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AND THE MEDITERRANEAN:
PERCEPTIONS, POLICIES AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Turkey's construction of its Mediterranean policy, starting from the period when the country's foreign policy began to undergo a significant reinvigoration. Employing discourse analysis methods, the study tries to present Turkey's priorities in key policy areas towards the region, while indicating changes in its position to the region both before and after the Arab uprisings. The analysis also demonstrates that Turkey has been unable to introduce a well-defined and structured Mediterranean policy although it has been able to establish a deeper level of engagement with the region in political, economic and social aspects. Furthermore, the article examines how Turkey's policies match, contrast or overlap with those of the EU through a case-based approach and puts forward the possible implications for Turkey and the Union.

INTRODUCTION

Regions are constructed as entities to organize place and people. This construction can emerge on and evolve around common interests or simply be dictated by political powers. The Mediterranean region is one of the oldest constructions of humankind. The first river valley areas of civilization grew towards one another and fused into a larger civilized block which eventually reached the Mediterranean Sea and thereby gave the rise to an early and extraordinary development of commerce and urbanization. The rise of Ancient Greece and Rome is usually depicted as a slight jump from the main agrarian threshold to a somewhat more elevated supra-threshold of the "precocious maritime civilizations" of Mediterranean Antiquity. This jump in the livelihood of humanity is exceptional, not only because of its forward momentum, but because of its impact on the creation of world civilization. The major role played by the Mediterranean Basin in the rise of philosophy, art and science was directly linked the region's success in creating a mosaic of mutually influencing societies and cultures. Thus, the Mediterranean has existed as a region during most of the human journey and has hosted numerous kingdoms, empires, city-states, nation-states and other forms of statehood. One of them was the Ottoman Empire, centred in the present-day Turkey, which controlled vast lands around the Mediterranean Basin under its sovereignty and served as a junction point between the East and the West for about six centuries.

In our day, the multifaceted interaction triggered by the Mediterranean region continues to reverberate within world politics as the region represents a cultural, economic and religious bridge between the Middle East and North Africa and the European Union (EU). The EU, being

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by far the most complex and advanced form of political union at the supra-national level, has a direct and transformative impact on the Mediterranean region. The critical question that begs an answer is to what extent the EU's policies still match the changing geopolitical configuration of the Mediterranean. To answer this question, it is crucial to examine the role, influence and impact on the Mediterranean of the rising powers and stakeholders, in particular regional powers such as Iran, Israel, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, and global powers like China, Russia and the United States (US).

To contribute to this larger effort, this paper will focus on the changing role and influence of Turkey in the Mediterranean region and analyse to what extent the Mediterranean exists as a region in Turkey's foreign policy.

By the same token, the paper will also examine whether Turkey's policies are conflicting, competing or overlapping with the EU's policies, and review geopolitically relevant and contentious policy areas under four categories: energy, migration and mobility, agriculture and water, and political ideas.

To provide answers, the article systematically follows the debates on the Mediterranean from Turkey's perspective through a methodological approach built on the discourse analysis approach put forward by Jennifer Milliken (1999). The methodology employed in this paper will allow us to identify "dominating or hegemonic discourses" as well as the "subjugated knowledges" and "resistance to dominating discourses" (Milliken 1999: 230, 244).

To this end, we have assembled a collection of relevant sources as a base from which to investigate Turkey's discourse on the Mediterranean, including official and policy documents, key speeches by governmental leaders as well as a review of the existing literature available in scholarly books and articles on Mediterranean geopolitics in both Turkish and English.²

The overall structure of the article takes the form of four sections, starting with the current introduction section followed by the second part focusing on how Turkey's discourse on the region has evolved since the early 2000s. This section will also introduce the oppositions, exclusions and silences in Turkey's policies, while comparing them with those of the EU. The paper will continue with the key policy ideas mentioned above to define Turkey's priority areas and end with a conclusion section.

1. TURKEY AND THE MEDITERRANEAN AT A GLANCE

Turkey borders the Mediterranean Sea with over 4,000 km of coastline and is historically linked to this area.³ Although Turkey is one of the key Mediterranean countries, it has never been fully involved in the Mediterranean politics as constructed by the EU and has thus kept a low profile in Euro-Mediterranean affairs. Similarly, relations with the Mediterranean region have never been a topic of priority in Turkey's foreign policy, however the region has strongly existed in the political rhetoric due not only to its Ottoman past but also to its current strategic importance.

2 Quotes from non-English sources have been translated by the authors.

3 Turkey occupies the longest coastline in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Being geographically close to the EU, Turkey has been under the influence of several Mediterranean policies of the Union including the Global Mediterranean Policy (1972), the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (1995), the Southeast Europe Stability Pact (1999), the EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and the Middle East (2004) and the European Neighbourhood Policy (2004). Turkey has been involved in these initiatives with different levels of interest. However, its participation in the abovementioned forums has never guaranteed a high degree of convergence between Turkey's foreign policy and the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the Union, especially when the political and security dimensions of the initiatives were weakly developed. However, a habit of dialogue has been established between these two sides and this has created a favourable ground for rapprochement.

Before proceeding to introduce a more detailed look at Turkey-EU relations with a specific focus on the Mediterranean Basin, it is important to understand Turkey's official policy discourse on the region in the recent decades, which is discussed in the following section.

1.1 FRAMING TURKEY'S DISCOURSE ON THE MEDITERRANEAN UNDER THE AKP ADMINISTRATION

Compared to the limited efforts in the post-Cold War period, Turkey's foreign policy on the Mediterranean region has gone through a re-orientation with the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power in 2002, which offered it a new dimension in its official political discourse. The AKP's perspective on the Mediterranean Basin has been largely shaped during the term in office of former Minister of Foreign Affairs (and later Prime Minister) Ahmet Davutoğlu, an important name in conceptualizing Turkey's foreign policy as one of "zero problems with neighbours."

In his address at the meeting of the Political Committee of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly in Istanbul, Davutoğlu articulated Turkey's strategy towards the region with following words: "Turkey wants the resolution of all conflicts in the Eastern Mediterranean, including Cyprus' and it wants the region to reemerge as the center of trade, politics, and culture as it used to be in the past" (cited in Altunışık 2011:16). In this conceptualization, the Eastern Mediterranean appears to have a central role, with an emphasis on contributing to peace, cooperation and stability in this specific territory and also the wider region.

Turkey's political engagement of the Mediterranean Basin was earlier addressed by then Foreign Affairs Minister Abdullah Gül, who put forward a relevant point for Turkey's role identity. In one of his speeches in 2004, he stated that Turkey cannot be defined in terms of a single geographic region, and instead it has a geostrategic location, which constitutes an intersection point of continents and basins (Gül 2007: 68).

It could be argued that Turkey began to show much clearer foreign policy interests in the region starting from this period, and took the European integration project "as an example for encouraging greater economic, political and social integration as a vehicle to achieve greater stability" in its neighbourhood (Kirişçi 2013: 23).

On this point, Turkey's inclusion in platforms such as the US-backed Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) Initiative, which was set up in 2008 by the G-8 countries, is relevant to

our discussion of Turkey's efforts in contributing to reform and transformation in the region. It might also support the argument that aside from the EU, Turkey's response to the region was also under the influence of the US-led initiatives.

This initiative was launched as a multilateral development and reform plan, which aims to foster economic and political liberalization in a wide geographic area of Arab and non-Arab Muslim countries. Introducing itself not as a model but as a possible "inspiration" for the region (Sever 2007: 77), Turkey initially put forward four stages, which define its discourse on the BMENA, as follows: "proactive involvement in securing BMENA as a soft power", "Turkey as 'de-securitizer', and [having] 'zero problems with the neighbors'", "Turkey as a 'regional protector' of BMENA" and "Turkey as [...] an 'integrative power'" (Erşen 2014: 100).

Turkey's emphasis on improving regional cooperation and dialogue in the Mediterranean has also continued in the post-Arab Spring period, as will be further analysed in the following sections. In an article in the *Turkish Policy Quarterly* magazine, Turkey's incumbent Foreign Affairs Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu draws attention to the High-Level Cooperation Councils, which have been formed with nine countries from the MENA region:

The time has come for the people of the region to rise above ethnic, religious, and ideological differences and to find a way to invest in the common good. [...] The High Level Cooperation Councils [...] were designed to serve specifically this purpose. So far, we have had 14 joint cabinet meetings and signed 181 agreements with the countries of the region to facilitate the free flow of goods, services, and people. (Çavuşoğlu 2015: 25)

Although Turkey's efforts on the Mediterranean Basin have not resulted in establishing a policy framework similar to the EU's, which is examined in the next section, it would not be wrong to claim that it has adopted several "political, diplomatic, and economic means to transform Turkey's relations with the countries in the region and to increase Turkish influence in this major geostrategic area" (Altunışık 2011: 19).

1.2 A COMPARATIVE LOOK AT TURKEY'S MEDITERRANEAN POLICIES

Despite the abovementioned efforts, Turkey's lack of a comprehensive vision on the Mediterranean region introduces certain challenges when comparing its approach with that of the EU, which has also its deficiencies. From a practical perspective, Turkey has maintained its stance of "view[ing] the Mediterranean at the periphery of different regions" (Altunışık 2011: 19), while ruling out conceptualizing it as a political entity, as the EU does.

The chronic problems of Turkey's foreign policy, like the Cyprus question and the relations with Greece over the Aegean Sea, are also Mediterranean issues. However, Turkey has treated them as distinct foreign policy hurdles rather than a part of its regional Mediterranean policy. In other words, Turkey's foreign policy has preferred to deal with the issues on the Mediterranean separately instead of constructing a single and unified Mediterranean policy. Turkey's foreign policy decisions towards the Mediterranean have been generally influenced by the EU membership process, the Cyprus question, the relations with Greece and the conflicts of the Middle East. The lack of a broad definition of the Mediterranean region in Turkey's strategic thinking paved the way for its perception that the region has separate dynamics including the

Middle East, Greece and Cyprus, the Balkans, and Europe. This picture also confirms that the notion of the Mediterranean is primarily considered, in Turkey's geopolitical thinking, in relation to the Eastern Mediterranean which hosts numerous security concerns as well as economic opportunities vital to Turkey's national interest.

Furthermore, Turkey's relations with the Euro-Mediterranean initiatives such as the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) introduce another dimension on why its Mediterranean policies are not entirely on the same page with the EU's. Among these initiatives, one of the most important, the Euro-Mediterranean process (EUROMED or the Barcelona Process), was created in 1995 in order to establish a framework for sustainable and institutional cooperation between the EU and the non-member Mediterranean countries. This process has been replaced by the UfM with the Euro-Mediterranean Summit of Heads of State and Government held in Paris in 2008. The Union for the Mediterranean aims to strengthen the Barcelona Process and envisages cooperation in a wide range of fields including de-pollution of the Mediterranean Sea, cooperation in maritime and land transport, civil protection, alternative energies and the strengthening of employment opportunities.

Following the 1999 Helsinki Summit, where Turkey assumed candidate status, it supported the ENP and the EMP, implementing the ENP instruments for its domestic political and economic reforms. However, Turkey has had a cautious approach toward the UfM among other Mediterranean-centred foreign policy initiatives. Since the creation of the European Economic Community, Turkey has targeted full integration to Europe and has thus had reservations about alternative political unions that could damage its full accession. Indeed, Nicolas Sarkozy, then French presidential candidate and the mastermind behind the UfM, stated his opposition to Turkey's entrance into the EU in his 2007 speech in Toulon, and pointed that the UfM can be an alternative to Turkey's accession to the EU (Sarkozy 2007). From the EU's side, this could be described as "an identity-construction exercise identifying/fixing the EU's borders and underlining who is to be left out because of non-European characteristics" (Cebeci and Schumacher 2017: 6).

In response, Egemen Bağış, the former chief foreign policy adviser to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was serving as Turkey's Prime Minister at that time, said in a telephone interview, "This [UfM] cannot be an alternative to Turkish membership in the EU" (Bennhold 2007). Turkey's reflection on this issue also lies beneath the country's indifferent position vis-à-vis EUROMED. Despite Turkey's low interest in EUROMED and similar initiatives, there exist strong collaboration opportunities between Turkey and the EU on Mediterranean issues.

As for other points of divergence between Turkey's perception of the Mediterranean region and that of the EU, mobility and economic interests appear to have a particular role. As the European Stability Initiative (ESI) reports, the negotiations for visa-free travel between the EU and Turkey began in late 2013, when Turkey accepted the EU's roadmap for a visa-free travel regime and signed a readmission agreement with the EU.⁴ However, as the ESI further indicates, the fact that Turkey still remains the only EU candidate whose citizens are obliged

4 See the ESI website: *Why a EU Visa Liberalisation Process for Turkey is in both the EU's and Turkey's Interest*, <http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=446>.

to obtain a visa before being allowed to enter an EU country, has become a major source of frustration for Turkey. In a statement given in 2011 by Egemen Bağış, Turkey's Minister of EU Affairs, he noted, "The time when Turkish people feel least European is when they wait in line for a visa" (Turkish Forum 2011).

The lengthy debate on visa-free travel between the EU and Turkey has led Turkey's government to revise its visa policies for the Middle Eastern and North Africa countries. "In contrast to the EU's failure to adopt policies encouraging such 'contacts', Turkey's visa policies have encouraged an explosion in the number of people entering Turkey from its neighbourhood" (Kirişçi 2013: 211-212). Following the visa lift for Morocco and Tunisia, Turkey signed agreements with Jordan, Lebanon and Syria in 2009 and 2010 for visa-free travel. At the Fifth Arab-Turkish Forum in June 2010, Davutoğlu, who was then serving as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, announced that Syria, Turkey and Lebanon will be declared free-trade areas and underlined the significance of free movement of people (Milliyet 2010, Kirişçi 2013: 212).

Another area where Turkey's policies differ conspicuously from EU policies is with respect to democracy promotion. Turkey's foreign policy has refrained from adopting the rhetoric of "democracy promotion", employing instead a noninterventionist approach due to its close relations with authoritarian regimes in its larger neighbourhood and its concerns about the internal stability within its own borders (Aydın-Düzgüt and Keyman 2014).

Therefore, Turkey has not introduced an "institutionalized democracy assistance policy" like that of the EU, yet is increasingly involved in activities that promote democracy at both governmental and civil society level (Kirişçi 2010: 14). In this respect, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) could be given as a relevant example. Established in 1992, TİKA has carried out projects in numerous areas such as education, health, infrastructure and women's empowerment, aimed at disadvantaged communities in a wide geographic scope including the Middle East and Africa. According to the 2014 TİKA annual report, Yemen was among TİKA's top beneficiaries with around 6 million dollars, mostly directed towards the health and education sector. In Tunisia, by contrast, TİKA has largely invested in administrative and civil infrastructure followed by social and economic infrastructure services, as the report further demonstrates. With respect to the Syrian crisis, Turkey has also spent around 25 billion dollars to assist and shelter refugees since the onset of the civil war (Sarioğlu 2016).

Turkey's deployment of "soft power" is a consistent part of its foreign policy discourse, being frequently mentioned by the government itself. "In this understanding, Turkey, home to over 3 million Syrian and Iraqi refugees, is currently carrying out humanitarian and development aid activities and undertaking thousands of projects in more than 140 countries", stated President Erdoğan in his speech at the 2016 Humanitarian World Summit held in Istanbul (Turkish Presidency 2016).

Overall, it would be difficult to deny the overlap between the declared objectives of the EU and Turkey with respect to the neighbourhood policy, which is to "achieve greater integration with their geographic neighbors in order to foster a friendly, peaceful, stable and prosperous neighborhood" (Kirişçi 2011: 33).

2. THE ROLE OF KEY POLICY AREAS IN TURKEY'S DISCOURSE ON THE MEDITERRANEAN

Having discussed the major themes of Turkey's official discourse on the Mediterranean and how it differs from that of the EU, we now turn to the four key policy areas: migration, energy and industry, agriculture and water, and political ideas with regard to the Mediterranean. This section sets out to ascertain Turkey's priorities in these areas and how it correspondingly constructs the EU's role in the region.

2.1 THE REFUGEE AND MIGRATION CRISIS

The escalating migration crisis since 2015 and the influx of refugees to the neighbouring countries as well as Europe continue to cause tensions, as the world is facing one of the most serious humanitarian tragedies of its recent past. The massive number of refugees poses major challenges that cannot be underestimated.

This year alone, more than a million people crossed the Mediterranean to Europe as migrants or refugees in search of a safe and better life. In addition to thousands of deaths on the way, this massive influx of people sparked a crisis in Europe by creating serious divisions in the EU. This humanitarian tragedy required a rapid response but the resettlement of the migrants has become a topic of discord among the Member States. Greece has been the most affected Member State and Turkey, a candidate country, has acted as the guardian of the Union's borders and forms a natural buffer zone between the migrants and the EU.

Since the onset of the migrant crisis, refugees have travelled towards Europe using both overland and maritime routes, making several stopovers on their way. The EU Network on International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion (IMISCOE) identifies six categories of countries (Düvell and Pastore 2008) that are involved in transit migration:

- country of origin;
- countries that are stage posts along the road (e.g. Russia, Yemen, Mauritania, Senegal, Mali);
- stepping stone to the EU (e.g. Ukraine, Serbia, Turkey, Libya, Morocco);
- first EU country (e.g. Slovakia, Hungary, Greece, Cyprus, Malta, Italy, Spain);
- EU countries that are passed en route (e.g. Austria, Germany, France); and
- final country of destination in the EU, North America or elsewhere.

In Europe's typology, Turkey holds a very special place as being by far the biggest steppingstone country to the EU. As of February 2017, Turkey is hosting 2,910,281 registered Syrian refugees.⁵ In addition to the registered refugees, Turkey also hosts more than a million unregistered refugees mostly coming from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. According to the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey, Turkey is hosting the largest refugee population in the world, ahead of both Lebanon and Pakistan (European Commission 2017c). In some border cities like Kilis, the refugee population even exceeds the local population.

5 UNHCR data on Syrian refugees in Turkey available at <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224>.

As a transit country, Turkey describes wars, conflicts, human rights violations and economic deprivation as "push factors" of irregular migration. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs states that economic and political instabilities in its neighbouring regions pose a significant challenge for Turkey's migration policy, which has been clearly seen in the Syrian crisis.⁶ With the rising number of people fleeing the conflict, Turkey's policymakers have "re-evaluated migration systems [to] create a more comprehensive migration and asylum policy" (Kilberg 2014) and in 2013 adopted the Law on Foreigners and International Protection, which is a crucial step in managing legal and irregular migration to Turkey.

Here it is also important to note Turkey's criticism of the EU at an official level, urging it to adopt a more coordinated strategy against the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean. In another article in the *Turkish Policy Quarterly* magazine in 2016, Foreign Affairs Minister Çavuşoğlu said: "The global response to this humanitarian catastrophe has not been quick enough or comprehensive enough to help alleviate the suffering. The EU countries are deeply divided on the refugee crisis and lack a concerted and coordinated approach to their migration and asylum policies" (Çavuşoğlu 2016: 18).

In an attempt to end the irregular migration from Turkey to the EU, an agreement was put into force between Turkey and the EU on 20 March 2016. According to the deal, Turkey would accept one refugee from the Greek Islands who used Turkey as the route to Europe; in exchange, a Syrian asylum seeker in Turkey would find a home in Europe. From the EU side, the selection criteria for the asylum seekers were quite vague. As for Turkey, visa-free travel for Turkish citizens was the big prize for taking back refugees and economic migrants from Europe. Besides being problematic from the human rights perspective, the deal had many shortcomings and it soon became clear that its full-scale implementation would never be possible. Therefore, the Turkey–EU migration deal did not ultimately succeed and only 6,907 Syrian refugees were relocated from Turkey to the EU within its mandate (European Commission 2017a and 2017b). Despite this, improving cooperation with Turkey on the refugee crisis remains a priority for the EU.

The EU–Turkey refugee deal was critical to stop the ongoing tragic human loss at sea. On the other hand, the moment the deal came into force, all refugees were already held in detention centres in Greece. The ones in the camps were unable to leave the Greek islands or forced to live under very difficult conditions. The islands were not designed as refugee camps and lacked basic needs including medical care, hygiene and nutrition (Dimitriadi 2016). In other words, the humanitarian tragedy of the refugees did not end but took another form. The Amnesty International's Deputy Director for Europe describes the situation as follows: "The EU–Turkey deal has been a disaster for the thousands who have been left stranded in a dangerous, desperate and seemingly endless limbo on the Greek islands" (Amnesty International 2017).

A year later, the deal between the EU and Turkey has decreased the flow of migrants into Europe. However, this is definitely not a final solution and tens of thousands of refugees are currently stuck in camps and suffering from trauma and depression due to the harsh conditions. In addition to the existing asylum seekers stuck in Europe, the failure of the EU–

6 See the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs website: *Turkey on Irregular Migration*, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey-on-irregular-migration.en.mfa>.

Turkey refugee deal can generate new phases of migrant influx to Europe. Moreover, the lack of similar agreements between the EU and the countries of Northern Africa complicates the situation even more and Europe may face a new wave of migrant crises in the months to come.

A recently published report on the migration routes suggests that migration flows change their routes primarily in relation to the policies implemented by the EU (Alexandridis and Dalkıran 2017). The changing of routes pushes migrants to use alternative routes which might increase the number of casualties. It should be also noted that Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, shows unwillingness to conduct search and rescue operations. This is another reason for the increased number of casualties in the Mediterranean. It is quite clear that Turkey–EU collaboration on the Mediterranean/Aegean migration crisis is a must. However, the lack of policy as well as the determination on the EU side to find a sustainable solution to the refugee influx creates more complications as the problem requires immediate solutions. It seems that externalizing the problem is so far the best option found by the European leaders after several inadequate attempts on the part of Brussels to resettle refugees among the Member States. The EU–Turkey refugee deal, despite its shortcomings, is an example of the sort of good opportunity that could save the lives of thousands who will try to cross the Mediterranean to Europe, and end the miseries of thousands more who are stuck in detention centres in Greece as well as in the Balkans.

2.2 ENERGY SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Leaving aside the growing migration crisis, energy security and cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean is another agenda item where Turkey and the EU interact to create collaboration and trade opportunities. Despite certain challenges, the natural gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean have created a new regional status quo where the Mediterranean countries have been somehow forced to engage in more communication and collaboration to create beneficial trade ties.

International energy politics is a tough field where producing and consumer countries, neighbouring states and multinational companies compete to get the deal that will best promote their interests. Regional energy cooperation on the other hand entails a process of balance formed by the interaction and behaviour of these agents. Significant natural gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean affect the economic, political and security dynamics in the region. As the fastest growing source of energy in the world, natural gas has an increasing role in Mediterranean politics, and energy development and transportation issues determine the nature of interstate relations in the region.

The discoveries in the Levant Basin, especially in Leviathan, Tamar and Cyprus-A, have introduced a new game of energy politics. This basin spans offshore territories that include the Gaza Strip, Israel, Cyprus, Lebanon and Syria.⁷ The proven offshore gas deposits in Israel and Cyprus have the potential to end both countries' dependence on energy import (Sartori et al. 2016). In addition, these new resources have the capacity to supply the natural gas needs of the Mediterranean region and Eastern Europe, which is still highly dependent on gas imports.

7 For a map of the Levant Basin, see Vella (2015).

Turkey's increasing appetite for more energy resources puts the country in a precarious situation. Securing energy is essential for Turkey's sustained economic growth which in turn underpins the country's political stability. Despite the fact that Turkey's dependence on energy is mostly derived from fossil fuel, Turkey is a hydrocarbon-resource-poor country and thus a net importer of oil and natural gas. Turkey has been making efforts to overcome this deficiency by trying to evolve into a major transit hub for hydrocarbon energy sources, connecting big consumer markets in Europe to supplier regions surrounding Turkey, including the Middle East, the Caspian Region and Central Asia. Similarly, Turkey's aspiration to become an energy hub has been voiced more strongly than ever as a governmental objective in the past couple of years. Despite this ambitious objective, Turkey lacks necessary infrastructure to become an energy hub.

Ukraine, which is very well suited to serve as both an energy hub and transit country, has an average gas storage capacity of 36.1 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas whereas Turkey's capacity is only 2.7 bcm. It should be noted that the storage capacity of a country is directly related to its natural gas reserves because the gas is best stored in the already consumed natural gas reservoirs. Since Turkey lacks significant gas reserves, its storage capacity is limited. In the past, Russian Gazprom was eager to invest in Turkey to build large storage reservoirs to regulate the gas to be exported to Europe; however, the discoveries made so far have not created such an opportunity. In addition, not all of the recently discovered natural gas fields in Turkey can be utilized for gas storage.

Under these circumstances, it could be argued that Turkey does not possess the necessary characteristics to become a hub for natural gas exports. The Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) project that Azerbaijan and Turkey agreed to realize together also confirms this situation by assigning to Turkey the role of transit state. TANAP will be mainly financed by SOFAZ and is planned to be operational in 2017 with a capacity of 16 bcm. Ten bcm of this gas will be sold to Europe whereas 6 bcm will be bought by Turkey to decrease dependence on Russian gas. The project is designed to be expandable to 30 bcm and ultimately 60 bcm per year.

As a hydrocarbon-poor country, Turkey's current energy policy is based on efforts to diversify its resources and import markets. Moreover, Turkey is largely dependent on Russia, Iran and Azerbaijan for its energy supply. By the same token, it is estimated that Europe's oil imports will increase by up to 95 percent and gas imports from 63 to 80 percent by 2030; and Europe is already the second largest market for Gazprom (Görgülü and Senyücel Gündoğar 2016: 4). The latest discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean offer both Europe and Turkey opportunities to diversify and enhance their energy security. Despite various obstacles, the idea of making the Eastern Mediterranean a potential gas supplier to consumer markets sounds appealing.

The proved natural gas reserves are in the seabed between Israel and Cyprus. Following the recent normalization in Israel-Turkey relations, there have been discussions on the possible construction of a sub-sea pipeline project that would connect Israel's Leviathan gas field to Ceyhan in southern Turkey. Indeed, energy cooperation has been one of the motivations behind Israel-Turkey rapprochement.

So far, the biggest challenge lying ahead of the sub-sea gas pipeline project is the decades-old conflict between Cyprus and Turkey. There are two possible routes for the pipeline and

the more cost-effective option is constructing it through Lebanon and Syria. Due to obvious security risks, the other option that would go through the territorial waters of Cyprus seems a better solution. If such a pipeline is to be constructed, the approval of the Cyprus Republic is a must. However, Turkey does not officially recognize this country due to the ongoing disputes since Turkey's military intervention in the island in 1974. Therefore, it is not possible to construct a sub-sea gas pipeline operating in the Mediterranean if the Cyprus conflict is not resolved.

In 2017, Turkey declared its intention to start more exploration studies in the Mediterranean. A statement issued by Turkey's Energy and Natural Resources Minister Berat Albayrak announced the exploration activities to be carried out: "This will be an important year for sea exploration, oil and gas exploration. We will continue with two different vessels, one will explore the Black Sea and the other will explore the Mediterranean Sea. This year will be a more active year for us" (Erkul 2017).

The resolution of the border issue, however, is crucial for the continuation of exploration activities. Following the Greek Cypriot call for the second international tender for offshore hydrocarbon exploration in 2012, Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs released an official statement describing the step as "unilateral" (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2012). The second round of concessions was met with objections from Turkey, which stated that unauthorized oil and natural gas exploration and exploitation activities in the overlapping areas will not be allowed under any circumstances.

Another mission was interrupted in March 2015 when tensions rose between the Turkish Cypriot government and the Greek administration over the ownership of the resources. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus argues that the resources of the island belong to both communities. However, as the Cyprus problem remains unresolved, it seems quite improbable that the Turkish side of the island would benefit from the oil and gas revenues. Therefore, the resolution of the Cyprus conflict seems like a sine qua non in order to ensure energy security in the Mediterranean.

2.3 TURKEY'S AGRICULTURE AND WATER POLICY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Trade is an important manifestation of Turkey's integration with its neighbourhood. Because the trade between the EU and the southern Mediterranean has been dominated by energy, Turkey's strategy toward a more diversified trade opportunity comes to the fore (Kirişçi 2013: 209-210). Turkey's trade with the Maghreb and Mashreq countries increased on average by 59 percent from 2008 to 2011, while it has continued to enhance its relations through free-trade agreements with Middle Eastern and North African countries like Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt (Kirişçi 2013: 210). These initiatives were accompanied by the establishment of the Close Neighbours Economic and Trade Association Council with Lebanon, Syria and Jordan in 2010.

With respect to trade relations between Turkey and the southern Mediterranean, agriculture appears to hold a significant place. Agricultural production is a major part of Turkey's economy, accounting for around 20 percent of the country's employment. The gross value of Turkey's agricultural production reached 62 billion dollars in 2013, according to data from the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock (cited in ISPAT 2014). Turkey is also the world's seventh largest agricultural producer and ranks first in Europe in this category. As part of its targets for the agriculture sector, it aims to be among the top five overall producers globally within five

to ten years.

In the early 2000s, Turkey embarked on structural reforms in agriculture due to ineffective policies and the related burden on government expenditures (Çakmak 2003: 11-13). Several initiatives such as deficiency payments, agricultural insurance support schemes, rural development programmes, compensatory payments and investment incentives were put into force notably following the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Agriculture, and in line with the developments in the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) (Sarica 2014: 31).

Turkey has also participated in a number of EU programmes like the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) for which the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock prepared and implemented the Rural Development Operational Programme from 2007 to 2013. Besides, Turkey has joined Agricultural Research for Development (ARD), which addresses the agricultural and development challenges faced by developing and emerging countries as well as countries in transition (Compés López et al. 2013). From both the EU and Turkey perspectives, agriculture is a "strategic sector to insure food security" (Compés López et al. 2013: 8).

For many Middle Eastern and North African countries, exports of agricultural products are an important source of foreign currency. Among these countries, Turkey is a leading agricultural producer and stands out in terms of the total value of its agricultural exports. In 2015, the exports of agricultural commodities and food products accounted to 16.3 billion dollars and 11.7 percent of Turkey's total export earnings, as reported by the Ministry of Economy. In addition to this, based on the 2013 FAO data, Turkey is the biggest agricultural commodity exporter among the Mediterranean Partner Countries (MPCs) and it also provides almost half of the MPCs' exports of agricultural products to the EU followed by Morocco and Israel (Sarica 2014: 58). As stated by Turkey's Minister of Food, Agriculture and Livestock Mehdi Eker, Turkey's potential in agriculture should be noted as an exemplary model for the Arab Spring countries (Anadolu Agency 2012).

Moving on to consider another policy area, water is seen as the key for geopolitical stability in the Mediterranean. Indeed, water is described "a source of conflict, specifically as it is crucial for food security, environmental sustainability, and the everyday existence of people in the region" (Huber and Paciello 2016: 6). The Mediterranean region is characterized by not only limited but also irregular availability of water resources. As shown by data from the WaterWorld Policy Support System, 15 out of 18 Middle East and North African countries are suffering from water scarcity, while Turkey is among the three most water-abundant countries along with Iran and Iraq (Keulertz 2016: 14-15).

As a candidate country, Turkey is required to conform with the EU Water Framework Directive and adopt water policies in line with this. Therefore, several new adjustments have taken place on water resource management since 2003.

In its official discourse, Turkey views water "as a catalyst for cooperation rather than a source of conflict".⁸ For transboundary waters, it prioritizes "equitable," "reasonable" and "optimum" use.

8 See the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs website: *Turkey's Policy on Water Issues*, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/>

Therefore, the Euphrates and the Tigris, the two rivers crossing Turkey's southeastern Anatolia region, are of significance. The Euphrates and the Tigris account for around one third of the country's water potential. While Turkey contributes around 89 percent of the 35 bcm annual flow of the Euphrates, the remaining 11 percent comes from Syria. By contrast, no Syrian waters flow into the Tigris. More than 50 percent of the total average flow of the Tigris comes from Turkey and the rest comes from Iraq.

The lack of an agreement between Turkey, Syria and Iraq on the use of these two rivers based on identical criteria has caused problems between the riparian states. Besides, the construction of the Southeast Anatolia Development Project (GAP, which covers six cities in Turkey's southeastern region) on the Euphrates and the Tigris has also become a major source of tension between the co-riparians. As a more recent attempt to resolve the dispute, Turkey, Syria and Iraq "agreed to establish joint stations to measure water volume, monitor and exchange information about climate and drought, and create joint water education programs" in connection with the Tigris and Euphrates in 2009 (Blua 2009).

Because the three states have sought to securitize their rights over these waters, a basin-wide management scheme addressing water security should be implemented in order to avoid both conflict and irreversible water and land degradation (Açma 2011: 115).

2.4 TURKEY'S STANCE ON THE ARAB UPRISINGS

For the southern Mediterranean countries, the Arab uprisings, which broke out with a series of anti-government protests and armed rebellions in late 2010, were a turning point in the proliferation of new political ideas that challenge domestic and regional structures, while conflicting, competing or converging with the EU understanding of issues like democracy or human rights (Huber and Paciello 2016: 6).

Before looking at the changes in perceptions from Turkey's perspective, it will be helpful to briefly discuss the EU's position on the Arab Spring. The eruption of the Arab Spring revolutions posed an unprecedented challenge to the EU in dealing with both national and regional crises simultaneously. Similarly, it effectively highlighted the several key imbalances in the Union's foreign policy. In addressing each country using a tactical approach – to maximize potential profits and minimize the losses – the EU adopted a multitude of positions, causing its Member States to often act in contradiction. For example, while the EU acknowledged the Arab populations' calls for democracy and political reform, it maintained its relations with the Gulf countries and turned a blind eye to the uprisings in Yemen and Bahrain (Abo Hamed 2014). By the same token, EU countries were unsure how to react to President Mohamed Morsi's removal from power by the Egyptian army. The Member States wanted to send a message to the coup plotters that they had gone too far, but at the same time they did not want to look as if they were backing Morsi (Rettman 2013). The EU's awkward reaction and its inability to name an obvious military coup were clearly in contradiction to the values that the Union argues promoting worldwide.

Without any shadow of doubt, the uprisings have brought major changes in Turkey's position towards the region, as the EU has also experienced. In this respect, one of the most striking examples would be the upside-down relations with Syria, where the ongoing crisis has caused a threat to Turkey's internal stability. Although Turkey initially tried to encourage the Syrian government to reform through diplomatic means, President Bashar al-Assad's ignorance and the accompanying refugee influx into Turkey have led the government to cut its relations with Syria and later back the Syrian opposition against the regime.

As for Libya, Turkey first adopted a cautious approach, refraining from taking an official position due its strong economic ties with the country. Although showing opposition to NATO's intervention in Libya by describing the no-fly zone as "unhelpful and fraught with risk" (Jean Yackley 2011), Turkey later changed its stance and called for former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi to step down "for the sake of the country's future" (BBC 2011). On this point, it is also important to mention Turkey's position towards democracy promotion in the Middle East, highlighted in Erdoğan's electoral victory speech in July 2011, during which he "saluted the democratic aspirations of peoples across the Middle East" (Tocci 2012). Similarly, Erdoğan indicated Turkey's recognition of the regional shifts in his remarks at the Cairo Opera House in 2011 with following words: "The freedom message spreading from Tahrir Square has become a light of hope for all the oppressed through Tripoli, Damascus, and Sanaa" (Karadeniz and Saleh 2011, Yılmaz and Üstün 2011: 85). His remarks are also an indication of Turkey's role during the uprisings: standing by the people demanding political and economic change. In this regard, it could be put forward that Turkish policymakers have "sided with the forces of change" and "continued to adjust policies on a case-to-case basis", while maintaining political and economic relations with the countries that "have undergone regime changes" including Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen (Özcan 2013: 3).

CONCLUSION

Employing discourse analysis, the report set out to review the official discourse of Turkey vis-à-vis the Mediterranean while investigating how this discourse has evolved on key policy areas. Taken together, the findings demonstrate that the Mediterranean does not exist as an individual region in Turkey's foreign policy, although the country has implemented several initiatives to widen its sphere of influence. The report further looks into Turkey's stance during the Arab uprisings, which appears to be a more pragmatic yet cooperative approach.

As mentioned earlier, the adoption of a proactive foreign policy towards the region indicates that Turkey tries to leverage its strategic role there while addressing the global challenges at the same time. It is important here to note that Turkey's self-image vis-à-vis the Mediterranean is not dependent on a nation-building role or imposing itself as a model, but having an impact in the region through better economic and political relations as well as its soft power instruments, which have been discussed in the previous sections. In this context, Turkey's potential for assistance appears to be crucial for its cooperation with the EU.

Given the fact that the region hosts several crucial foreign policy obstacles including the Cyprus question, conflicts in the Middle East, energy security and the Mediterranean migration crisis, all these hurdles deserve close bilateral as well as regional collaboration.

So far, it is difficult to argue that such cooperation has materialized. From the EU side, the Union's decision-making process has resulted in a slower policy response to the developments in the MENA region. In addition, Brexit has created many legal uncertainties and raised several questions about the future of the EU itself. On the other side, Turkey is exhausted with several foreign policy challenges including the crisis in Syria, the war against ISIS, the latest disagreements with Europe and finally the turbulent relations with Russia. Despite these loaded agendas in both sides, the paper argues that foreign policies of Turkey and the EU converge in principle, at least from the perspective of migration and energy, as examined in previous sections. The refugee deal between Turkey and the EU, discussed in detail in this paper, is a good example of this convergence.

However, mutual agreement does not always create harmonious and functional solutions. Energy security for example is a serious risk for both the EU and Turkey, but challenges on grounds such as the Cyprus conflict prevent the construction of mega-energy projects. Today, energy relations of the EU and Turkey are framed in terms of excessive dependence on Russia, qualifying the latter as a security threat. Energy cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean is a valuable opportunity to deal with this risk.

The future of EU–Turkey relations appears gloomy and there exists a growing risk that Turkey's EU accession process will break down. If Turkey's membership process is suspended, it is quite probable that we will witness less cooperation between the two, in the context of the Mediterranean. The EU would lose its already diminished leverage on Turkey, and regional crises that need immediate solutions such as the refugee crisis would be even more complicated in the absence of cooperative Turkey–EU relations. Therefore, EU–Turkey dialogue is quite valuable and should not be left at the mercy of daily politics and populism on both sides, if we are to achieve a more secure and balanced regional order.

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