few times that Turkey was mentioned during this time, the respective paragraphs only mentioned specific areas of cooperation (e.g. terrorism or migration) and did not appear under the headline of “enlargement” as in earlier years.



Overall, the results of the study indicate that this narrative focusing on the special – and often problematic – character of Turkey as an applicant as well as candidate country was strong since the end of the 1980s, with a peak around 1997 with the invention of the “European Strategy” for Turkey, and continues to be relevant until the present.

Strategic Partner

One of the most constant elements in the official rhetoric of the EU institutions, and forming part of different narratives, has been the emphasis on Turkey’s high geostrategic relevance for Europe. Drivers for this kind of narrative relate to the security perspective but also to Turkey’s growing economic importance and the increasing trade relations as well as its foreign policy and role in the neighbourhood. In recent years, references to Turkey’s potential as energy hub or corridor¹² and its role as a partner in the management of the migration¹³ became also prominent in the rhetoric.

Due to its strong links to the security dimension, the international context is important for the plot and logic of this narrative. For example, Turkey’s role as a partner of the “West” during the Cold War and as a bulwark against the expansion of the Soviet Union was an important driver from the 1960s to the end of the 1980s. A recurring motif in this context has been Turkey’s membership and significant role in NATO. In most periods, this was evaluated as a positive factor of relations, such as Turkey’s contribution to NATO’s armed intervention in the Kosovo War 1999, which was welcomed and highlighted positively in the documents (e.g. 2001EU1)¹⁴.

The Strategic Partner narrative is based on this perception of Turkey’s geostrategic value but in some instances goes further and can draw implications for the framework of relations. Namely, the narrative can include references to forms of partnership as a goal that remains below membership and is, therefore, related to a scenario of cooperation and a form of partnership instead of membership. The aim is then to establish and stabilize a close cooperation in certain fields of joint interests, which can either be institutionalised or, alternatively, remain on more a transactional basis. Arguments promoting close cooperation or high-level dialogues but also for an upgrade of the customs union can thus be related to this narrative. In this view, the accession negotiations might not necessarily have to be stopped but they are not a high priority and even less so their conclusion.

The idea to seek a form of relationship with Turkey in the sense of such a strategic partnership is not new. We find notions of this also in the EU’s official documents. For example, the Commission’s opinion of 1989, which rejected Turkey’s membership application, made several proposals in this direction: “The intensification of political links between the Community and Turkey, extending beyond the current framework of political dialogue, should be an objective. A

¹² In the analysed EU documents, energy was mentioned explicitly in relation to Turkey only very rarely before the beginning of accession negotiations 2005. Energy cooperation and Turkey’s role for energy security in EU became a constantly mentioned topic particularly since 2011.

¹³ In the analysed EU documents, migration was a topic in the 1970s with reference to Turkish workers in Europe and their rights, as well as Turkish asylum seekers in Europe. Also, the readmission agreement with Turkey was mentioned as goal. However, the most references to migration as a driver of relations were found for the documents published since 2011.

¹⁴ An exception has been the concern voiced over Turkey’s policy of vetoing NATO cooperation including Cyprus (see e.g. 2006EU4, 2012EU2).



further possibility might be ad hoc procedures intended to involve Turkey in discussions on issues which are of particular interest for Turkey and the Community.” (1989EU2)

Given the fierceness with which Turkey’s governments rejected concepts below membership so far, it has not been possible for the EU’s political leaders to suggest a form of strategic cooperation that would replace of the accession perspective in their official statements and resolutions so far. This paper, argues that many elements in the recent discourses already link to such a *Strategic Partnership* perspective, although they do not spell out clearly that this should be the main frame for the relationship replacing the accession perspective in the future.

For example, in light of the standstill in the accession negotiations and reform process in Turkey, the Commission in 2012 launched a “Positive Agenda”, which should “bring fresh dynamics and a new momentum” into the relations (2012EU4). While it aimed to deepen cooperation in certain areas like in a partnership kind of framework, it sought to “complement and support” the accession process, not replace it (2012EU4). One could, therefore, argue that the Commission tried to launch a new and more positive narrative of EU-Turkey relations, after many frustrating years of standstill in the relations. However, while the EP endorsed the initiative in its resolution, the European Council never mentioned it (2013EU3). Looking back, we can conclude that the Commission was not successful in its endeavour. The revitalization of relations, which did materialize a few years later, was not due to this positive agenda as such but to the wider political context and in particular the large migration flows towards Europe, which resulted in the need for the EU to cooperate with Turkey on this issue.

The EU-Turkey statement of November 2015 was another example of the logic of the *Strategic Partner* narrative. Although it still included a formulation that the accession process should be revitalized, the cooperation within the Joint Action Plan on migration management as well as the visa liberalization process was in the foreground of the agreement (see also Saatçioğlu 2016). The same applied for the March 2016 statement, which foresaw high-level meetings and summits as means to strengthen cooperation in the fields of migration, counter-terrorism, energy and business (2015EU4, 2016EU6). The recent EP resolutions also include elements that link to a form of strategic partnership. In 2016, the EP for example supported “a structured, more frequent and open high-level political dialogue on key thematic issues of joint interest such as migration, counter-terrorism, energy, economy and trade” (2016EU10).

The discussion about the upgrade of the customs union (CU) is an example of the *Strategic Partner* narrative. Already in 2012, the Commission stated they wish to launch a modernization and asked the World Bank to carry out an assessment of the customs union (2012EU3)¹⁵. In May 2015, a meeting of Commissioner Cecilia Malmström and the Turkish Minister of Economy Nihat Zeybekçi concluded with the decision to work jointly on a modernisation of the customs union. Again, in this statement, it was stressed this upgrade would not be considered an alternative to the accession process but would be understood as “complementary” (2015EU12). In 2016, the Commission asked for a mandate for the European Council to prepare the talks with Turkey, which it has not received yet. Clearly, it will be difficult to achieve consensus on this issue, given that

¹⁵ Further mentioning of the upgrade is found in the Commission’s enlargement strategy of 2015, 2016 (2015EU15, 2016EU11) and a speech by Commissioner Füle of June 2013 (2013EU1).



Germany has blocked the initiative publicly (Daily Sabah 2018). The European Council in its conclusions did not mention the upgrade of the customs union so far which might also have to do with the German blockage of the initiative. Unlike that, the EP in its resolution of July 2017 supported the project – although it demanded that clause on conditionality linked to human rights and fundamental freedoms should be included (2017EU5).

Beyond that, in academic circles, recently a debate has emerged on the question of whether the customs union could even become the main framework of relations instead of the accession process (e.g. Kirişçi/Bülbul, 2017; Tocci 2018; Ülgen, 2017). The EU’s official statements do not go so far, although the Commission, as explained above, put forward the modernization of the Customs Union as a priority.

The study has shown that the perception of Turkey’s important strategic value for the EU has probably been the most consistent element of the EU side. When looking at more recent statements, the analysis shows that the acknowledgement of Turkey’s strategic importance is still prevalent in recent years, despite the rise of conflict in the relationship. In 2014 and 2016, respectively, the EP for example called Turkey a “strategic partner” (2014EU3) and also “key strategic partner” (2016EU10).

Overall, one can conclude that the EU’s official discourse does not (yet) promote a notion of a strategic partnership as the framework of relations and possibly replacing the accession process. However, there have been many representations in the EU’s discourse pointing towards a de facto dominance of elements of the *Strategic Partner* narrative and the linked cooperation scenario. Hence, this narrative could potentially gain relevance in the future or at least keep its present significance.

Distant Neighbour

The *Distant Neighbour* narrative perceives Turkey as an estranged and distant, or even hostile neighbour and prefers to keep Turkey at a distance. With its unreliable foreign policy, in this view, Turkey drags the EU into conflicts in the neighbourhood or even contributes to creating conflicts, such as in the Aegean or towards Cyprus. From an identity and culture perspective, this narrative perceives Turkey as “the Other” and as too different from “Europe” to become an EU member. With regard to the implications for the institutional side of relations, references to the freeze or suspension of relations and/or an abandoning the accession process represent the most drastic consequence or postulation forming part of this narrative.

During the history, a suspension of relations was implemented from the EU from 1980-1986 (due to the political and human rights situation in the country after the military coup) and by the European Parliament in 1994. In the latter case, the EP had blocked the work of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee in reaction to the human rights violations (1994EU1). As another high peak of the escalation of the debate, the EP in November 2016 demanded a freeze of relations. From the Turkish side, relations within the EU-Turkey Association Council were suspended after 1997 following the European Council’s decision in its Luxembourg meeting to reject Turkey’s application for full membership. Also in 2012, Turkey announced to freeze relations with the EU during the Cypriot Presidency in the European Council, which was sharply criticised



by the European Council in its conclusions of December 2011 (2011EU1), October 2014 (2014EU4) as well as by the Commission (2012EU3).

Obviously, the conflict over the Cyprus issue has been a constant source of conflict overshadowing relations and one of the most persistent brakes of the relationship. The Cyprus issue was mentioned in most of the EU’s official documents that were analysed in this study since 1975. An EP resolution of 1975 (1975EU1) in the aftermath of the coup d’état in Cyprus and the following Turkish invasion mentioned that the involved parties should work towards a peaceful solution for the island. However, it did not mention further negative repercussions for the relations with the Community. Since then, with only a few exceptions, the lack of progress towards a settlement of the conflict was perceived as a hurdle for further progress in the overall relationship and particularly so since Cyprus became an EU member in 2004.

Criticism of Turkey’s foreign policy has also been an element of conflict in some cases. For example, such references linked to the Turkish military involvement in Iraq (see 1996EU1), its “provocative” military operation in the Aegean 1996 (1996EU4) and later the “casus belli” threats against Greece (2006EU3), or they condemned the Turkish military intervention against Kurdish forces on Northern Syria (2016EU10), but never led to an actual suspension of relations.

When looking back to the first decades of relations, the documents of the 1960s (after the Ankara Agreement 1963) and of the 1970s were in general characterized by a lack of conflict elements. The gap between Turkey’s economy and those of the Member States was mentioned, as well as the implications that a free movement of workers would have, but these issues were not presented as insurmountable hurdles. An exception was the two years after May 1960, when the negotiations for association were suspended for almost two years after a military coup in Turkey (Scotti, 2017: 114).

The results of the analysis indicate that the first longer phase of serious conflict arose in the official debate in the 1980s. In the years between 1980 and 1985, the European Parliament (EP) issued 11 resolutions regarding human rights violations. Also, more than 20 motions for resolutions by Members of the European Parliament were tabled during that time, whereas no such motions had been tabled during the five years before. (1985EU1)

The so far most explicit expression of conflict in the relations was when the European Community suspended its relations with Turkey from 1981 onwards. It demanded that democratic rule should be reintroduced as a precondition for reinstating the relations and condemned the “political violence”, “suspension of democratic institutions” and “executions and torture” (1981EU1). In consequence, the EP suspended its cooperation within the Joint Parliamentary Committee in the time from 1980 onwards and revived relations only after the first free elections had taken place in Turkey in 1987. The Association Council resumed its activities one year earlier, in 1986.

Until the mid-1990s, the EP’s resolutions remained very concerned of the developments in Turkey and, at first, it rejected the establishment of Customs Union with Turkey because “the human rights situation in Turkey is too serious” (1995EU4, see also 1996EU1). Despite that, the Association Council in 1995 took the decision to implement the Customs Union in the next year. In December of the same year, the European Parliament then finally gave its assent but stressed



that Turkey should continue the process of improving democratic and human rights standards (1995EU6).

It is worth mentioning that the negotiating framework of the Council, which prepared the beginning of Turkey’s accession negotiations, already included a paragraph stipulating that the process can be suspended “in the case of a serious and persistent breach in Turkey of the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law on which the Union is founded” (2005EU1). This measure was for example also mentioned in the Commissions Enlargement Strategy documents of 2005 and 2006 (2005EU6, 2006EU4) as well as in several EP’s resolutions (2004EU1, 2005EU5, 2006EU3, 2016EU8) and by the European Council in its conclusions of December 2004 (2004EU4). This indicates that the possibility of a suspension has moved closer in the last decade.

Criticism towards the democratic and human rights situation in Turkey has increased substantially. Whereas the Commission already in 2005, the first year of the accession negotiations, spoke of a slowed down reform process (2005EU6), since 2015 the EU institutions also speak of a “backsliding” of democratic reforms and of the freedom of expression and assembly in particular (2015EU10, 2016EU11, 2015EU9, 2016EU10, 2017EU5). This indicates that there is a perspective that sees Turkey as moving away from European values, as expressed by a quote from a speech by Commissioner Füle from 2004 “I must admit that events over the past three months have cast doubt on Turkey's commitment to European values and standards” (2014EU1). More drastically, this was expressed by COM president Juncker in 2017 when he stated that “Turkey has been taking giant strides away from the European Union for some time” and, at the same time, ruled out Turkish membership “for the foreseeable future” (2017EU3) given the lack of priority that Turkey in his assessment attached to the rule of law and fundamental rights.

Overall, the analysis indicates that the Distant Neighbour narrative had a peak in the 1980s as well as mid-1990s and again in the more recent years. While conflict thus seems to be a regular element in the debate since the 1980s, the political rhetoric by the EU institutions (but also in Turkey, see below) at times reached a comparatively high level of conflict and alienation in 2016 and 2017. As a consequence, doubts have emerged as to whether a disruption of relations and/or an end of the accession perspective might be possible. Due to the present high relevance of this kind of rhetoric, it is likely that conflict will be a persistent element in the political debate also for the time to come.



3.2. Turkish Narratives

The analysis of the documents for the Turkish actors and institutions indicates five main narratives: 1) Westernisation, 2) Europeanisation, 3) Eurasianisation and 4) Turkey as “the Heir” and 5) Turkey as a “Great Power”.

Westernisation

Westernization is one of the most predominant Turkish narratives in the history of the EU-Turkey relations, and it appears to be reinforced by actors with immensely different backgrounds and political positions. This narrative captures the perspective that Turkey is an integral part of “the West”, which holds a deep political meaning as it is utterly associated with the rule of law, secularism, liberalism, and economic development. Combining the ideas of democratization and modernization, this narrative focuses on the role and importance of the Western alliance on Turkey’s transition into a democratic constitutional state with a free market economy and addresses the issue of EU-Turkey relations within a broader Euro-Atlantic perspective. “The West” here is used as an umbrella term that includes different states and institutions. Among this wide range of actors, the United States and the NATO are the most preeminent and emphasized, followed by the UN, the OECD, and the GATT. While both the Council of Europe and the EU are also given close attention in this narrative, the former is attributed a higher normative value during the initial years of the relations since the latter is seen more like an economic cooperation with relatively low political significance at the time.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the Westernization narrative is shaped by the regional and international dynamics rather than the domestic ones. It is understood from the documents that the narrators’ concerns at the time are twofold. On the one hand, feelings of insecurity and anxiety arising from Turkey’s proximity to the Soviet Union prompted the Turkish actors to attach a significant value on bilateral and multilateral partnerships. Numerous references to the hostile bipolarisation in international relations and nuclear arms race as well as to the bilateral conflicts in the region show that being from a frontline state at the height of the Cold War, the Turkish actors feel the constant need to reaffirm and highlight their staunch alliance with the Western bloc. In this context, President Celal Bayar, for instance, refers to the NATO as “an especial creation, which was brought into being by nations that are determined to live freely” and asserts that “the role NATO plays in the reinforcement of [Turkey’s] national security is great and exhilarating” (1958TR1)¹⁶. On the other hand, the quest for economic prosperity and welfare for the country seem to drive the actors to focus on the improvement of the relations with the transatlantic community. It is often stated that the foreign aid required for the country’s growth could be obtained from “the international organisations to which Turkey is a member and from friendly and allied countries in the sense of economic stability and Western democracy” (1962TR1)¹⁷.

¹⁶ Bayar, C. (01.1.1958). “Hür yaşamaya azmetmiş milletlerin vücuda getirdikleri müstesna eser olan NATO’ya sadakatla bağlıyız. NATO’nun, millî emniyetimizin takviyesi bakımından oynadığı rol büyüktür, inşirah vericidir.” (Translation by authors).

¹⁷ İnönü, İ. (02.07.1962). “Bu suretle, iktisadi istikrar ve Batılı demokrasi anlayışı içinde, kalkınmamızın lüzumlu kıldığı dış yardım ihtiyacının, üyesi bulunduğumuz Milletlerarası teşekküller ile dost ve müttefik memleketlerden temin edebileceğine kaani bulunmaktayız.” (Translation by authors).



According to the Westernization narrative, Turkey is an active and effective partner that shares "a common fate", or "a common path", with the West. As such, Turkey's involvement in the abovementioned institutions is constantly presented as a proof of the country's Western identity. It is used to assert Turkey's efforts and dedication as well as its worthiness to be a part of the West. Turkey's membership to the Council of Europe, in that sense, is seen as the embodiment of Turkey's institutional ties with Europe in the post-WWII era. Similarly, the Association Agreement signed between Turkey and the EU in 1963 is perceived as "a historical document that would tie the country's fate with the West" (1963TR1)¹⁸.

The EU's significance within the Westernization narrative builds up over time as it institutionalizes and gains political power and influence. It remains as an essential actor in the narrative but, unlike the Europeanization narrative below, it co-exists with numerous non-European actors and institutions within the narrative.

Since the Westernization narrative refers to various actors, there are multiple linkages and a broad array of drivers, which make this narrative relatively steady. Furthermore, it is more focused on political, economic, and security aspects of relations with only a few references to cultural, historical, or identity-related debates (except for the overemphasis on Turkey's "Westernness"). This target-oriented nature of the narrative leaves a small room for fluctuations arising from culture- or identity-related debates. Therefore, even in the cases of serious bilateral disputes, the efforts of Turkish political actors to locate Turkey in the West continue uninterrupted throughout the years.

Europeanisation

While sharing many elements and resources with the Westernisation narrative, Europeanisation focuses on the Europe-induced transformation Turkey has undergone and aspires to experience further. It tries to tackle the question of Turkey's place among the European actors and constantly highlights the historical, social, and cultural commonalities Turkey and Europe share. Unlike the other narratives, Europeanisation directly focuses on Europe and the EU and does not devote close attention to other actors. It is the narrative most explicitly promotes and supports the Turkish membership to the EU since it overwhelmingly centres upon the positive aspects of the relationship and the EU itself.

In this narrative, Turkey is seen as a natural part of the continental Europe in both historical and geographical terms. With its centuries-long, deep interactions and relations with the other countries of the continent, Turkey is claimed to be an indisputable member of the European family. Furthermore, the country is believed to "cherish and defend the same values and norms the EU is built on, such as democracy and respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n. a.). Nonetheless, the strategic and pragmatic sides of cooperation are also underlined. According to the Turkish actors, Turkey and the EU share a common destiny as well as common interests and concerns in a wide spectrum of issues. From security to economy, migration to energy, these two actors can neither be thought nor act

¹⁸ İnönü, İ. (30.12.1963). "Bu Anlaşma, memleketimizi Batı âlemi ile kader birliğine götürecektir olan tarihî bir belge mahiyetindedir." (Translation by authors).



separately. In the face of multiple challenges on different levels, which include but are not limited to the instability in the Balkans and the Middle East, aggression of Russia and Iran, coup attempt in Turkey, rise of the radical right in Europe, and terrorism; Turkey’s political integration into (or at least harmonization with) the EU is fundamentally seen as “a win-win formula for both parties” (2015TR1).

The Turkish actors, who represent this narrative, take pride in Turkey’s involvement in different Europe-oriented international organisations. The country’s founder membership to the Council of Europe and participation in the OSCE, OECD, and NATO with its allegedly central role in the UN are often seen as an indicator of Turkey’s democratic, secular, liberal identity. Here, in fact, the European Council initially is attributed a bigger value than the EEC in terms of European culture because the latter is seen as an economic partnership rather than an integration project. As the EEC transforms first into a community and then a union, the Turkish actors start to esteem it as an “embodiment of values” (1997TR1)¹⁹.

Still, even at the very beginning of the relations in 1959, Turkish actors seem seemingly eager to take part in any form or level of European integration. In this context, the extensive constitutional reforms that have been carried out by focusing on in political, legal, economic, and social systems of the country throughout the years are reportedly designed to be compatible with the European institutional architecture. However, it is also stressed by various actors in different times that these reforms do not take place “because the EU wants” but because “they are the adjustments the Turkish society deserves” (2003TR4)²⁰. Similarly, the EU membership is asserted to be “a means, rather than an end, to bring the Turkish nation up to the level of contemporary civilization it deserves” (2003TR4)²¹.

It can be argued that the Europeanisation narrative has two main components since the mid-1990s: causality and conditionality. On the one hand, the Turkish actors, after marking the transitional stage, official application, and candidate status in the relations, vocalize their clear expectations for Turkey to have “its rightful place”²² among the most prominent EU member states. They perceive the membership as an obvious next step in the process that started years ago and do not advert (or later accept) any other form of integration. To Süleyman Demirel, for instance, “it is impossible to not see” that “Turkey has the highest position among the EU candidate states” (1995TR1)²³. Consequently, it is believed that nobody -whether in the EU or not- could prevent Turkey’s full membership to the EU. On the other hand, the Turkish actors stipulate for respect and impartialness, and assert that Turkey will certainly be an EU member but “only with its head held high” (1995TR1, 1995TR2). As the EU postpones Turkey’s membership and

¹⁹ Demirel, S. (01.10.1997). “Türkiye’nin, bir coğrafyadan ziyade, bir değerler manzumesi olarak algıladığı Avrupa’yla bütünleşme iradesi, tamdır.” (Translation by authors).

²⁰ Erdoğan, R. T. (29.05.2003). “Bu değişiklikleri Avrupa Birliği istediği için değil; fakat, halkımızın hak ettiği düzenlemeler olduğu için gerçekleştirmemiz gerekmektedir.” (Translation by authors).

²¹ Erdoğan, R. T. (29.05.2003). “Biz, Avrupa Birliği üyeliği, bir amaç olarak değil, Türk Halkını hak ettiği çağdaş uygarlık seviyesine ulaştırmak için bir araç olarak görüyoruz.” (Translation by authors).

²² Similar excerpts can be found in other selected documents such as 1989TR1, 1995TR1, 1997TR2, 2005TR1.

²³ Demirel, S. (01.10.1995). “Türkiye [...]v bugün, Avrupa Birliği üyeliğine aday olan ülkeler arasında en üstün bir konumu haizdir. Bunu görmemek mümkün değildir.” (Translation by authors).



continuously imposes new preconditions, the sincerity and objectivity of the relations are questioned, and the demand for equal treatment and transparency becomes more explicit.

Regardless, Europeanisation remains as the cornerstone of the Turkish narratives, and the membership goal still is asserted as a keystone of the country’s foreign policy by many actors.

Eurasianisation

Geographically speaking, “Eurasia” describes the combined continental land of Europe and Asia. Within the context of this paper, however, “Eurasianism” also has political interpretations as it refers to the understanding in which Turkey is asserted to have a special historical and political role in the defined region that is believed to be increasingly prominent and important in international relations. Eurasianism is also perceived as a process as well as one of the most crucial implications of the end of the bipolar world.

In the documents from the years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, significant attention is given to the smaller, newly formed countries of Eurasia. There is a perceivable reorientation of Turkey’s position at the time: While still standing very close to the West, the Turkish actors welcome the now-independent Turkic states, “the brothers and sisters” with whom they share cultural, historical, religious, and language ties. In this period, there is also a change in the self-perception of the Turkish actors, which also reveals itself in different narratives through a new representation of Turkey as a country that belongs to the West and the East simultaneously.

The major premise here is that Turkey is a key player that has a strategic geopolitical position and a complex character that is compatible with both the Western and Eastern values. As Bulent Ecevit puts it, Turkey is European “with its culture, history, and geography”, but “Europeanness” does not define Turkey by itself since the country also belongs to “Central Asia, Middle East, Eastern Mediterranean, Black Sea, Balkans, and partly Africa” (1999TR4)²⁴. In this narrative, Turkey is a guide, a successful model for the other countries in the region as it is a “great county that has understood the modern world with its established democratic tradition; its experience on free market economy application” (1995TR1)²⁵. It is not only “a lively connection between Europe and Asia but also between Islam and Christianity and Judaism” (1999TR4)²⁶. Moreover, it is “the pioneer of democracy, modernity, and secularism in the Islam world” (1999TR4)²⁷ and therefore, Europe’s much-needed door to the neighbouring regions.

With the end of the Cold War and elimination of the Soviet threat, the Turkish actors see the emergence of “the Eurasia” notion as a natural consequence of the commonalities, of “the roots”

²⁴ Ecevit, B. (07.06.1999). “Biz, kültürümüzle, tarihimizle, coğrafyamızla Avrupalıyız; ama sadece Avrupalılığa da sığmayız. Biz, aynı zamanda, bir Orta Asya ülkesiyiz, bir Ortadoğu ülkesiyiz, bir Doğu Akdeniz ülkesiyiz, bir Karadeniz ülkesiyiz, bir Balkanlar ülkesiyiz, kısmen Afrika ülkesiyiz ve bu kökenleri çok iyi bağdaştırabildiğimiz için de, Avrasyalaşma sürecinin anahtar ülkesi konumuna gelmiş bulunuyoruz.” (Translation by authors).

²⁵ Demirel, S. (01.10.1995). “Türkiye, köklü demokrasi geleneği ve laiklik ilkesine bağlılığı ve serbest pazar ekonomisinde kat ettiği büyük merhaleyle, keza, dinamik nüfusa ve etkili bir rekabet gücüne sahip olmakla, diğer taraftan, uluslararası ve bölgesel çaptaki siyasi ağırlığıyla, bugün, Avrupa Birliği üyeliğine aday olan ülkeler arasında en üstün bir konumu haizdir.” (Translation by authors).

²⁶ Ecevit, B. (07.06.1999). “Türkiye, yalnız Avrupa ile Asya arasında değil, Hıristiyanlık ve Musevilikle İslamiyet arasında da canlı bir bağıdır.” (Translation by authors).

²⁷ Ecevit, B. (07.06.1999). “Türkiye, nüfusunun büyük çoğunluğu Müslüman olan ülkeler arasında, demokrasinin, çağcılığın ve laikliğin öncüsüdür.” (Translation by authors).



shared by millions of people from a wider region that extends from the Adriatic to the Chinese Sea (1997TR1). In the Eurasianisation narrative, specifically, smaller states in the region are asserted as somewhat passivized subjects: They need to be re-connected with the new world, rescued from their own lethargy, and be shown the economic and political opportunities the post-Cold War international system can provide. Here, the Turkish actors devotedly offer support and help; almost undertake to help these young countries as a duty. Allegedly, the Eurasia notion “is never considered as a means of gaining influence through political calculations” (1997TR1)²⁸. On the contrary, cooperation between Turkey, Europe, and Eurasia serves to the greater good of all folks of the region because “Europe’s security, stability, and welfare depend on the enlargement of the geography of democracy” (1997TR1)²⁹.

In this context, the Turkish actors postulate the changing international system as a source of both risks and opportunities. The risks that are specific to the Eurasianisation process derive from the destabilization of the region with multiple new countries and the obscurity of their political and ideological orientations. The opportunities, on the hand, arise from the possible intraregional economic ties, especially on transport infrastructure and energy sectors. Because the world’s geostrategic centre is assumed to be shifting progressively towards the East, in the Eurasianisation narrative, the Europe Union is expected to draw advantage from the power gap in Eurasia by enhancing economic, political, and social interaction with the newcomers and attempting to become the anchor of the Western values over the United States. Concordantly, Turkey’s value and influence are also supposed to increase.

Starting from the 2000s, the political and security-related aspects of Eurasianisation gain importance against economic and social ones. Numerous challenges including terrorism, bilateral conflicts between countries, organized crime, and rising radicalism and extremism, seem to drive the Turkish actors to reformulate their priorities. Moreover, Russia gaining power in the region and becoming increasingly authoritarian result in a dramatic change in perception of the balance of power among actors. The Turkish actors recognize Russia as one of the key actors in the region but do not immediately assert it as a threat (2006TR1). On the contrary, “the improving cooperation between the two important countries of the Eurasia and the Black Sea regions, Turkey and Russian Federation,” is expected to “contribute to the peace, stability, and prosperity of entire region” (2006TR1)³⁰. This friendly approach toward Russia is still apparent in the more recent years, although it is sometimes replaced by a threatening, antagonistic rhetoric because of political clashes between the counties. Similarly, Turkey’s interest in the neighbouring countries continues but the idea of transforming the entire region and achieving a form of integration that would include both continents is not expressed anymore. Regardless, the European Union remains

²⁸ Demirel, S. (01.10.1997). “Biz, hiçbir zaman, Avrasya olgusunu, siyasî hesaplar güderek, bir nüfuz sağlama aracı olarak görmemekteyiz. Amacımız, bağımsızlığına yeni kavuşan ve yıllardır uzak kaldığımız kardeşlerimizin kendi ayakları üzerinde durmalarına ve uluslararası toplum içinde her bakımdan saygın birer üye olarak hak ettikleri yerlerini almalarına yardımcı olmaktır.” (Translation by authors).

²⁹ Demirel, S. (01.10.1997). “Avrupa’nın güvenlik, istikrar ve refahı, demokrasi coğrafyasının genişlemesine bağlıdır.” (Translation by authors).

³⁰ Sezer, A. N. (01.10.2006). “Avrasya ve Karadeniz bölgesinin iki önemli ülkesi olan Türkiye ve Rusya Federasyonu arasında gelişen iş birliği, tüm bölgenin barış, istikrar ve gönencine katkıda bulunacaktır”. (Translation by authors).



as the main actor and the Turkish membership is the ultimate objective of the Eurasianisation narrative.

Turkey as “the Heir”

In the first three narratives, it is evident that Turkey implicates Europe (sometimes under the umbrella of “the West”, sometimes together with “the East”) in its modernisation, democratisation, and liberalisation processes. The EU’s normative superiority is recognized by the Turkish actors as they underline the need for reforming the Turkish state, society, and market in a way that would make Turkey more compatible with Europe and suitable for the European integration. The remaining two narratives, on the other hand, are shaped more by attitudinal ambivalence and scepticism than empathy and admiration towards Europe. Despite the Turkish actors are still persistent in their objective of the EU membership, the criticism appears to increase substantially over time.

In the second half of the 1990s, especially after the establishment of the Customs Union between Turkey and the EU, a mood of optimism among the Turkish actors seems to shape the narrative. However, this optimism quickly vanishes, gives way to frustration and anger after the 1997 Luxembourg European Council, where Turkey was only confirmed to be eligible to become a member whereas the other eleven countries were confirmed to either open accession negotiations with the EU or to prepare for membership under a pre-accession strategy. Mesut Yılmaz (1997TR3), the Turkish Prime Minister of the time, condemns the EU’s decision as follows:

“They will leave me outside of that 11 [countries]. They will divide that 11 into two; tell some that they will start the negotiations for full membership in April, say “We will support and prepare you for the full membership.’ to the others, and then try to stall me with some vague statements. (...) I could come here and present [Turkey’s eligibility for membership] as a victory but my sense of politics would not let me. That is because I have never seen the EU membership as ‘a must’ but stated it would have happened if “it serves my purpose’ and ‘abides by my honour’.”³¹

Since then, every positive development within the relationship appears to be overshadowed by a bigger, negative one for the Turkish actors. Turkey’s official grant of the EU candidacy status in 1999 is followed by Cyprus’ membership to the EU in 2002; the accession negotiations started in 2005 and only one year later, 8 chapters were halted in relation to the Cyprus issue; and lately, the EU-Turkey Action Plan and Joint Statement were left in the shade by the EU’s unresponsiveness to the coup attempt in Turkey.

Without a doubt, the waning of the membership perspective and the continuing impasse in the accession negotiations in the last couple of decades have influenced the Turkish narratives adversely. What is even more stressed within the context of this specific narrative is the debates

³¹ Yılmaz, M. (25.12.1997). “Beni 11’in dışında tutacaklar. 11’i ikiye bölecekler; bir kısmına bu sene Nisan ayında tam üyelik müzakerelerini başlatacaklarını söyleyecekler, bir kısmına “Biz size yardım yapacağız, sizi tam üyeliğe hazırlayacağız.” diyecekler; ondan sonra beni de birtakım muğlak ifadelerle geçiştirmeye çalışacaklar. Ben bunu gelip burada sizlere bir zafer olarak da takdim edebilirdim ama benim siyaset anlayışım buna elvermezdi. Çünkü ben, Avrupa Birliği meselesine hiçbir zaman “Ya olacak, ya olacak.” diye bakmadım, “Benim işime gelirse olacak.” dedim, “Benim şerefime uyarırsa olacak.” dedim.” (Translation by authors).



in Europe on Turkey’s ability to ensure the rule of law, the functioning of democracy, and practice of human rights, or the overall “Europeanness” of Turkey. Relying on arguments similar to the ones from the previous narratives, Turkey as “the heir” narrative asserts Turkey as a European country that embraces “the values Europe represents” such as “representative democracy, pluralism, rule of law, human rights, secularism, freedom of thought and conscience” (2003TR4)³². In other respects, it goes one-step further and claims that the main reason for Turkey’s aspirations for modernisation and full membership to the EU is its thousand-year-long history in Anatolia³³.

In this narrative, Turkey is seen not only as the heir of the formidable Ottoman Empire but also of the preceding Turkic empires. Thus, this narrative captures more than the so-called Neo-Ottomanism. It merges both Balkanist and Orientalist discourses and underlines that the Ottoman Empire “in fact developed as a Balkan state in its founding period” and became a “multicultural, multinational, multi-religious European and Mediterranean power” (1999TR1)³⁴ after Istanbul became the capital. President Erdoğan (2016TR10), for instance, insists that “Turkey is not the guest but the host in Europe”³⁵ and follows:

“I am not talking about the times before we honoured [Europe] with Islam, the times of the Turkic states established in the 400s, 500s, 600s, 700s but only referring to the times after our ancestors, Ottomans, expanded into the European continent in the 1350s when I say we have been in existence in Europe with our country, our culture, and our civilisation for more than 650 years and we will continue to do so.”³⁶

As a response to the European scepticism towards the Turkish membership, which purportedly propounds the memories of past atrocities and conflicts, this narrative initially attempts to initiate a discussion on the common history without subscribing to ancient hatreds and prejudices. It embraces the civic memories of the country’s past but does not disparage Turkey’s Ottoman or Turkic characteristics against alleged European ones. In this regard, “the strength Turkey takes from its history and civilization is the biggest advantage” (2017TR1)³⁷ when comes to the country’s relations with the Euro-Atlantic institutions. Turkey’s centuries-long “strong state tradition” (something that is also often emphasized in the next narrative) is considered as an important factor that makes the country an asset for the EU, especially when the Union’s incapability against

³² Erdoğan, R. T. (29.05.2003). “Türkiye’yi Avrupalı yapan, Avrupa’nın temsil ettiği değerleri, katılımcı demokrasiyi, çoğulculuğu, hukukun üstünlüğünü, insan haklarını, laikliği, düşünce ve vicdan özgürlüğünü benimsemesidir.” (Translation by authors).

³³ Demirel, S. (01.10.1996). “Türkiye’nin çağdaşlaşma hedefinin ve Avrupa Birliğine tam üyelik arzusunun temel nedeni, Anadolu’daki bin yıllık tarihimizdir.” (Translation by authors).

³⁴ Demirel, S. (01.10.1999). “Osmanlı Devleti, kuruluş döneminde esas itibarıyla bir Balkan devleti olarak gelişmiştir ve İstanbul’un başkent olmasıyla birlikte, çok kültürlü, çok uluslu, çok dinli bir Avrupa ve Akdeniz gücü olarak tarih sahnesindeki yerini almıştır. (Translation by authors).

³⁵ Erdoğan, R. T. (01.12.2016). “Biz Avrupa’da misafir değil, ev sahibiyiz.” (Translation by authors).

³⁶ Erdoğan, R. T. (01.12.2016). “Daha eskilere, İslamiyet’le şereflendirdiğimiz o günlerin öncesine, 400’lü, 500’lü, 600’lü, 700’lü yıllarda Avrupa’da kurulmuş olan Türk devletlerine kadar gitmiyorum. Ecdadımız Osmanlı’nın 1350’li yıllarda Avrupa kıtasına geçişinden itibaren ele alarak söylüyorum: 650 yılı aşkın süredir kesintisiz bir şekilde Avrupa’da devletimizle, kültürümüzle, medeniyetimizle varız, var olmaya devam edeceğiz.” (Translation by authors).

³⁷ Erdoğan, R. T. (01.10.2017). “Türkiye, elbette Avrupa-Atlantik kurumlarıyla yakın işbirliği içindedir. Ama bu, tarihimizi ve medeniyetimizi yok saymamız anlamına kesinlikle gelmiyor. Tam tersine, tarihimiz ve medeniyetimizden aldığımız güç, bizim en büyük avantajımızdır.” (Translation by authors).



the crises such as the Eurozone Crisis, Brexit and Syrian Refugee Crisis (2004TR4, 2016TR1, 2017TR1) are considered.

Underlying some of these arguments, however, lays a deeper claim that the European actors bring up the so-called identity-related differences and strategically use Turkey’s past to mask out their own reluctance for further integration. According to Yılmaz (1997TR3), “the Turkey-phobia, which those who were sitting at the table have had since the very beginning”³⁸ is the main reason of Luxemburg Summit decisions³⁹. Years later, referring to the EU enlargements, which recognized the membership of candidates that are claimed to be incomparable to Turkey in terms of democratic and economic criteria, Erdoğan (2016TR1) states that holding Turkey at the door for over 50 years clearly shows “the EU’s true intentions” with the country. He then adds, “There is no need for trying to stretch the truth, trying to gain ground upon some diplomatic tricks. (...) We just ask the Europeans to stop trying to pin the sins of their ill-intentions on us.” (2016TR1)⁴⁰.

In this narrative, Turkey is portrayed as an honourable but victimized side of the relationship; a party that has exerted itself to the utmost and kept all of its promises and yet been subjected to an unfair, disrespectful, and deceptive treatment by the EU. In one instance, Erdoğan goes even further and asserts that a Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of France warned him by stating that Turkey was struggling in vain because the EU would never accept Turkey, a Muslim country, as a member (2016TR4)⁴¹. According to his claim, Erdoğan already knew this but still wanted to take this road, assuming that it was a “sincerity test”.

As a reflection of this devoted and determined character portrayed for Turkey, the Turkish actors are very clear that despite all, they will retain their policy to become an integral part of the European integration. In spite of everything, they still expect the EU to make the right decision and start pursuing an objective, transparent, impartial policy towards Turkey. They maintain a forgiving, noble attitude but assure that Turkey will be just fine by itself if the EU fails to come through. In this respect, the Turkish actors still hold membership as a goal, although under certain conditions, within this narrative. However, unlike previous narratives, they declare themselves prepared for any other outcome as well.

³⁸ Yılmaz, M. (25.12.1997). “Lüksemburg zirvesinde ortaya konulan neticenin, bizi tatmin etmeyen o kararların müsebbibi, ne Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Devletidir ne de aziz milletimizdir. Bu kararların, bu neticenin tek müsebbibi, bir taraftan, o masanın etrafında oturan ülkelerden bazılarının, ezeli olarak taşıdıkları Türkiye fobisidir.” (Translation by authors).

³⁹ During this discussion with other MPs at the Parliament, Yılmaz also blames the Turkish leaders, who made promises on behalf of the Turkish State only to break them by turning the subject into a political leverage within domestic politics.

⁴⁰ Erdoğan, R. T. (01.10.2016). “Ama, özellikle son genişleme süreçlerinde, demokratik ve ekonomik kriterleri Türkiye’yle mukayese edilemeyecek ülkeler hızla tam üye yapılıırken, ülkemizin ısrarla kapıda bekletilmesi, kolay değil 53 yıl, Avrupa Birliği’nin bizimle ilgili gerçek niyetini göstermiştir. Lafı döndürüp dolaştırmanın, diplomatik cambazlıklarla üste çıkmaya çalışmanın gerçeği yoktur. Avrupa Birliği yetkilileri ile Birlik içinde etkin olan ülkelerden açıklık, şeffaflık, samimi bir ikrar bekliyoruz. Lütfen Avrupalılar, kafalarındaki farklı niyetlerin günahını bizim üzerimize yıkmaya çalışmaktan vazgeçsinler.” (Translation by authors).

⁴¹ Erdoğan, R. T. (22.06.2016). “Bunu Fransa’nın eski Dışişleri Bakanlarından bir tanesi bana zaten açık açık söyledi. Sayın Davutoğlu da yanımda, 3’lü olarak görüşüyoruz ve açık açık söyledi: ‘Sizi almazlar Avrupa Birliği’ne, boşuna uğraşıyorsunuz.’ ‘Niye?’ dedim. ‘Müslümanız’ dedi. ‘Biz de bunu biliyoruz aslında ama, biz yine de bakalım bir samimiyet testidir diye bu yola girdik.’ dedim.” (Translation by authors).



Turkey as “a Great Power”

Like the previous narrative, the final Turkish narrative, Turkey as “a Great Power”, is nourished with the claim that the EU and its member states have been hesitant and tentative towards the Turkish membership from the very beginning of the relationship. The discontent felt towards the EU’s allegedly reluctant, hypocritical policies and purported cultural conflicts once again seem to relegate Turkey’s endeavour to be included in the European integration. Similarly, Turkey’s “strong state tradition” is proudly acclaimed as the Turkish actors lash out at the EU for its unfair, prejudiced behaviour.

In conjunction with the economic stability and development in the last fifteen years under the AKP rule, however, this particular narrative provides a radically revised image of Turkey vis-à-vis the EU and in world affairs in general. Here, Turkey is considered able to pit against the EU –not only normatively but also politically and economically. In the wake of the recent crises within the broader region (like in the cases of Syria, Ukraine, Spain, United Kingdom), Turkey is believed to acquire a growing pivotal role that entails various strategic opportunities. It is pictured as a significant player rising in the face of its neighbours, or, a great power as the title suggests. Conversely, the EU is considered to gradually lose power and capacity to pursue the integration project as is.

Turkey’s improving rankings that coincided with Europe’s economic struggles, purportedly successful military interventions in Syria, active involvement in the Refugee Crisis, and aspirations to become an energy hub are presented as a verification of the changing relational dynamics between Turkey and the other regional actors. In line with this altered self-perception, Turkey’s relationship with the EU is also reassessed with profound changes. Perhaps for the first time in the history of the relationship, Turkey and the EU are narrated as equals. More importantly, there is a very strong emphasis on the mutual dependence between two actors. The EU is claimed to need Turkey as much as Turkey needs the EU.

As Turkey grows stronger, the sense of cooperation and collaboration apparently gives its way to the notion of quid pro quo. In this narration, the Turkish actors refuse the asymmetrical relationship between Turkey and the EU. In their own view, the free and powerful “New Turkey” does not have to comply with the EU’s rules, or desperately try to make room for itself among the member states. It is proclaimed to have the capacity to wield its influence and sit down at the table under equal terms. Instead of accepting what is given, it is envisaged to have the means to negotiate. This new vision can be spotted during the infamous Refugee Deal, on which the Chief Negotiator Ömer Çelik (2016TR14) comments:

Turkey is playing a central role in preventing a very large regional and global crisis. Therefore, the 18 March Turkey-EU Statement, voluntary humanitarian admission, the Readmission Agreement and visa liberalisation must be thought of as part of a single package. All these make up a single file. The sheets of this file cannot be separated.

According to Çelik, Turkey’s performance on the issue of migration prevented “one of the biggest crises to upset the geopolitical order and political map” which is why, “visa liberalization cannot be simply a nice gesture towards Turkey, but is rather an outcome that must be reached as a result of a concluded agreement” (2016TR14). Similarly, on terrorism, Çelik argues that “Turkey must be



commended for its efforts” since “the EU would have to face the phenomenon of terrorism directly ‘if Turkey did not engage in a high-capacity fight’ against it” (2016TR13).

As can be noticed from the above statements, the Turkey as a “Great Power” narrative comprises a seemingly ossified “Us” versus “Them” dichotomy. This dichotomy is not inherently antagonistic. It initially serves to picture Turkey and the EU as two distinct sides with different bargaining positions and powers on a variety of issues. This, however, changes when Turkey’s aspirations to reenergize the accession negotiations go unrealized by the EU. After the EU omits to fulfil the requirements of the Turkey-EU Agreement of 18 March 2016 (2016TR1) and Turkey’s attempts to secure leverage on issues like visa liberalization, negotiating chapters and financial assistance fail, the Turkish actors obtain a more aggressive and threatening tone.

Here, the EU is once again accused of being the usual selfish, heartless utilitarian that does not hesitate to connive at the Mediterranean turning into a graveyard, where babies wash up on the Turkish shores for the sake of its border security (2016TR8, 2016TR9). It is claimed to batten upon the countries of Africa and the Middle East and not feed on the sufferings of their people (TR 2016 P?). With references to France’s colonial history and accusations of Nazi inclinations to Germany and the Netherlands, it is reminded that it has no right to give “democracy lessons” to Turkey and that it should worry about its own issues and crises (2016TR5).

With the failed coup attempt in July 2016, ongoing state of emergency, armed conflicts in Southeast Anatolia, and the change of the government system and overall centralization of power; the EU and Turkey seem more estranged than ever. As the EU becomes increasingly critical about the profound transformation Turkey has undergone, the Turkish actors also appear to be equally disappointed by the EU. These actors frequently voice their resentments about the EU for leaving Turkey alone before the coup plotters, standing with the terrorists targeting Turkey, and interfering in the country’s internal affairs.

With Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as the most important representative of this narrative, on the other hand, the resentment reaches to an unprecedented level. In 2016, during the peak of conflicts with the member states and the Union itself, there even comes a point where President Erdoğan openly threatens the EU to open the gates and send millions of refugees to Europe (2016TR9). He further warns the Europeans that (after asserting the EU supports and hosts terrorists and coup plotters fleeing Turkey) “once they start suffering from the terrorism themselves, they will neither find someone to offer a helping hand nor somewhere to be welcomed with open arms” (2016TR5)⁴². Finally, Erdoğan attempts to use his domestic powers, such as the reintroduction of the death penalty or referendum on the EU membership, as a mean of threat.

In this framing, the Turkish actors sometimes directly refer to the EU but other times talk about the shadowy forces that bent on destroying Turkey. They point to international conspiracies behind every crisis Turkey faces since the Gezi protests and harp on the national struggle to defend the country’s strength and sovereignty against the enemies inside and outside. The language about these dark, external forces, which somewhat but surely include the EU, is usually vague but

⁴² Erdoğan, R. T. (09.11.2016). “Biz bu badireyi de Allah’ın izniyle atlatırız. Fakat onlar terörün pençesinde kıvrınmaya başladıklarında kendilerine uzanacak bir yardım eli, kucağ açacak hiçbir yer bulamayacaklar.” (Translation by authors).



it hints at a certain “jealousy” aspect. Those, who ally against Turkey, do so because they envy the development and growth of Turkey. They are the reason for Turkey’s fuelled mistrust and rage in its just case.

In the eyes of the Turkish actors, the recent developments and changing dynamics cumulatively lead to a crossroads, or a decision point, for the relationship. The function of the ‘crossroads’ metaphor, interestingly, does not imply the abandonment of the membership objective: Like in the other narratives, in Turkey as a “Great Power” narrative, it is recurrently underlined that Turkey is not going to be the one that “throws in the towel”. Instead, this metaphor serves as a call to the EU to revisit and readjust its past strategies, and devise a path forward that encompasses accelerated accession talks in return for Turkey’s cooperation and contribution.

Leaving aside the somewhat paradoxical nature of Turkey’s fierce criticism and perpetual commitment towards the EU, this narrative successfully illustrates the relevance of the time factor within the EU-Turkey relations. When paired with changes within the structure and among the drivers, the tiredness from the decades-long “stalling” results in a narrative as never before. Turkey is “a Great Power” is the first narrative with such a level of despair and anger. It is the first one, where the Turkish actors “do not recognize” (2016TR8) the decisions reached by the European institutions. It is also the one where other international institutions, i. e. Shanghai Economic Organization, are considered as an alternative instead of an addition to the EU membership (2016TR7). In that sense, this narrative is arguably the one that best demonstrates how a shift in the dominant narrative at the present time might be critical in terms of turning Turkey’s future destiny with the EU and vice versa.

4. Progressively Divergent and Growingly Conflictual: Dynamics between EU and Turkish Narratives

The previous chapters shed light on the processes through which the European and Turkish actors have been making sense of their relationship throughout the history. In line with the comparative objective of this research to elaborate on how Turkish and EU narratives have correlated or contrasted and may do so in the future, this chapter is interested in the characteristic properties of the narratives in Turkey and the EU as well as their change over time. More importantly, it pays close attention to the dynamics as well as elements of convergence and conflict between the debates on both sides.

Overall, the narrative analysis conducted in this study allows drawing four interrelated conclusions as regards to Turkish and EU narratives:

First, the study shows that the identified Turkish and European narratives vary considerably in their nature.

While Turkish narratives all share the same goal but have different plots, the EU narratives differ in both their goals and their plots. In Turkey, all the predominant narratives appear to aspire after the EU membership; the Turkish accession to the EU as a goal is a constant element. The justification of and motives for this desired goal, however, change in each narrative. Early in the relationship, the EU is seen as a part of the Western alliance rather than a distinct, significant



political actor. Being a part of the EU, therefore, is covetable for the Turkish actors primarily within the context of the bipolar international order of the Cold War period. In the 1980s, both the normative and strategic values to which the EU is attributed start to change and expand. The EU attracts more attention, which brings along stronger, more pointed and multifaceted ideas and judgments from the Turkish actors.

Later, the EU also gains a distinct identity and starts to be treated not only as a noble form of cooperation or integration but also as an actor itself. This embodiment, or personification of the EU, has robust and far-reaching attitudinal consequences for the Turkish actors. It changes the features and qualities the Turkish actors ascribe to the EU. With the perception of the EU as a conveyer of identity, the Turkish actors get to see the EU as an ally, partner, rival, or collaborator as we observe in the subsequent Turkish narratives. In this context, though it is constant, the meaning of the Turkish membership to the EU also changes: It evolves from “something to be achieved”, which underlines the normative superiority of the EU over Turkey and Turkey’s willingness to work for membership, to “something to be taken”, which indicates Turkey’s long-awaited, condign reward from its equivalent. Therefore, it is worth noting that having all Turkish narratives include the official goal of membership does not mean that their plot cannot have elements of conflict. On the contrary, the *Turkey as “the Heir”* and *Turkey as a “Great Power” narratives* point more at Conflict and Cooperation scenarios than they do at Convergence.

As opposed to the Turkish narratives, the EU narratives show a variation of goals, ranging from membership on the one end (mainly dominant in the 1960s, 1970s and in the period between 1999 and 2005) to alienation of and separation from Turkey on the other. In some instances, there are even statements referring to the goal of freezing or ending the accession negotiations, as was the case for example in 2016. One interesting aspect is that, in some periods (such as after 2005), the EU institutions seem to refrain from formulating a concrete goal or *finalité* for the EU-Turkey relationship. They instead spoke of an “open-ended” accession process. This terminology is often paralleled with arguments underlining the unique character of Turkey as a special accession candidate.

On the other hand, the analysis suggests that the EU institutions have increasingly referred to a partnership with Turkey over time. Such a (strategic) partnership reflects the need for continued cooperation with Turkey in light of the country’s invariable geostrategic importance for the EU. Despite the recent positive developments or reinforcement of this narrative (such as with the Positive Agenda, discussions on the upgrade of the Customs Union or the EU-Turkey deal on migration) that would presumably substantiate this approach, however, the official EU sources have not yet indicated whether this form of cooperation would replace the full membership perspective as the main framework of relations.

Looking at the documents, it is safe to state that the EU actors’ perceptions of the Turkish identity are also quite diversified. Sometimes they are more focused on the country’s European character, such as in the Membership narrative, while in others their focus is more on its geostrategic importance. At the same time, it is also possible to observe perceptions of a growingly alienated partner, which is moving away from European values (as was the case in the 1980s until the mid-1990s and again in recent years). Overall, the findings conclude that not only the goals but also



the plots of the narratives on the EU-Turkey relationship have become more divergent in the EU. This, of course, also has to be evaluated in light of the growing scepticism among the political elite and the public sphere in several member states towards enlargement in general and Turkey as a particular case.

Second, the impact of “time” is observable in both construction and evolution of narratives, first, with regard to role of temporality and second, as a driver itself.

As stated above, narratives are reinterpretations of social and political reality. They include temporal sequences, i.e. beginnings, ends, and durations. Thus, they are inherently bounded by temporal and spatial contexts. Like the narrated social and political processes themselves, narratives respond to changes and continuities in settings, relations, rules, or paradigms since their plots and goals take shape based on actors’ interpretations of what is “out there” (Eralp, 2009).

The role of temporality or impact of time-varying factors on narratives can be most easily exemplified with the drivers referred in the plots. In the case of Turkey, for instance, the lack of stability and reconciliation in the Middle East and North Africa appears as a constant positive political driver that prompts actors to have closer relations with the EU. It is an element observable in all the identified Turkish narratives from the beginning of the relations. The related parties and places of the conflict in the region change throughout the years but the security-related concerns stemming from this turbulence finds its way into every story narrated by Turkish actors as an embedded, durable argument.

The Turkish actors’ demand for a revision of the Customs Union, on the other hand, is a relatively recent negative economic driver that causes tension between Turkey and the EU. Despite the added value of the Union having been debated since the 1970s by certain Turkish actors, the issue of the Union’s modernization has gained importance and become a driver in the Turkish narratives only recently due to the increase in the number of the Free Trade Agreements signed or negotiated between the EU and third parties. These agreements, especially the ongoing Transatlantic Trade and Investment Project negotiations between the EU and the U.S., have caused this contextual change by nurturing the Turkish actors’ concerns on compatibility and growing asymmetry in the power relations.

The role of temporality is especially important when searching for clues for future narratives. The historical approach of the narrative analysis conducted for this paper reveals that there are certain historical patterns in the flow of argumentation that might be useful to forecast potential constituent of future stories. The examples above demonstrate *continuous* (i.e. regional instability) and *discrete* (i. e. Customs Union) elements and drivers referred within the narratives.

In addition, there are *cyclical* and *cumulative* patterns observed within and across narratives in the process of time. For instance, Turkey’s identity as a European country is a matter of debate, which has turned to both sides over the years. It has evolved in ups and downs, creating a cyclical pattern in driving the perception of Turkey and implicitly the plots and goals in the narratives.

Finally, there are certain arguments that appear more and more in narratives over time. The debates on the EU’s trustworthiness, transparency, and eagerness for the Turkish membership



are increasingly heated since the 1990s. For the last couple of decades, they have appeared more and more in the Turkish narratives; become embedded in the stories in a quite negative way. It is therefore likely that we will see similar debates as somewhat of a driver within the narratives of the near future.

The second impact of time is that time itself increasingly appears as a driver in the narratives. Being “kept waiting at the EU’s door for 54 years” (Erdoğan, 2018), the exhaustion and frustration of the Turkish actors are gradually vocalized in their stories. The more Turkey waits for membership, the more conflictual Turkish actors’ narratives get – which makes the elapsed time a cumulative, negative driver and a possible element for future stories.

Third, when mapped, the changes over time indicate a close link between narratives and milestones.

This paper’s main proposition was that narratives, which depict the social and political reality, are closely interlinked to the actual course of relations. The analysis shows that the selected historical milestones coincide with the significant changes within the discourses of the political actors and, thus, confirms the milestone-based periodization as put forward by the paper. The figure below confirms and illustrates this aspect further.

However, as supported by this study, taking up a forward-looking perspective, it appears that the narratives also have important implications for the future of the relations. The recursive expression of positive considerations, especially when reciprocal, can bring along positive changes. Conversely, adverse rhetoric and an escalation of conflictual speech can indicate a more negative scenario even with the presence of cooperative interactions. Recently, despite the ongoing cooperation on various fields such as migration, energy, security, and economics, the future of the relations does not seem promising.

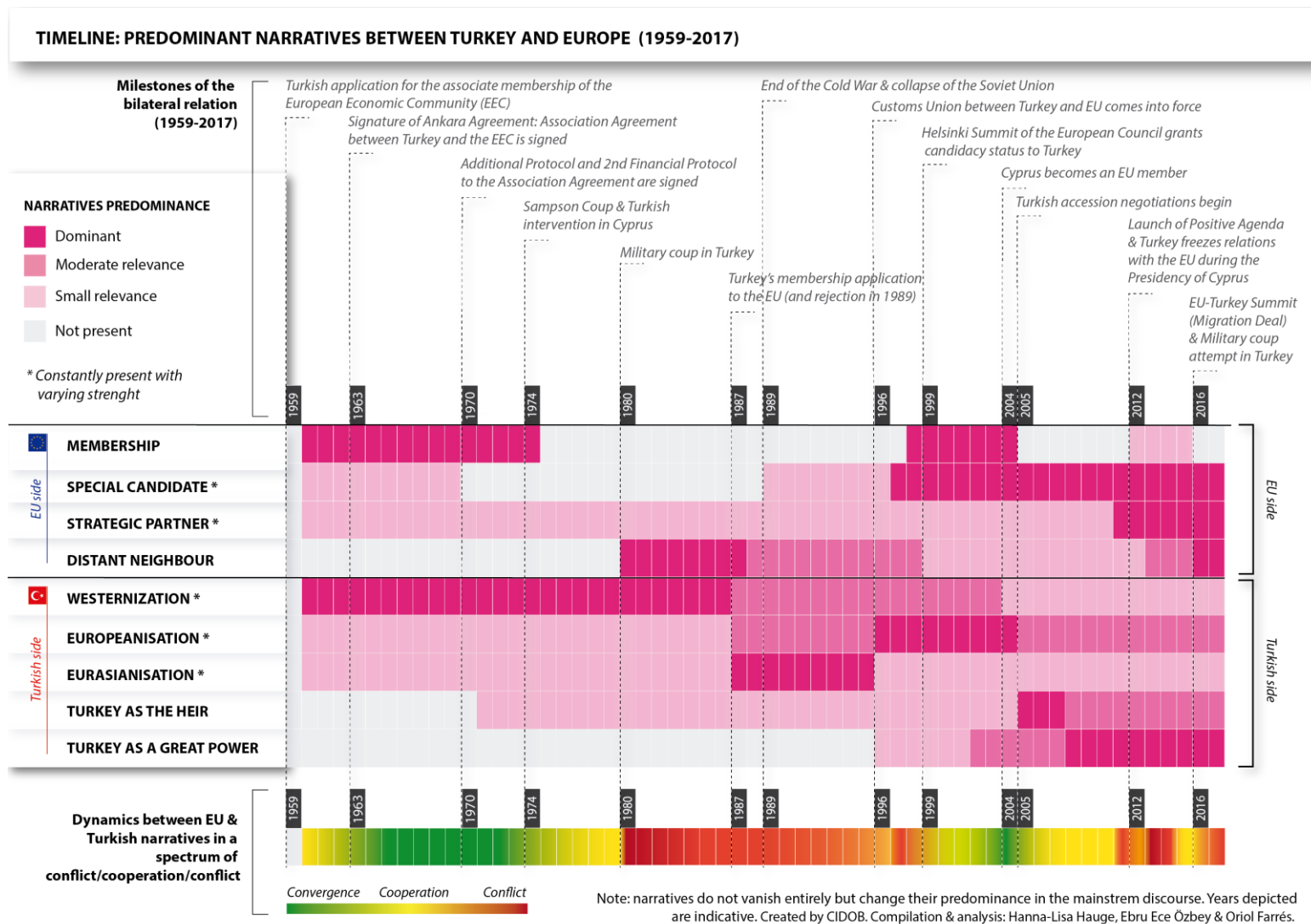
Finally, as regards the historical overview, we can draw the conclusion that the earlier official narratives from Turkey and the EU shared significant similarities, whereas the denoted plots and goals of the subsequent Turkish and European stories have diverged gradually over time resulting in a higher degree of plurality in the debate.

The analysis of narratives conducted in this study allows drawing some conclusions on the timing of the narratives in the historical context. Although the mapping of a precise timing is not the main purpose of this paper due to the qualitative nature of the research, the figure below puts forward a certain chronology of Turkish and EU narratives since the 1960s and thereby illustrates their salience over time.

The map also indicates whether narratives between the Turkish and the EU debate at a given time converge, coexist or conflict – as outlined in the three ideal-type scenarios explained in the introduction above.



Figure 4.1: Timeline of Predominant Narratives



With this figure at hand and based on the deeper analysis of the narratives in Chapter 3, the paper draws the following major conclusions in terms of historical trends of the debates:

The 1960s and most part of 1970s saw a harmony, or convergence, of narratives from Turkey and the EU. In Europe, Turkey’s accession to the Community was expressed as the final goal of the association and Customs Union. From a present viewpoint, it may even be surprising how clearly European actors voiced their support at the time. However, this kind of rhetoric has to be interpreted against the background of the Cold War and Turkey’s importance as a partner in NATO. Similarly, Turkish actors argued along the Westernization and Europeanization narratives during this time, which meant that narratives in the EU and Turkey at this time pursued a similar goal.

With the military coup in 1980 in Turkey, the debate became more differentiated. Elements from the conflict-related Distant Neighbour narrative – particularly, criticism regarding the military rule and violations of human rights – entered the EU’s discourse and are proof of a certain degree of alienation in the relationship. While in Turkey the situation was stabilized and an (unsuccessful) application for membership was prepared in 1987, the EU’s attention at the end of the 1980s and in the 1990s was rather directed to the states from Eastern and Central Europe in terms of future enlargement. Turkey was perceived more as a special candidate (or applicant respectively). The official goal of membership was no longer explicit part of the official discourse.

In Turkey, the major shifts after the end of the Soviet Union also influenced the discourse and particularly so in the form of the Eurasianisation narrative. With the European Council’s decision not to grant candidacy status to Turkey in 1997, Turkey’s hopes for an influential role as a future member of the community were crushed, and the country suspended its relationship with the Community. At the same time, the Turkey as a special candidate narrative started to dominate in the European politics, illustrated by the European Strategy that was proposed specifically only to Turkey.

A turning point was the Helsinki decision 1999 to grant candidacy status to Turkey. This also brought about a drastic change of narratives. On the EU side, the Membership narrative gained ground again, at least for a short time, namely until the accession negotiations officially began in 2005. Despite the disappointment and rage felt towards the EU, the Turkish actors once again started to voice their keenness on and dedication for membership. Unfortunately, this positive atmosphere did not last very long as the Cyprus conundrum induced a deadlock in the negotiations, which has had an unexampled impact to this day.

Since then, the European and Turkish narratives became increasingly conflictual, and particularly so in the most recent years. In the EU, the perception of Turkey moving away from democratic values has become hardened and criticism dominates the official discourse, particularly since the purges after the attempted coup of July 2016. At the same time, the study identified more and more arguments linking rather to a Strategic Partner narrative in the EU discourse.

In Turkey, in the last years, one can see the rise of narratives also testifying elements that are more conflictual. In the *Turkey as Heir* and *Turkey as Great Power* narratives, the Turkish actors’ perceived image of EU appears to change radically and adversely. The normative superiority of



the West in general and of the EU in particular is no longer a constant element in neither of these narratives. The Union’s trustworthiness and credibility are under question, which makes the Turkish actors more intolerant and aggressive towards the EU and the relation itself more fragile. With the prolonged Turkish candidacy, increasing number and variety of drivers, and the persistent lack of a clear roadmap for membership, the antagonistic tones and differentiation of *the Self* from *the Other* gradually gain a presence in the narratives. Consequently, despite the repeated emphasis on Turkey’s indispensable and indisputable goal of EU membership, the stories of the Turkish actors are indicative of conflict rather than convergence.

This chapter discussed the elements of continuity and change and impact of time on the debates on EU-Turkey relations in general. This interest was guided by the assumption that in enduring issues, perceptions or arguments, possible or likely constituents of future narratives become apparent. The following section will pay closer attention to this aspect on the basis of the results of this study.



5. Conclusion: A Mix of Conflict and Mutual Dependence

This study tackled the long-standing EU-Turkey relations with a progressive approach based on a comparative qualitative analysis of a uniquely comprehensive data set from EU and Turkey. It propounds that the narratives in Turkey and the EU regarding the nature and the future of the relationship are not only multi-faceted and multi-layered but also have gradually become more divergent and differentiated over time. Alongside of cyclical, cumulative, and discrete trends of argumentation, continuous elements can be identified in these narratives, which enable us to forecast potential constituent of future narratives.

With regard to the future of the Turkish and EU debates, one important question that arises is, thus, whether one narrative is likely to have dominated over time and will therefore also be most influential in the future. Indeed, there are several historical patterns in the flow of argumentation in both Turkish and European narratives, although the study does not confirm the existence of one enduring most dominant narrative on either side.

On the Turkish side, a constant element has been the proclamation of the official goal of Turkish EU membership. What does this mean for the future of the relationship? Firstly, it means that it is likely that membership will continue to be a cornerstone of the official Turkish narratives. Beyond that, it renders a potential change of the EU’s discourse towards strategic partnership or other forms of partnership as official EU narrative problematic. Such a trend would likely either continue to meet opposition from Turkey or it might even cause a serious rupture. Therefore, should the actors in the EU aspire to officially argue for a partnership instead of some form of membership, they should be aware of the implications in terms of the terminology.

For the EU side, independent from the changing goals that the EU actors may have expressed for the future framework of the relationship, the perception of Turkey’s geostrategic importance forms part of the discourse throughout the whole history of the relationship. Therefore, this acknowledgement is likely to persist in the EU’s narratives also in the future, along with the resulting realization that cooperation with Turkey continuous to be a necessity. The study illustrates that in the recent years that representations of the *Strategic Partner* narrative continue to be influential despite the growing dismay and conflict. Even in cases when the EU institutions criticised the political developments in Turkey, they still stressed that Turkey is an “important partner” (EP2016b) or “key partner” country (COM2016). While the arguments underlying this assessment have changed over time, as has been outlined in Chapter 3, the basic acknowledgment that Turkey is one of the most important partners for Europe remained the same.

The second factor that is likely to influence the future are the constellations of the present narratives. The question is in particular whether present narratives in the EU rather link to conflict, cooperation or convergence as ideal-type scenarios for the future of EU-Turkey relations?

A key conclusion to be drawn from the results of this research – and with repercussions for the future debates – is the observation that in the most recent years, the political rhetoric on both sides has become more contentious compared to earlier times. Observers of the relationship are aware that conflict is not a new element of the relationship and the “rocky” and “cyclical” character of EU-Turkey relations has to some degree become normality. Elements of conflict and



diplomatic crises can emerge and dissolve, given that an “oscillation and coexistence between conflict and convergence captures the very essence of the (un)steady state of Turkey’s place in Europe” (Tocci 2018).

Yet, the level of escalation in the recent years is high and seems likely to persist in the near future. Particularly in light of the political development in Turkey, which is paralleled by more and more populist trends and opposition against Turkish membership in the EU member states. The EP’s resolution demanding a freeze of the accession process in November 2016 (EP 2016b) represents the highest level of escalation in the discourse of the EU institutions, as represented by the data set of this study. But also the Turkish actors take on a more aggressive approach and generally, the Us vs. Them language has increased on both sides. Thus, conflict seems also likely to be a continuing element in EU and Turkish narratives in the (near) future.

Overall, the paper draws the conclusion that in terms of future debates on both sides, a mix of conflictual elements and the emphasis on the importance to cooperate with each other is likely to be expected. This is in line with research on the overall development and drivers within the FEUTURE project⁴³. While the escalation of the debate has risen to a high level also in a historical perspective, the results of the narrative analysis still indicate that the EU and Turkey still perceive each other as important partners and stress the need to cooperate in many policy fields.

⁴³ FEUTURE Online Paper “The Future of EU-Turkey Relations: A Creative Association Framework for Conflictual Cooperation” (forthcoming).



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Annex I: List of Milestones

Table A. 1: Milestones and Descriptions

Milestone	Definition
1958 <u>1959</u> 1960	Turkish application for the associate membership of the European Economic Community (EEC)
1962 <u>1963</u> 1964	Signature of Ankara Agreement: Association Agreement between Turkey and EEC is signed
1969 <u>1970</u> 1971	Additional Protocol and 2 nd Financial Protocol to the Association Agreement are signed
1973 <u>1974</u> 1975	Sampson Coup & Turkish intervention in Cyprus
1979 <u>1980</u> 1981	Military coup in Turkey
1986 <u>1987</u> 1988	Turkey’s membership application to the EU (and rejection in 1989)
1988 <u>1989</u> 1990	End of the Cold War & Collapse of the Soviet Union
1995 <u>1996</u> 1997	Customs Union between Turkey and EU comes into force
1998 <u>1999</u> 2000	Helsinki Summit of the European Council grants candidacy status to Turkey
2003 <u>2004</u> 2005	Cyprus becomes an EU member
2004 <u>2005</u> 2006	Turkish accession negotiations begin
2011 <u>2012</u> 2013	Launch of Positive Agenda & Turkey freezes relations with EU during Presidency of Cyprus
2015 <u>2016</u> 2017	EU-Turkey Summit (Migration Deal) & Military coup attempt in Turkey

Source: Researchers’ elaborations



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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 neighborhood 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 neighborhood.

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