



Tackling Uncertainty: Turkish-EU Foreign Policy Cooperation in the Middle East and North Africa



edited by Andrea Dessì, Senem Aydın-Düzgüt and Daniela Huber

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1. Tackling Uncertainty: EU–Turkish Foreign Policy Cooperation in the MENA

by Senem Aydın-Düzgit, Andrea Dessì and Daniela Huber

The foreign policy landscapes of the EU and Turkey have recently gone through various earthquakes. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), NATO has withdrawn from Afghanistan whilst there are accelerated signs of US military redeployments from Iraq and potentially Syria. In Europe, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, NATO is likely to engage in a renewed confrontation with Russia over a longer period of time, while the EU is increasingly (re)turning to look at the Mediterranean as a priority to limit energy dependence on Russia. Both developments make foreign policy cooperation between the EU and Turkey on issues of mutual concern in the MENA an absolute necessity.

Rather than cooperation, however, the relationship has increasingly become contentious and even conflictual as disagreements over key foreign policy files have mixed with domestic politics in both Turkey and certain European states to add further strain to the bilateral relationship. While tensions have subsided since the hot summer of 2020, both sides appear unprepared to develop new modalities of cooperation. Yet, coordinated policy stances on key foreign policy dossiers of mutual interest such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean are more urgent than ever, not least since much uncertainty persists as to future trajectories in these contexts, where possible “black swan” events could heavily impact the EU–Turkey relationship in the absence of adequate coordination and contingency planning.

Trends of uncertainty are further augmented by the possibility of an upcoming governmental change in Turkey in 2023 and the current tension surrounding Ankara's positioning vis-à-vis the Ukraine conflict and Russia, and particularly on the topic of NATO's enlargement to Sweden and Finland. While Turkey's approach to key foreign policy portfolios in the MENA is unlikely to be completely overturned, there might be varying Turkish positions if the current government in Ankara is posed to stay (likely in an authoritarian form) or if opposition parties (fragmented as they are) manage to form a government.

While there is debate in Turkey on various positions vis-à-vis Syria (in particular the question of Bashar al-Assad or the migration deal which the opposition wants to renegotiate), less is known about the policy stances of various Turkish political parties on Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya or the Eastern Mediterranean. In some cases, aims might differ; in others, it may be approaches or modes of engagement that experience variations.

Despite these uncertainties, EU institutions and member states have directed little thought or planning to the question of future EU–Turkey cooperation on these crucial foreign policy dossiers. Having identified this gap and the need for adequate contingency planning, this project starts from the *assumption that space for cooperation clearly does exist*: from migration and the consolidation of fragile ceasefires in Libya and Syria, to the fundamental need to devise de-confliction and inclusive reconciliation initiatives in the Eastern Mediterranean, Iraq or Afghanistan, both Europe and Turkey do have common concerns in many of these domains. However, to stake out the actual scope for cooperation, one needs a better understanding of what bones of contention exist, which areas of cooperation are feasible and how political forces in key states (Turkey, France, Germany and Italy in particular) approach these issues from their respective domestic contexts.

1.1 Analytical approach and research objectives

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This collective study, which marks the end of a one-year research, engagement and outreach project jointly run by the Rome-based Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and the Istanbul Policy Center (IPC), with the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI) and the Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation, contains five case studies tackling key foreign policy dossiers of mutual interest for Turkey and the EU: Afghanistan, the Eastern Mediterranean, Syria, Libya and Iraq. Written by individual authors with broad experience on the given country and the prevalent policy approaches of key EU states and Turkey therein, each case study is approached through four distinct analytic lenses.

Firstly, the evolution of the overall context and the role that Turkey and the EU have played are assessed in an effort to map the broad interests, objectives and

policies adopted by Turkey and key European member states (Germany, France and Italy) in each context over recent years. Secondly, the studies assess how respective foreign policies are being debated among various parties in Turkey, inquiring into how various parties perceive their interests, objectives and room for cooperation in these contexts and outline their key policy prerogatives. Thirdly, a foresight exercise is added to the analysis, seeking to develop contingency planning for possible “black swan” events that could fundamentally alter current policy stances, promoting greater EU-Turkish cooperation or divergence in each given context. Finally, each author has developed concrete and constructive policy recommendations directed at EU states, institutions and Turkey to enhance modalities of cooperation, contingency planning and coordination between the respective foreign policies of each actor in a given context.

In sum, studies engage with the main structural constraints and existing bones of contention in EU–Turkey relations with respect to each particular context over previous years, also considering possible black swan events that may impact the development of future cooperation modalities. Combining this with a reflection on how possible political changes in either Turkey or key EU member states may impact these perceptions and lines of engagement, this exercise is meant to identify areas *where more sustainable and predictable forms of cooperation can be gradually developed*, while *providing context-specific and forward-looking policy recommendations* on how Turkey and the EU can best cooperate while planning ahead to manage uncertainties, both internal and external.

Whilst the single studies therefore examine areas of possible convergence or divergence in the foreign policy approaches of Turkey, Germany, France and Italy according to the identified objectives, bones of contention and aspirations in each context, this introductory contribution aims to set the stage, outlining the overall geopolitical context as well as general rationales, themes and perspectives vis-à-vis the five chosen case studies.

1.2 Turkey, the EU and evolving geopolitics in the MENA

Against the backdrop of continuing trends of relative US disengagement from/redeployment in the MENA, three general trends which are of relevance for EU–Turkey relations can be outlined. Firstly, *US disengagement/redeployment has contributed to increasing conflictuality rather than cooperation between the EU and Turkey* in various ways. To start with, it has led to a partial vacuum in these regions where regional powers such as Turkey (as well as Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates) have embraced more independent foreign policies which at times put them on a collision course amongst each other as well as with the EU, such as in the Eastern Mediterranean, in Syria and in Libya. Furthermore, US disagreements with the EU during the Trump administration also strengthened the belief within the Turkish government that the West, and in particular Europe, was in decline and in no shape to act in a uniform fashion in its wider neighbourhood, thereby emboldening unilateral Turkish actions in the region. These developments also facilitated growing assertiveness by Russia in the MENA, leading to a flexible – yet at times conflictual – alliance between Moscow and Ankara, which in turn reinforced doubts about Turkey’s overall commitment to the transatlantic alliance and its future within NATO.

As a result, Ankara has pursued its own form of “strategic autonomy”, moving to assert itself as a strong, independent state willing and able to act when its perceived interests are threatened. This was contrasted against an increasingly weak and divided EU and Western anchor that could operate by separating, as much as possible, security abroad and democratic backsliding at home. Most recently, with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Turkey, a NATO member, has continued its difficult balancing act between Russia on the one hand and the US and EU on the other. While the salience of NATO in this conflict brought members closer, also helping to reinvigorate the Atlantic alliance, Turkey’s ongoing grievances with the US due to sanctions imposed for Ankara’s acquisition of Russian anti-air defence systems and tensions with certain European states surrounding the Kurdish issue, are also spilling over to impact Turkey–EU and Turkey–NATO relations, as evidenced in Ankara’s recent opposition to NATO’s expansion to Sweden and Finland.¹

¹ “Turkey Confirms Opposition to NATO Membership for Sweden, Finland”, in *Al Jazeera*, 17 May 2022,

A second general trend revolves around *heightened forms of Turkish unilateralism in the region*. The drivers behind this are multifold. In economic terms, the Turkish economy grew rapidly after 2002, enabling rising Turkish assertiveness in its wider neighbourhood. As economic stagnation grows, the Turkish government feels the pressure to sustain its presence in the wider neighbourhood, seeking favourable business relations in Afghanistan, Libya or potentially Syria. Ideology and identity have also played a role, particularly during the Davutoglu era, when affinity with the Muslim Brotherhood was expected to help extend Turkish influence in the region after the Arab uprisings. Turkey's unilateralism is also related to its domestic politics, as foreign policy is often used to unify the public and some segments of the opposition behind the Turkish government, while further demonising the opposition, particularly in times of crises. Another domestic element which pushes Turkish activism forward, particularly in Syria but also Iraq, is the unresolved Kurdish issue, which makes Turkey wary of an autonomous Kurdish region in north-eastern Syria and continues to cause contention in Turkey-Iraqi relations as well as Ankara's relations with certain European states.

This heightened activity is, thirdly, coupled with a *non-response on the part of the European Union* which, as opposed to some of its member states such as France, has not developed any concrete foreign policy action – let alone a shared or cohesive policy – towards the MENA. This is particularly evident in terms of the EU not having a high-level foreign policy initiative in the region along the lines of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership of the 1990s or the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) of the 2000s. Despite reviews of the ENP, and the recently launched New Agenda for the Mediterranean, nothing similar has been developed and adopted in response to the ground-breaking changes since the onset of the Arab uprisings and the increased multipolar conflictuality that followed. The only discernible high-level initiative is the shared position vis-à-vis the Iranian nuclear file, while the EU has weakened its outspoken position on Israel/Palestine which had traditionally been one of the key areas of EU foreign policy towards the region. It seems that, despite all the talk about strategic autonomy, the EU is still unable to provide for such

autonomy in the MENA. EU inactivity in the region has become even more evident with the Russian invasion of Ukraine to which the EU did respond in unity, with determination and with solidarity vis-à-vis refugees from Ukraine. Today, it is increasingly likely that the conflict in Ukraine and relations with Russia will absorb most of the EU's efforts. At the same time, the renewed impetus to diversify energy imports from Russia is likely to result in newfound EU interest in the broader MENA. This could possibly increase the momentum for engagements in this area, including with regard to Turkey's ambition to remain a key energy hub towards Europe. Moreover, the war in Ukraine has further increased the salience of the EU–Turkey migration deal of 2016² as the new wave of migration from the east, given the general anti-migrant sentiment across EU member states (as well as Turkey), creates a politically risky situation, likely increasing support for the maintenance of the EU–Turkey deal in the south.

Looking to the future, the EU must not lose sight of what is happening in its direct neighbourhood to the south. To do this, forms of coordination with Turkey remain important, beginning from those contexts where both actors are engaged and where both maintain significant interests, investments and threat perceptions should developments take a turn for the worst. Below, brief outlines are provided for each of the five case studies addressed by the project: Afghanistan, the Eastern Mediterranean, Iraq, Libya and Syria. These serve as general introductory contexts, whilst the individual analysis chapters that follow elaborate in greater depth where the EU and Turkey stand on these foreign policy dossiers and where/how these two actors can better cooperate to advance their mutual and independent interests.

Afghanistan

Following the end of the failed US-led NATO mission in August 2021, multiple crises loom on the horizon in Afghanistan, with direct effects on the livelihoods of local populations and significant implications for broader geopolitical dynamics. The country is facing brewing humanitarian and financial crises and international isolation after the Taliban takeover: the interim government

² European Council, *EU-Turkey Statement*, 18 March 2016, <http://europa.eu/!Uv88TM>.

remains internationally unrecognised; Afghanistan's foreign assets are frozen and how political and economic relations between the Taliban regime and the outside world could resume remains unknown. A great deal of uncertainty also regards the future inflow of international assistance, particularly from Western donors. All this raises severe humanitarian concerns in a country where already before 2021 the economy was highly dependent on international assistance (grants amounted to 42.9 per cent of GDP in 2020),³ and 18.4 million people were in need of humanitarian aid.⁴ Against this backdrop, the United Nations Development Programme has cautioned about a worst-case scenario of 10–13 per cent drop in GDP and a 97 per cent poverty rate by mid-2022.⁵ In terms of the political context, whether and how the Taliban complete the transition from armed insurgency into an actor capable of governance remains a big question. The composition of the caretaker government as well as its stances towards women, ethnic and religious minorities, or journalists suggest that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms or inclusive governance are not among the Taliban's priorities. Further, the security situation remains fragile in the face of deadly attacks claimed by or associated with Islamic State Khorasan militants (ISIS-K).

Informed by over four decades of conflict, displacement has been a defining feature of Afghanistan. Of the 2.6 million registered Afghan refugees globally, close to 2.2 million live in Iran and Pakistan, which also host large communities of undocumented Afghans.⁶ According to Turkish authorities, Turkey hosts over 180,000 registered Afghan refugees, in addition to an estimated 120,000 undocumented migrants.⁷ Germany hosts more than half of the nearly 500,000 Afghan nationals residing in Europe,⁸ including the majority of registered

³ World Bank, *Afghanistan Development Update April 2021. Setting the Course to Recovery*, 2021, <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/35363>.

⁴ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan (2018-2021)*, revised January 2021, <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/node/256555>.

⁵ UN Development Programme (UNDP), *Economic Instability and Uncertainty in Afghanistan after August 15. A Rapid Appraisal*, 9 September 2021, <https://www.undp.org/publications/economic-instability-and-uncertainty-afghanistan-after-august-15>.

⁶ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) website: *Afghanistan*, <https://www.unhcr.org/afghanistan.html>; UNHCR, *Operational Data Portal, Afghanistan Refugee Situation*, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/afghanistan>.

⁷ Nazlan Ertan, "Ankara Calls on EU to Help Afghanistan's Neighbors", in *Al-Monitor*, 14 September 2021, <https://www.al-monitor.com/node/44661>.

⁸ Nasrat Saye, "Diaspora Engagement in Afghanistan. A Policy Agenda for Sustainable Development", in *Cordaid Policy Papers*, April 2021, <https://www.cordaid.org/en/publications/afghan-diaspora>.

refugees.⁹ Meanwhile, 3.4 million Afghans are internally displaced and nearly 670,000 people were displaced in 2021 alone.¹⁰ While the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was preparing for a regional movement of up to 500,000 Afghan refugees by the end of 2021,¹¹ 96,600 asylum-seekers were reported to have arrived in Iran, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan from the beginning of the year to the end of November.¹² Nearly 70,000 irregular Afghan migrants were apprehended in Turkey in the January–December 2021 period (suggesting an increase from an annual figure of 50,000 in 2020 but a drop from a record high of over 200,000 apprehensions in 2019), while the share of new arrivals is not specified.¹³ Apprehensions in relation to irregular crossings of Afghans along the Eastern Mediterranean Route in 2021 stood at 1,811.¹⁴ Given the protracted nature of Afghan displacement, it should also be borne in mind that a considerable share of Afghan refugees and migrants arriving in Turkey and the EU depart from Iran, not least since Ankara has also recently completed a major border wall specifically directed at preventing the flow of migrants from Afghanistan.

The EU reads the current situation in Afghanistan mainly through the lens of migration and asylum. The risk of Afghanistan returning to become a safe haven for international terrorism constitutes another major concern, while debate on how to engage the Taliban and mitigate the humanitarian crisis in the country also figures high on the agenda. On top of this, broader geopolitical calculations regarding the policies of China and Russia in Afghanistan do remain significant in Europe (and in the US). While Brussels underlines the need to support local populations through sustained humanitarian aid and conditions its engagement with the Taliban on the latter's inclusivity and respect of human rights, the core EU objective is preventing what the Union sees as a potential out-of-control influx of Afghan refugees, that is, a repetition of 2015.¹⁵ The

⁹ UNHCR website: *Refugee Data Finder*, <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download>.

¹⁰ UNHCR, *Afghanistan Situation External Update – 1 December 2021*, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/89970>.

¹¹ UNHCR, *Afghanistan Situation. Regional Refugee Preparedness and Response Plan*, August 2021, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/88385>.

¹² UNHCR, *Afghanistan Situation External Update – 1 December 2021*, cit.

¹³ Website of the Turkish Ministry of Interior-Presidency of Migration Management: *Statistics: Irregular Migration*, updated 5 May 2022, <https://en.goc.gov.tr/irregular-migration>.

¹⁴ Frontex website: *Migratory Map: Detections of Illegal Border-Crossings Statistics* (updated monthly), <https://frontex.europa.eu/we-know/migratory-map>.

¹⁵ See, Council of the European Union, *Statement on the Situation in Afghanistan*, 31 August 2021,

policy approach remains unchanged, in that no consensus on a quantitatively or qualitatively meaningful humanitarian admission scheme has so far been reached. By augmenting political and economic investments in neighbouring and transit countries, the EU aims to delegate protection responsibilities and the task of stemming irregular migration to countries like Iran, Pakistan and Turkey, and the provision of humanitarian aid to international organisations and NGOs.

The emphasis on the external dimension comes as no surprise, as the political and policy context on migration in Europe has not evolved since 2015: the solidarity deficit underpinning the dysfunctions of a common asylum system remains largely intact, while immigration and admission of refugees continue to be highly politicised in domestic politics, where migration is instrumentalised by populist forces and the fear of the rise of populism shapes mainstream discourses and positions on migration. This is likely to remain unchanged, as demonstrated by the political debate in key EU capitals, independently from the unprecedented solidarity displayed by the EU towards the influx of Ukrainian refugees escaping the war. Discourses focusing on the risk of “an out-of-control influx of immigrants” took central stage ahead of the presidential elections in France.¹⁶ That “uncontrolled migration” has to be avoided and third countries should be supported to host refugees also became the mantra during campaigning in Germany, with the Greens being the only political force pointing towards a “coalition of the willing” approach to tackle responsibility-sharing within the EU while intensifying cooperation with traditional countries of resettlement, i.e., the US and Canada.¹⁷ While the coalition programme of the new government foresees significant changes to migration policy, including an expansion of legal avenues for accessing protection in Germany,¹⁸ the extent to which these changes would be effectively enforced remains to be seen. Considering the key role played by Germany in shaping EU–Turkey migration

<https://europa.eu/!FrHPm9>; Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on Afghanistan*, 15 September 2021, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11713-2021-REV-2/en/pdf>.

¹⁶ Norimitsu Onishi, “Migration Talking Points Surge in France, but Not Migration”, in *The New York Times*, 2 December 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/02/world/europe/french-election-immigration.html>.

¹⁷ William Noah Glucroft, “German Politicians Fret about Refugees from Afghanistan”, in *Deutsche Welle*, 17 August 2021, <https://p.dw.com/p/3z4vO>.

¹⁸ Sertan Sanderson, “New German Government to Introduce Sweeping Changes to Migration Policy”, in *InfoMigrants*, 25 November 2021, <http://infomi.gr/1BGK.T>.

cooperation, this could potentially lead to some nuances in approach (e.g., progress in terms of fairer responsibility sharing). However, with the focus of the government on Ukraine now, this agenda has not yet been addressed (at the time of writing).

Engaging third countries, including Turkey, in stemming irregular arrivals is likely to remain on top of the EU policy priorities concerning Afghanistan. Since 2015, migration remains one of the few areas in which Turkey sees potential for enhancing its leverage vis-à-vis the EU, and the situation in Afghanistan might offer such an opportunity.¹⁹ However, one major difference to 2015 is that this time Ankara has made it clear that it has neither the capacity nor the willingness to host more refugees.²⁰ This might generate a source of contention if the EU keeps the focus on Turkey in its migration containment and prevention strategy. Given the anti-immigration backlash that is becoming increasingly visible in a context of rapidly deteriorating economy and approaching general elections, Ankara's room for manoeuvre to give in to EU demands is particularly limited. The two sides might nonetheless be converging in their positions on channelling further humanitarian aid to Afghanistan to prevent departures and supporting Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan's neighbours in Central Asia in hosting refugees.²¹ Convincing Iran and Pakistan to take up such a role might prove challenging and costly, however, given their reluctance to receive new arrivals on top of the large refugee and migrant communities they already host. What seems clear though is that migration will remain the main prism through which the EU looks at Afghanistan, and probably the area on which EU–Turkey engagement (be it cooperation or divergence) will centre.

Turkey's interests in Afghanistan go beyond preventing new waves of migration. Ankara has intensified its efforts to secure and operate the Kabul Airport in a bid to improve its relations with the US now under Biden, and to carve out its own space of influence in Afghanistan under Taliban rule.²² It has, however, not achieved meaningful progress on either of these objectives, as the importance

¹⁹ Galip Dalay, "Will Turkey's Afghanistan Ambitions Backfire?", in *Chatham House Expert Comments*, 6 October 2021, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/node/27150>.

²⁰ Nazlan Ertan, "Ankara Calls on EU to Help Afghanistan's Neighbors", cit.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Galip Dalay, "An Afghan Thaw in the Turkish–US Relationship?", in *SWP Point of View*, 9 September 2021, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/an-afghan-thaw-in-the-turkish-us-relationship>.

of Afghanistan for the US seems to have faded, while the Taliban clearly rejects any form of foreign military presence, including by NATO-member Turkey. The opposition in Turkey has been also vocally against any military involvement in Afghanistan. Further, such presence also meets resistance by Pakistan, which continues to be one of the most influential regional actors in the new geopolitical landscape in Afghanistan.²³ Alongside Pakistan, Qatar, a close Turkish partner, has emerged as another important regional actor, successfully consolidating its role as key interlocutor for EU and US engagement with the Taliban, and recently holding talks with the Taliban interim government in Doha.²⁴ Turkey also relies on collaboration with Qatar in its bid for the Kabul Airport. Yet, the two countries' involvement remains limited to technical operation and lacks a security provision aspect that Turkey had hoped for.²⁵ Finally, when it comes to the reconstruction of Afghanistan, China has already nominated itself for the role and is likely to overshadow any other actor with similar interests, including Turkey.²⁶

With regard to possible black swan events that may impact the respective approaches to Afghanistan and boost or constrain potential cooperation, three developments can be highlighted: (a) major migrant and refugee flows from Afghanistan due to a collapse of the state and further aggravation of the humanitarian emergency in the country, leading to pressure on Turkey's borders and those of other neighbouring states in Central Asia as well as Pakistan and Iran; (b) a Chinese and/or Russian formal recognition of the Taliban interim government – an option that Russia might indeed consider, to bind the Taliban government closer to itself and prevent US influence in Afghanistan; (c) a significant uptake in terrorist threats both within Afghanistan and in neighbouring states due to an expansion of ISIS-K or other groups and a weakening of the Taliban's security operations against these actors.

²³ "Turkey and Pakistan vying for Influence in Afghanistan after Taliban's Takeover", in *Middle East Eye*, 21 November 2021, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-pakistan-influence-afghanistan-taliban-takeover>.

²⁴ European External Action Service (EEAS), *Afghanistan: EU Held Talks in Doha with Representatives of the Taliban Declared Afghan Interim Government*, 28 November 2021, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/108039>.

²⁵ "Turkey and Pakistan vying for Influence in Afghanistan after Taliban's Takeover", cit.

²⁶ Galip Dalay, "Will Turkey's Afghanistan Ambitions Backfire?", cit.

The Eastern Mediterranean

EU–Turkey tensions over the Eastern Mediterranean reached a peak in the summer of 2020 after Turkey signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) in November 2019, militarily intervened in Libya on the side of Tripoli and sent its seismic exploration vessels off the coast of Cyprus and later Castellorizo. The EU accused Turkey of illegal actions that ran counter to international law and the sovereign rights of EU member states, and took the decision to impose modest sanctions. As of now, tensions seem to have de-escalated with the withdrawal of Turkish vessels and the relative silence of Turkish authorities on this front, although acrimony persists surrounding the divided island of Cyprus.

Regarding the main actors and their positions, on the one side stand Greece and the Republic of Cyprus, having forged closer ties with Egypt, Israel and the UAE, with which Turkey has had acrimonious relations. France, which is on a collision course with Turkey over strategic interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, Syria as well as Libya, supported Cypriot and Greek positions against Turkey, calling for harsh sanctions on Ankara. Germany, on the other hand, adopted a more pragmatic position and acted as a facilitator and mediator to start dialogue and reconciliation between the parties. The divergent positions of member states ultimately led to a compromise, where the EU decided to only impose modest sanctions on Ankara.²⁷ It is likely also that to sustain a sufficient amount of solidarity after the Russia-Ukraine War, the German government is going to maintain its mediating position on the Eastern Mediterranean and Libyan files, supported in this respect by both Italy and Spain as well as the US.

At the heart of the conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean lie the Greek-Turkish disputes over the divided island of Cyprus and the delimitation of Exclusive Economic Zones from the Aegean to the Eastern Mediterranean. The strong reaction of France to Turkey's actions is closely related to France's policy in Libya

²⁷ See for instance, Andrea Dessì, "Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean: Navigating Complexity, Mitigating Conflict(s) and Fishing for Compromise", in Michaël Tanchum (ed.), *Eastern Mediterranean in Uncharted Waters: Perspectives on Emerging Geopolitical Realities*, Ankara, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, December 2020, p. 100-115, <https://www.kas.de/en/country-reports/detail/-/content/eastern-mediterranean-in-uncharted-waters-perspectives-on-emerging-geopolitical-realities-1>.

and its support for the eastern Libya general Khalifa Haftar, which placed it on opposing sides to the Tripoli GNA that Turkey actively backed. Other drivers for France-Turkey tensions relate to identity and ideology, particularly contrasting visions on the role of religion in the public sphere and, more specifically, on support for political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood. Further contentious issues relate to an uptake in military exercises in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as Turkey's absence from the newly established East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), fuelling fears that Turkey's interests will not be taken into account and that the Forum will weaken Turkey's ambition to emerge as a major energy hub for supply to Europe. While these tensions remain unresolved, the fallout from the conflict in Ukraine combined with Turkey's worsening economic outlook and growing isolation have translated into hesitant trends of de-escalation in the area and a revival of intra-regional diplomatic dialogue. This is reflected in a tentative – and ultimately interrupted – resumption of Turkey–Greece dialogue,²⁸ as well as renewed contacts between Ankara and Cairo, Abu Dhabi, Riyadh and Tel Aviv, elements that could provide some groundwork for renewed cooperation between the EU and Turkey when it comes to the Eastern Mediterranean.²⁹

Turning to possible black swan events in the Eastern Mediterranean, these could include: (a) a unilateral announcement of unity between Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot community, with foreseeable reverberations on EU–Turkey relations and the UN-led diplomatic process on Cyprus. A further black swan development could be; (b) the return of Turkish seismic vessels to contested waters in the Eastern Mediterranean, thereby increasing the possibility of an unexpected accident in the area, with consequent repercussions on the bilateral EU-Turkish relations. A final black swan event; (c) would include a formal announcement of a military, economic and energy alliance among riparian states (Israel, Egypt, Greece and the Republic of Cyprus) that excludes

²⁸ While not leading to a political or diplomatic breakthrough, the resumption of Turkey-Greece dialogue is a positive signal. See for instance, “Turkey, Greece Discuss ‘Positive Agenda’ in Athens”, in *Daily Sabah*, 22 February 2022, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkey-greece-discuss-positive-agenda-in-athens>.

²⁹ See for instance, Şaban Kardaş, “The Normalization Agenda in Turkish Foreign Policy: Drivers and Parameters”, in *Trends Research Insights*, 23 February 2022, <https://trendsresearch.org/?p=69948>. For a less optimistic outlook on the resumption of intra-regional dialogue, see Steven A. Cook, “The Middle East’s Kumbaya Moment Won’t Last”, in *Foreign Policy*, 6 May 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/05/06/erdogan-saudi-arabia-visit-turkey-iran-uae-relations-diplomacy>.

Turkey and would further enhance Ankara's fears of isolation in the wake of the establishment of the EMGF which continues to exclude Turkey. This latter eventuality has increased in relevance lately in light of the uptake in formal military cooperation exercises by these states – as well as the UAE, Italy and France – in the Eastern Mediterranean and the recent announcement of military and defence agreements by France and Greece and the US and Greece respectively, further enhancing concern in Ankara. At the same time, recent overtures between Turkey and its former rivals Israel, Egypt and particularly the UAE do hold some potential to assist with broader efforts to de-escalate tensions in the area and may provide avenues for Europe to also build on these dialogues to enhance forms of cooperation and consultation with Turkey, given especially the urgent need to attain energy security after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and Western sanctions on Moscow.

Libya

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Closely connected to the evolving tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, European states and Turkey do share common approaches and priorities vis-à-vis the Libyan transition and support for the UN-backed diplomatic process. Since the 2020 ceasefire and the subsequent emergence of a new Government of National Unity (GNU), EU-Turkey tensions over Libya have diminished due to the joint support for the UN-led and Berlin-backed three-track negotiation process (economy, security and governance) and the elections originally planned for 24 December 2021, but ultimately postponed indefinitely. Yet, beneath the surface, tensions persist in all three of these dimensions, particularly in the security realm where calls for a withdrawal of foreign military forces and mercenaries continue to remain a bone of contention. Further, in the economic dimension, hesitant signs of disagreements over spheres of influence and economic investments in Libya, and particularly in Western Tripolitania, could be highlighted as a source of possible discord between Turkey, France and Italy. On the electoral road map, while nominally supportive of the original electoral appointment in late December, subsequent developments demonstrated some diverging views between European states and Ankara with regard to the legal process and support for different candidates. Ultimately, after the electoral postponement and the formal end of the legal mandate of the GNU government, a renewed political crisis has developed since March 2022 as

Libya returned to having two rival prime ministers each claiming authority over Libyan institutions and backed by an array of armed militias, heightening the threat of renewed conflict in the North African country.³⁰

Since early 2020, Germany has taken the lead in promoting diplomatic negotiations among external actors involved in Libya, convening two international conferences on Libya and deploying Berlin's political, economic and diplomatic credentials to support the UN-led reconciliation process. Benefitting from its removed location and more neutral approaches vis-à-vis Libya and the various external actors involved in the country, Germany is likely to retain this leadership role within Europe, with support from the UN, US and other European states as well as Turkey. How Germany's new coalition government will approach Libya remains to be seen – particularly in light of the fluidity of events on the ground, the electoral postponement and renewed military tensions in and around Tripoli – but the broad contours of engagement are unlikely to change, independently from the current conflict in Ukraine. That said, much will also depend on the actions of other external states involved in Libya, the UAE, Russia, Egypt, France, Italy and Turkey in particular, not least in light of the current conflict in Ukraine which could diminish (or enhance) Russia's resolve to maintain a presence on NATO's southern flank. Much uncertainty persists regarding the future actions and role of key political and military figures in Libya, all of which enjoy various degrees of external backing and are currently repositioning in light of the renewed fragmentation of political and military authority in the country. Other salient issues will likely revolve around the degree of economic investments in Libya and efforts by Turkey and others to receive assurances that past investments and deals will be recognised by any new government in the country. Reconstruction efforts and institutional reforms targeting Libya's Central Bank and other key economic motors – the National Oil Corporation and Libyan Investment Authority – will also figure prominently as topics of negotiation, as will the broader issues of service delivery and socio-economic indicators across the country.

³⁰ See for instance, Patrick Wintour, "Clashes in Tripoli as Would-Be Prime Minister Attempts to Claim Power", in *The Guardian*, 17 May 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/p/yezkt>; "Libya's Bashagha Says Will Base His Rival Gov't in Sirte", in *Al Jazeera*, 17 May 2022, <https://aje.io/6afsm7>.

Turning to possible black swan events, one (a) concern revolves around the possible relapse into conflict and civil war in the wake of the electoral postponement and renewed tensions between rival prime ministers and associated militias. Other possible events could include (b) the approval of an EU-led Common Security and Defence Policy mission to Libya, which may reshuffle the political-military deck within Libya regarding external influence and/or (c) a direct Egyptian intervention in Libya in the context of a more encompassing collapse of authority in the country and/or renewal of the ISIS threat within Libya. How European states and Turkey would react to any one of these possible developments remains to be seen, but each could alter perceptions and trajectories of engagement and thereby deserve to be considered in assessing the scope and potential for cooperation or divergence in EU and Turkish approaches to Libya. Finally, other possible black swan events could include (d) a formal announcement of a permanent Russian military or naval base in Eastern Libya and/or (e) a prolonged and extended halt to hydrocarbon exports from Libya due to the activities of eastern-aligned militia groups and elites, backed directly or indirectly by Russia, intent on blockading export terminals to heighten pressure on rival political actors as well as Europe.

Iraq

Turning to Iraq, another key arena of foreign policy engagement for both Turkey and key European member states, the impending US drawdown alongside continued security, economic and governance crises facing Iraqi authorities are likely to present a number of foreseeable challenges over the coming months. Future scenarios in Iraq are likely to be heavily impacted by the outcome of ongoing negotiations with Iran over the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in Vienna, developments in north-eastern Syria, as well as the broader regional talks underway between regional states that have been at odds with one another over recent years. In this respect, European states have identified Iraqi stability as fundamental to avoid further crises across the region and have tacitly backed the Iraqi government in its efforts to consolidate authority, improve the security environment and enhance service provision to the local population, as well as Baghdad's efforts to dampen regional tensions by promoting intra-regional dialogue among Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iran, Turkey and Egypt amongst others. With Italy assuming the command of the

NATO mission in Iraq in 2022 – which will also include a significant expansion of troop levels – Iraq is likely to retain importance on the foreign policy agendas of different European states. Also France, which has retained important military cooperation with Baghdad in the fight against terrorism, is likely to assume greater roles in the country.³¹ Turkey, another key actor involved in Iraq, has also recently enhanced its cooperation with the Kurdistan Regional Government as well as Baghdad in the security and energy realms, but tensions persist with regard to periodical cross-border raids by the Turkish military into northern Iraq, as well as the activities of various Kurdish groups in these areas. Turkey is also reportedly in talks to sell military drones to Baghdad, while other salient issues revolve around Iraq's water insecurity and Turkish dam construction upstream.³² At the same time, more positive reports have surfaced of a planned train-link development from Iraq to Turkey, as well as recent UAE-Iran-Turkey trade connectivity links that may provide benefits to the three countries and the broader region.³³ This latter development is linked to the broader efforts to mend relations between the UAE and Turkey³⁴ and could provide an opening for European states to also support such endeavours, given the benefits to regional stability and sustainability.

With regard to EU–Turkey cooperation or divergence in Iraq, alignment is present in terms of efforts to consolidate central authority in Baghdad and strengthen the legitimacy of Iraqi institutions and security services. Reconstruction

³¹ See, Munqith Dagher, "The Secret Behind the French Interest in Iraq: A Geostrategic Analysis", in *CSIS Commentaries*, 23 September 2021, <https://www.csis.org/node/62401>; Francesco Salesio Schiavi, "In Iraq, Italy and France Are Looking for a Primary Role to Play", in *ISPI Commentaries*, 18 October 2021, <https://www.ispionline.it/en/node/31955>.

³² See, "Iraq May Become 2nd Neighbor to Buy Turkish Combat Drones", in *Daily Sabah*, 9 December 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/defense/iraq-may-become-2nd-neighbor-to-buy-turkish-combat-drones>; Bartholomäus Laffert and Daniela Sala, "Conflict and Climate Change Collide: Why Northeast Syria Is Running Dry", in *The New Humanitarian*, 20 December 2021, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/node/262260>; "World Bank Warns over Looming Plunge in Iraq Water Resources", in *France 24*, 24 November 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20211124-world-bank-warns-over-looming-plunge-in-iraq-water-resources>.

³³ See for instance, "Turkiye-UAE Route Reshapes Trade Map in the Region", in *TRT World*, 21 December 2021, <https://www.trtworld.com/article/52855>; ZAWYA, *Projects: Iraq to Sign Deal for Rail Link with Turkey*, 15 December 2021, <https://www.zawya.com/en/projects/projects-iraq-to-sign-deal-for-rail-link-with-turkey-w8jb5c7w>.

³⁴ See, Eralp Yazar, "Turkey-UAE Rapprochement Embodies New Regional Realities", in *Daily Sabah*, 1 December 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/news-analysis/turkey-uae-rapprochement-embodies-new-regional-realities>; Hamdullah Baycar, "Rapprochement Spree: Abu Dhabi Recalibrates Relations with Ankara" in *Sada*, 16 December 2021, <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/86025>.

efforts and investments, including in the domain of energy – where recent discussion also extends to possible energy imports to Europe via Turkey from Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan to diminish reliance on Russian energy – could provide opportunities for EU and Turkish alignment in Iraq. Tensions could, however, emerge regarding certain European approaches towards northern Iraq and the Kurdish Regional Government, although Ankara and Erbil have themselves been collaborating closely over previous years. Ultimately, the security and socio-economic dimensions within Iraq are likely to top international agendas, as any revival of the ISIS threat or internal tensions and factionalisms within the Iraqi security forces and other militias could well spark renewed crises in the country. Moreover, the worsening socio-economic conditions facing much of the population, as well as water scarcity issues and broader challenges linked to climate change and environmental degradation, imply that Iraq will remain on the brink of possible internal turmoil for the foreseeable future, requiring significant external support and assistance, both from Europe and from Iraqi neighbours Turkey, Iran and the Arabian Peninsula.

Turning to possible black swan events, three scenarios may be worth considering. A first (a) revolves around a possible resumption of major popular protests, including violence by militias aligned with one or another external actor. Should major clashes return to Iraq, undermining the functioning of the government, European states – Italy and France in particular – but also Turkey would likely be called to enhance engagement, including possibly in the security domain, not least in light of the significant troop presence in the country and the unlikely eventuality of a major US return to Iraq. A second possible scenario (b) could include the revival of the ISIS threat in key localities of Iraq, with attacks targeting NATO forces and thereby leading to enhanced tensions in the country. Finally, (c) the eventuality of a military strike on Iran by Israel, regional Arab states or the US cannot be ruled out in the event that JCPOA negotiations fail to revive the nuclear deal. Iraq would likely become a key theatre of conflict in such a scenario with predictable reverberations on the interests and security of NATO personnel in the country and a possible revival of migration waves out of Iraq.

Syria

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Over a decade since the Syrian revolution, the civil and proxy conflict which squashed its aspirations for change has become protracted. There are 6.7 million internally displaced Syrians and 6.6 million Syrian refugees,³⁵ 3.7 million of whom have found refuge in Turkey and 1.3 million in Europe (mainly in Germany and Sweden). An estimated 397,282 Syrians were killed over the course of the war,³⁶ and Syria has suffered a large-scale destruction of its economy and infrastructure.³⁷ The Assad regime controls most of Syria today with the support of Russia and Iran. Two main areas in Syria are not under government control, the Idlib governorate in north-western Syria and the Turkish-occupied area in northern Syria, as well as the Kurdish Democratic Autonomous Administration in the North East which currently still features a US and French military presence. Israel is also regularly intervening militarily in Syria through air strikes. Thus, the protracted conflict continues to pose local, national and regional security issues, even though the severity of the fighting has diminished compared to previous years.

Both the EU and Turkey early on in the conflict took a principled position against Assad, ending the policy of engagement both had entertained either in the framework of negotiations over an association agreement or in the context of Turkey's "zero problems with neighbours" policy. However, while Turkey has been chiefly involved in the Astana Talks (alongside Russia and Iran), the EU has not played a similarly exponent diplomatic role in the UN-led process and has not even appointed a special envoy. Indeed, with its main concern being the refugee issue, the EU has limited its role to humanitarian and development aid to those countries hosting a majority of Syrian refugees (Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan), providing some similarities with European concerns over Afghanistan. Whilst the refugee issue is also of chief concern to Turkey, Ankara sees the conflict as a direct security issue as the fragmentation of Syrian statehood has impacted Kurdish autonomy in Syria, as well as the Kurdish communities in

³⁵ UNHCR website: *Syria Emergency*, updated March 2021, <https://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html>.

³⁶ Uppsala Conflict Data Program: *Syria*, <https://ucdp.uu.se/country/652>.

³⁷ Khalid Abu-Ismaïl et al., *Syria at War: Eight Years On*, Beirut, UNESCWA, 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syria-war-eight-years>.

Turkey and to a lesser extent in northern Iraq.

The key issue for EU–Turkey cooperation remains the migration deal, the renegotiation of which might well come back to the agenda as both opposition parties in Turkey as well as the German Green party – which is now principally represented in the German Foreign Ministry but not the Ministry of the Interior (social democrats) – have raised question marks. Furthermore, the Kurdish issue also remains on the agenda, as well as the Assad question which has returned to the scene in light of an accelerated renormalisation process involving Assad's Syria and a number of other Arab states, chief among which stands the UAE. The recent dialogue and rapprochement efforts between the UAE and Turkey are also likely to have positive carry-on effects on Syria, in a similar fashion to those underway in Iraq outlined above. In Turkey, the question of Assad's recognition has been raised by opposition parties. Whilst the EU maintains sanctions on the Assad regime and the High Representative and Parliament have confirmed the non-normalisation policy,³⁸ a few EU member states have either left their embassies open or reopened them at least partially (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Hungary and Greece).³⁹

Overall, it appears likely that 2022 will continue to witness hesitant renormalisation of relations with the Assad regime, starting with key states in the region and perhaps eventually also reaching others in Europe. While dialogue on the Constitutional text continues, little concrete progress has been made, likely symbolising that Assad feels comfortable with his territorial gains and continues to believe in an outright military victory. Indeed, much uncertainty persists regarding the Turkish-administered Idlib governorate, where a number of Islamist-leaning groups are located in the last existing bastion of the Syrian opposition to the Assad regime. Assad has made no secret of his ambition to push into northern Idlib to recapture the governorate. Russia has so far contained this ambition, but might use it as a means of pressure vis-à-vis NATO

³⁸ See EEAS, *Syria: Statement by High Representative Josep Borrell on the Presidential Elections*, 27 May 2021, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/99087>; European Parliament, *Syria Needs a Greater Financial and Political Response from the EU*, 11 March 2021, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20210304IPR99218>.

³⁹ Sandrine Amiel, "Which EU States Are Rebuilding Diplomatic Relations with Assad's Syria?", in *Euronews*, 19 June 2021, <https://www.euronews.com/2021/06/17/which-eu-states-are-rebuilding-diplomatic-relations-with-assad-s-syria>.

partner Turkey. Indeed, it is unlikely that Russia will limit its engagement in Syria in light of its war in Ukraine. Syria has become strategically even more important for Russia now.

In this complex contest, major black swan events to be considered are: (a) renewed military clashes surrounding Idlib and which might also imply clashes with Russia; (b) the complete US and European military withdrawal from north-eastern Syria, allowing for an Assad return to the area and possible pressure on Turkish-Russian demilitarised zones in the near vicinity. While this may appear less likely in the current geopolitical context following the conflict in Ukraine, such eventualities still cannot be ruled out entirely; (c) major military clashes between Turkish troops and Kurdish groups in northern Syria's Turkish-administrated zones and the possibility that Ankara moves further south into Syria in response to these attacks; (d) a revival of ISIS attacks within Turkey or Syria and/or the use of chemical weapons by one or another actor in Syria's diverse conflict zones could also represent events of significant magnitude and impact on EU–Turkey foreign policy cooperation over Syria.

2. Taking EU-Turkish Refugee Cooperation Beyond Humanitarian Assistance

by Kemal Kirişçi

EU–Turkey relations have yet to recover from their “historic low” of last year.¹ In an impressive U-turn, the Turkish government has recently embarked on an effort to rebuild its relations with countries of the Middle East from Egypt to the United Arab Emirates and Israel. A similar intent has been declared with respect to relations with the EU, but its actual realisation will probably need to wait until after Turkish national elections scheduled for June 2023.²

Against this backdrop, increased room for EU–Turkey cooperation on the many challenges in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean may emerge in the future. However, one area connected with the Middle East where sustained cooperation, despite numerous challenges, has materialised revolves around burden-sharing in support of Syrian refugees under temporary protection in Turkey. The framework provided by the EU–Turkey Statement of March 2016, though widely criticised and marked by a range of implementation problems, has constituted the basis of this cooperation.³ As the presence of Syrian refugees in Turkey has surpassed a decade there is growing recognition that the initial humanitarian assistance focus needs to be supplemented

¹ European Parliament, “EU-Turkey Relations Are at a Historic Low Point, Say MEPs”, in *Press Releases*, 23 April 2021, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20210517IPR04118>.

² Luigi Scazzieri, “From Partners to Rivals? The Future of EU-Turkey Relations”, in *CEPS Policy Briefs*, June 2021, <https://www.cer.eu/node/9215>.

³ The Statement has engendered a rich literature ranging from questioning the ethical and legal aspects to the implementation angle. Space precludes a discussion of this literature. A brief sample can be found in the following works: Matteo Garavoglia, “The EU-Turkey Dirty Deal on Migrants: Can Europe Redeem Itself?”, in *Order from Chaos*, 14 March 2016, <http://brook.gs/2bcXLpS>; Nils Muiznieks, “Stop Your Backsliding, Europe”, in *The New York Times*, 14 March 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/15/opinion/stop-your-backsliding-europe.html>; Berkay Mandıracı, “Sharing the Burden: Revisiting the EU-Turkey Migration Deal”, in *Crisis Group Commentaries*, 13 March 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/node/13565>; Sibel Karadağ and İlker Bahar, “Ending Up in a Cul-de-Sac: Critical Junctures in the EU-Turkey ‘Deal’ on Its Sixth Anniversary”, in *IPC-Mercator Analysis*, March 2022, <https://ipc.sabanciuniv.edu/en/publications?cat=ad91b1a3-3fa1-42c7-8377-831f10c05dd8>. For an assessment of Facility for Refugees in Turkey see: European Commission, *Fifth Annual Report on the Facility for Refugees in Turkey* (COM/2021/255), 26 May 2021, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52021DC0255>.

with more of a developmental approach. The objective is to improve the self-reliance of refugees and resilience of their host communities. In this domain, one important policy recommendation to pursue includes the adoption of trade facilitation for countries hosting large numbers of refugees in return for access to the formal labour market of host countries, as suggested in the Global Compact on Refugees. This would help achieve a “win-win-win” outcome for the EU, for Turkey but most importantly for the refugees themselves.

2.1 Protracted presence of refugees and the absence of durable solutions

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Syrian refugees have been hosted in Turkey for 11 years and their numbers are now 3.7 million, making Turkey the country that hosts the largest refugee population in the world.⁴ Most of these refugees are leading precarious lives. Nearly half of all refugee households live below the World Bank’s moderate poverty line, while 7 per cent were below the extreme poverty line based on a 2020 survey.⁵ Conditions are likely to have worsened since then due to the Covid-19 crisis and Turkey’s poor economic governance. The official inflation rate in March 2022 was reported at 61.1 per cent while the rate for food and non-alcoholic beverages stood at 70 per cent.⁶ Commentators argue that these figures do not reflect the true extent of inflation in the country and that the war in Ukraine is likely to make the inflation rate worse.⁷ Unemployment problems, especially among youth, persist with the official rate standing at 10.7 and youth unemployment at 20.7 per cent.⁸

This adverse economic picture is causing rising public resentment towards refugees in Turkey, as demonstrated by recent opinion polls. In 2020, 71.8

⁴ UNHCR, *Global Trends 2020. Forced Displacement in 2020*, June 2021, p. 8, <https://www.unhcr.org/60b638e37/unhcr-global-trends-2020>.

⁵ World Food Programme (WFP) Turkey, *Comprehensive Vulnerability Monitoring Exercise (CVME), Round 5*, June 2020, p. 31, <https://reliefweb.int/node/3650022>.

⁶ Turkish Statistical Institute, *Consumer Price Index*, March 2022, 4 April 2022, <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Consumer-Price-Index-March-2022-45792&dil=2>.

⁷ Mustafa Sonmez, “Turkey Inflation Hits 61% as Fallout from Ukraine War Continues”, in *AI-Monitor*, 4 April 2022, <https://www.ai-monitor.com/node/48038>.

⁸ Turkish Statistical Institute, *Labour Force Statistics, February 2022*, 11 April 2022, <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Labour-Force-Statistics-February-2022-45646&dil=2>.

per cent of those surveyed saw refugees as aggravating the unemployment problem,⁹ with the number rising to 78 per cent in 2021,¹⁰ as calls for repatriation increase. This stands in stark contrast to the preferences of Syrian refugees. According to the Syrians Barometer 2020, the response among Syrians in Turkey to the statement “I don’t plan to return to Syria under any circumstances” has increased from just under 16.7 per cent in 2017 to 77.8 per cent in 2020, while those who supported the statement “I would return if the war in Syria ends and if an administration we want is formed” dropped by half from almost 60 to 30.3 in 2019 and then to 16 per cent in 2020.¹¹

The presence of Syrian refugees in Turkey has become protracted.¹² The realisation of durable solutions in the form of voluntary return, resettlement and local integration have been negligible. The prospects of return for Syrian refugees remain dim in the short, medium and long term, given the destruction and ongoing instability in their home country, as well as the unlikely resolution of what has become a “frozen conflict”.¹³ The issue of repatriation from Turkey to Syria is a complicated and sensitive one while the relevant data is opaque. Repatriation from Turkey occurs primarily to three pockets in northern Syria controlled by the Turkish military and its local allies, where living conditions are very precarious.¹⁴ According to the Turkish Ministry of Interior, as of 4 April 2022 almost 493,000 returns have taken place¹⁵ whereas the UNHCR puts the figure

⁹ Mustafa Aydın et al., *Turkey Trends 2020. Quantitative Research Report*, Istanbul, Kadir Has University Turkey Studies Group, Akademetre and Global Academy, January 2021, slide 89, http://www.mustafaaydin.gen.tr/source/TEA2020_ENG_WEBRAPOR.pdf.

¹⁰ Mustafa Aydın et al., *Turkey Trends 2021. Quantitative Research Report*, Istanbul, Kadir Has University Turkey Studies Group, Akademetre and Global Academy, January 2022, slide 96, <https://khas.edu.tr/sites/khas.edu.tr/files/inline-files/turkeytrends-web-press.pdf>.

¹¹ M. Murat Erdoğan, *Syrians Barometer 2020. A Framework for Achieving Social Cohesion with Syrian in Turkey*, UNHCR, March 2022, p. 230, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/91511>.

¹² UNHCR defines a protracted situation as one when refugees have been displaced without a durable solution (such as voluntary return to their home countries following the resolution of conflicts, resettlement or local integration) for more than five years. UNHCR, *Conclusion on Protracted Refugee Situations No. 109 (LXI) – 2009*, UNHCR Executive Committee 61st session, Extraordinary Meeting, 8 December 2009, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/excom/exconc/4b332bca9/conclusion-protracted-refugee-situations.html>.

¹³ International Crisis Group, “Syria’s Frozen Conflict” (podcast), in *Hold Your Fire!*, 28 January 2021, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/node/16098>.

¹⁴ Sinem Adar, “Repatriation to Turkey’s ‘Safe Zone’ in Northeast Syria”, in *SWP Comments*, No. 1 (January 2020), <https://doi.org/10.18449/2020C01>; Carlotta Gall, “In Turkey’s Safe Zone in Syria, Security and Misery Go Hand in Hand”, in *The New York Times*, 16 February 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/16/world/middleeast/syria-turkey-erdogan-afrin.html>.

¹⁵ Cited in Refugees Association, *Number of Syrians in Turkey April 2022*, 21 April 2022, <https://>

at just over 128,800 for the end of March 2022.¹⁶ Voluntary return of refugees to their country of origin remains the preferred durable solution based on the UNHCR's principles of voluntariness, safety and dignity but this has often been difficult to ensure.¹⁷ This is also the case with Syrian returnees.

Global resettlement prospects in general are equally unpromising. Departures for resettlement in general but particularly from countries hosting Syrian refugees has been steadily falling since 2016.¹⁸ Traditional resettlement countries, such as the United States and leading European Union member countries have practically closed their doors to resettlements from Syria and the Middle East. Only minute numbers of resettlements are occurring from Turkey compared to the number of refugees in need of resettlement. The UNHCR had projected that there would be 423,600 places of resettlement needed for Turkey in 2021.¹⁹ As of the end of November 2021, the UNHCR reported there were only close to 7,400 departures (of whom 76 per cent were Syrians) out of 12,270 submissions.²⁰ In 2019 and 2020 there were only 10,268 and 3,867 resettlement departures respectively.²¹ In the March 2016 Statement provisions were made for the resettlement of one Syrian refugee for every irregular migrant returned to Turkey. Although a quota of 72,000 was made available for this so called "1:1 scheme" there were, between April 2016 and February 2021, only 28,621 Syrian refugees who were resettled from Turkey to the EU.²²

multeciler.org.tr/eng/?p=419.

¹⁶ UNHCR, *Syria Regional Refugee Response: Durable Solutions*, last updated on 31 March 2022, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria_durable_solutions.

¹⁷ UNHCR, *Handbook. Voluntary Repatriation: International Protection*, Geneva, January 1996, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3510.html>; Jeff Crisp and Katy Long, "Safe and Voluntary Refugee Repatriation: From Principle to Practice", in *Journal of Migration and Human Security*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (September 2016), p. 141-147, <https://doi.org/10.1177/233150241600400305>.

¹⁸ UNHCR, *UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2021*, June 2020, p. 121, <https://reliefweb.int/node/3647398>. The diminishing resettlement opportunities for Syrian refugees are also stressed in: Refugee Protection Watch, *I Haven't Known the Taste of Safety for Ten Years. Syrians Trying to Survive in Lebanon and Syria*, November 2021, p. 18, <https://paxforpeace.nl/what-we-do/publications/i-havent-known-the-taste-of-safety-for-ten-years>.

¹⁹ UNHCR, *UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2021*, cit., p. 12 and 74.

²⁰ UNHCR, *Turkey Operational Update, November-December 2021*, January 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/node/3808001>.

²¹ UNHCR, *Turkey Operational Update, November 2019*, January 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/node/3466548>; UNHCR, *Turkey Operational Update, November 2020*, December 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/node/3697192>.

²² European Commission, *Fifth Annual Report on the Facility for Refugees in Turkey* (COM/2021/255), 26 May 2021, p. 4, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52021DC0255>.

Local integration in the form of granting Syrian refugees a path for eventual citizenship in Turkey has happened only in a very limited manner. The granting of citizenship to refugees is a very sensitive, politicised and procedurally difficult issue.²³ Obtaining statistics on the topic is notoriously difficult. According to an announcement by the Minister of the Interior the number of Syrian refugees who were granted citizenship stood at 200,950 at the end of March 2022.²⁴ Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had advocated the idea several times but had to retract in the face of strong push-back from the opposition and within his own party in favour of repatriation for Syrian refugees. This is not surprising considering that 87 per cent of the Turkish public believe Syrians “should not be given any political rights” and 76.5 per cent are against the granting of citizenship, with very strong majorities from supporters of Erdoğan’s governing coalition.²⁵

This public resentment towards refugees and the concern about them obtaining citizenship has become increasingly politicised, marked by a discourse depicting refugees as a cultural, economic and security threat – a discourse often likened to the narratives of right-wing extremist political parties in Europe.²⁶ Both Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and Meral Akşener, chairs of the main opposition parties of the Republican People’s Party (CHP) and İyi (Good) Party, have promised the public that they will be sending the refugees back home if they assume power. Both leaders, though, have tied the return of refugees to Syria to achieving peace and stability in the country.²⁷ Both criticised Erdoğan for failing to make peace with the Assad regime, and Akşener expressed her

²³ Şebnem K. Akçapar and Doğu Şimşek, “The Politics of Syrian Refugees in Turkey: A Question of Inclusion and Exclusion Through Citizenship”, in *Social Inclusion*, Vol. 6, No 1 (2018), p. 176-187, <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v6i1.1323>.

²⁴ Cited in Refugees Association, *Number of Syrians in Turkey April 2022*, cit.

²⁵ M. Murat Erdoğan, “‘Securitization from Society’ and ‘Social Acceptance’: Political Party-Based Approaches in Turkey to Syrian Refugees”, in *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 17, No. 68 (2020), p. 73-92 at p. 89, <https://doi.org/10.33458/uidergisi.883022>.

²⁶ Emircan Saç, “Mülteci Sorunu | Nermin Aydemir: Partilerin göç hakkında ne tür politikalar benimsediği konusunda değerlendirmelere ihtiyacımız var” [Refugee Problem, Nermin Aydemir: We need assessments on what kind of policies the parties have adopted on immigration], in *Daktilo 1984*, 6 March 2022, <https://daktilo1984.com/?p=7505>; Cihat Arpacık, Interview with Bekir Berat Özipek “Muhalefet partileri göçün başından bu yana Suriyelileri ‘dehumanize’ ediyor...” [Opposition parties have been ‘dehumanising’ Syrians since the beginning of migration], in *Independent Türkçe*, 20 July 2022, <https://www.indyturk.com/node/389761>.

²⁷ Merve Eke, *Muhalefet Partilerinin Göçmen Politikaları* [Immigration policies of opposition parties], TUIÇ Akademi, 1 May 2021, <https://www.tuicakademi.org/?p=47435>.

willingness to talk to Assad to help create the conditions for the return of refugees.²⁸ In contrast Erdoğan, in the midst of the unfolding Ukrainian refugee crisis and while addressing the sixth “International Kindness Awards” ceremony, announced “We will not send [them]. We will continue to host. We are not worried about it.”²⁹ However, Erdoğan, was compelled to revisit his position and announced “We are doing our best for the voluntary and honorable return of our Syrian brothers and sisters” after a heated public debate erupted in April calling for the repatriation of the refugees.³⁰ This debate is likely to persist and the fact that, as depicted by a prominent pollster, “independently of people’s party preferences and ethnic background more than 80 per cent of the public wants Syrian refugees to go back”³¹ is promising to weigh heavily on the upcoming presidential and national elections in 2023.

Hence it would be unrealistic to expect that the Turkish government would go beyond the “temporary protection” status officially extended to the refugees in October 2014, granting formal protection as well as access to basic public services on the condition that they are registered.³² Turkey’s efforts are supplemented by programmes and projects supported by the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT), instituted by the EU–Turkey statement³³ and the UN’s Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) framework.³⁴ Initially, both the FRIT

²⁸ “Opposition Leader Akşener Says She Is ‘Willing’ to Go to Syria, Talk with Assad”, in *Duvar English*, 6 January 2020, <https://www.duvarenglish.com/politics/2020/01/06/opposition-leader-aksener-says-she-is-willing-to-go-to-syria-talk-with-assad>.

²⁹ “Turkey Will Not Send Any Refugees Back: Turkish President”, in *Hürriyet Daily News*, 15 March 2022, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-will-not-send-any-refugees-back-turkish-president-172245>.

³⁰ Quoted in Murat Yetkin, “Erdoğan Signals a U-Turn on Syrian Refugees”, in *Yetkin Report*, 20 April 2022, <https://yetkinreport.com/?p=20939>. For a commentary on the origins of the debate and its implications see Ruşen Çakır, “Ümit Özdağ’ın zaferi: Mülteciler” [Ümit Özdağ’s victory: Refugees] (podcast), in *Medyascope*, 19 April 2022, <https://youtu.be/OXR6aly2b5c>.

³¹ Quoted in Gülsen Solaker, “Erdoğan’ın ‘Göndermeyeceğiz’ çıkışı ne anlama geliyor?” [What does Erdoğan’s ‘We will not send’ mean?], in *DW Türkçe*, 16 March 2022, <https://www.dw.com/tr/a-61151021>.

³² Turkey, “Geçici Koruma Yönetmeliği” [Temporary Protection Regulation], in *Resmî Gazete* No. 29153 of 22 October 2014, <https://yimer.gov.tr/EN/Legis/9330276b-1338-4aa7-a584-c7b7dce1ca5b>. The unofficial English translation is available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/56572fd74.html>. The description of the terms of the temporary protection regulation in English can be seen at: Asylum Information Database (AIDA), *Temporary Protection Regime: Turkey*, <https://asylumineurope.org/?p=4008>; Turkish Ministry of Interior-General Directorate of Migration Management, *Temporary Protection in Turkey*, <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection-in-turkey>.

³³ European Commission website: The EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/enlargement-policy/negotiations-status/turkey/eu-facility-refugees-turkey_en.

³⁴ Since 2015, 3RP is a coordination and programming mechanism involving various UN agencies, such as UNHCR, UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, FAO, etc. See official website: <https://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org>.

and 3RP were primarily focused on humanitarian and protection programmes. However, with the growing recognition that Syrian refugees were becoming to a large extent settled, if not integrated, into Turkish society, attention has also been given to access to livelihood for refugees as well as to social cohesion and support for municipal services.³⁵ This trend is in line with the recognition that most refugee situations around the world have become protracted and that humanitarian assistance needs to be supplemented with a developmental approach.

Since the so-called European migration crisis of 2015–16, the notion of harnessing the potential contribution of refugees to the development of their host communities has gathered more attention.³⁶ A growing body of research shows that proper employment prospects for refugees and a welcoming environment for their entrepreneurs contribute to economic growth in the host country.³⁷ This research also demonstrates that the faster obstacles to formal employment are resolved, the sooner refugees integrate as productive members of their host society. Furthermore, this kind of positive integration enhances the likelihood of refugee returns to their country of origin and their ability to help with reconstruction. Such are the premises on which the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), adopted in December 2018 and endorsed by all EU member states except Hungary, is based.³⁸ It advocates for policies in

³⁵ This is reflected in key documents such as: European Commission, *Facility for Refugees in Turkey. Updated Strategic Concept Note*, June 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/document/download/e418763d-76dd-4a62-9150-ef6ef7202bd5_en; and United Nations, *Turkey: 3RP Country Chapter - 2021/2022*, February 2021, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/85061>. For Turkish government documents see *Uyum Strateji Belgesive Ulusal Eylem Planı, 2018-2023* [Harmonization Strategy Document and National Action Plan, 2018-2023], 2018, <https://www.goc.gov.tr/uyum-strateji-belgesi-ve-ulusal-eylem-planı>; Frit Office of the Presidency of Turkey and Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services, *Exit Strategy from the ESSN Program*, 20 December 2018, p. 4, <https://www.csgeb.gov.tr/media/3725/essn-exit-strategy-1.pdf>.

³⁶ Maegan Hendow, *Bridging Refugee Protection and Development. Policy Recommendations for Applying a Development-Displacement Nexus Approach*, International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), January 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/node/2994209>; UNDP, *Development Approaches to Migration and Displacement 2016-2018*, October 2019, <https://www.undp.org/publications/development-approaches-migration-and-displacement-2016-2018>.

³⁷ Dany Bahar and Meagan Dooley, “No Refugees and Migrants Left Behind”, in Homi Kharas, John W. McArthur and Izumi Ohno (eds), *Leave No One Behind. Time for Specifics on the Sustainable Development Goals*, Washington, Brookings Institution Press, 2019, p. 79-104, <https://brook.gs/2Kl88bu>; Michael Clemens, Cindy Huang and Jimmy Graham, “The Economic and Fiscal Effects of Granting Refugees Formal Labor Market Access”, in *CGD Working Papers*, No. 496 (October 2018), <https://www.cgdev.org/node/3127019>.

³⁸ The text of the GCR can be accessed from: UNHCR, *Report of the United Nations High Commissioner*

support of the self-reliance of refugees and resilience of host communities through, inter alia, the promotion of “economic opportunities, decent work, job creation and entrepreneurship programmes for host community members and refugees” in countries hosting them.³⁹

2.2 Supporting self-reliance and its limits

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This policy perspective has been around since 2016.⁴⁰ However, it was not until recent years that policy attention has increased. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), this is because a very large proportion of Syrian refugees of working age are employed informally and a dire need is recognised to draw them into the formal economy.⁴¹ The projects to support this transition towards more sustainable forms of employment have ranged from those focused on improving life skills to those providing language and vocational training aimed to enhance refugees’ employability in the labour market, as well as provision of tax subsidies to employers. These have been accompanied by numerous projects to encourage self-employment and the creation of small businesses. As much as these projects may have increased the “employability” of their beneficiaries, they have not, in fact, been translated into sustainable formal employment and job creation in any significant manner.

That said, the 2020 UNDP monitoring report noted that overall “livelihoods and food security partners have supported over 36,000 refugees and host community members to access employment opportunities since the inception of the 3RP”.⁴² In January 2016, the government introduced legislation opening the Turkish labour market to Syrian refugees and enabled their employers to apply for work permits.⁴³ Subsequently, it also adopted administrative

for Refugees. Part II Global Compact on Refugees, 2 August 2018, [https://undocs.org/en/A/73/12\(PartII\)](https://undocs.org/en/A/73/12(PartII)).

³⁹ Ibid., point 70.

⁴⁰ UNHCR, Turkey: 3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2016-2017 in Response to the Syria Crisis, January 2016, <https://reliefweb.int/node/1351411>.

⁴¹ Luis Pinedo Caro, *Syrian Refugees in the Turkish Labour Market*, ILO Office for Turkey, 9 February 2020, p. 12, https://www.ilo.org/ankara/publications/WCMS_738602/lang--en.

⁴² UNHCR, 3RP Turkey Chapter. 2020 Outcome Monitoring Report, August 2021, p. 60, <https://reliefweb.int/node/3761323>.

⁴³ Turkey, *Geçici Koruma Sağlanan Yabancıların Çalışma İzinlerine dair Yönetmelik* [Regulation on Work Permits of Refugees under Temporary Protection], in *Resmî Gazete* No. 29594 of 15 January 2016, <http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/3.5.20168375.pdf>. The unofficial English translation is available at:

arrangements to increase access to formal employment.⁴⁴ However, these measures have not been particularly effective. In 2019 and 2020 there were only 63,789 and 62,369 work permits issued to Syrian nationals according to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security.⁴⁵ According to one estimate, in 2020, the number of Syrians informally employed, often in insecure and precarious work, ranged approximately between 700,000 and 1 million in a working age population of around 2.1 million.⁴⁶ The fall is not surprising considering the persistent problem of unemployment in Turkey further aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic. According to one survey in 2020, 69 per cent of refugees had lost their jobs during the pandemic.⁴⁷

2.3 How to boost self-reliance through job creation?

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The need for greater investment “to support a transition to the formal economy” and scale-up “livelihoods and job creation efforts” to address growing needs for self-reliance and prevent frustration surrounding employment, “which has the potential to fuel social tensions”, is well recognised.⁴⁸ One way to overcome the problem of transforming improved “employability” to sustained employment would be to create demand for refugee labour. The GCR suggests exploring “preferential trade arrangements [...] especially for goods and sectors with high refugee participation” to spur employment both for refugees and locals, thereby helping social cohesion.⁴⁹ This suggestion is fully in line with trade

<https://www.refworld.org/docid/582c71464.html>.

⁴⁴ Bastien Revel, *Turkey's Refugee Resilience: Expanding and Improving Solutions for the Economic Inclusion of Syrians in Turkey*, Atlantic Council and UNDP, July 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/?p=276789>.

⁴⁵ Turkish Ministry of Labour and Social Security, *Yabancıların Çalışma İzinleri / Work Permits of Foreigners, 2019 and 2020*, <https://www.csgeb.gov.tr/istatistikler/calisma-hayati-istatistikleri/resmi-istatistik-programi/yabancilarin-calisma-izinleri>.

⁴⁶ M. Murat Erdoğan, *Syrians Barometer 2020*, cit., p. 178-180.

⁴⁷ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and Turkish Red Crescent Society (TRC), *Impact of COVID-19 on Refugee Populations Benefitting from the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN). Assessment Report*, May 2020, p. 8, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/76274>; Şenay Akyıldız, “How Has COVID-19 Affected Turkey's Labor Market?”, in *TEPAV Evaluation Notes*, No. 2020|29 (June 2020), <https://www.tepav.org.tr/en/haberler/s/10170>.

⁴⁸ United Nations, *Turkey: 3RP Country Chapter - 2021/2022*, cit., p. 6; United Nations, *Turkey: 3RP Country Chapter - 2019/2020*, March 2019, p. 89, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/68618>. On a recent commentary on the importance of job creation see: Sinem Adar and Friedrich Püttmann, “Making EU-Turkey Cooperation on Migration Sustainable”, in *SWP Comments*, No. 7 (February 2022), <https://doi.org/10.18449/2022C07>.

⁴⁹ UNHCR, *Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Part II Global Compact on*

liberalisation through the reduction of tariffs, the expansion or even full elimination of quotas and the resolution of regulatory obstacles, all of which are key drivers of economic growth and employment.⁵⁰ Such economic growth would also help create demand for the skills and labour of refugees and complement ongoing efforts focused on increasing their employability. In the specific case of Turkey, the European Commission had indeed flagged gaining access to “export markets [...] and providing preferential export and trading status to specific products” as a “priority action” for improving the self-reliance of Syrian refugees in Turkey.⁵¹

One specific way to put such a policy idea into action would be for the EU to grant concessions that would enable Turkey to expand its agricultural exports to the EU. The customs union between the EU and Turkey is recognised as economically beneficial to both sides but it only covers industrial goods.⁵² Modernisation of the customs union has been on the agenda of bilateral relations for some time and is supposed to include incorporation of the agricultural sector as well, but for a variety of reasons this has not happened.⁵³ Thus, exports of fresh fruits and vegetables, together with the agricultural portion of industrially processed agricultural goods, are taxed and face regulatory restrictions, such as quotas. For this reason, agricultural exports to the EU have lagged significantly behind industrial exports. From 2014 to 2020, agricultural exports to the EU fluctuated between 4 and 5 billion euros per year, compared to Turkey’s overall exports to the EU, which amounted to roughly 50–70 billion euros per year during the same period.⁵⁴ The massive difference in

Refugees, cit., para. 71.

⁵⁰ Jeffery A. Frankel and David Romer, “Does Trade Cause Growth?”, in *American Economic Review*, Vol. 89, No. 3 (June 1999), p. 379-399, <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.89.3.379>; Romain Wacziarg and Karen Horn Welch, “Trade Liberalization and Growth: New Evidence”, in *NBER Working Papers*, No. 10152 (December 2003), <https://www.nber.org/papers/w10152>.

⁵¹ GEotest Consortium, *Technical Assistance to the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey. Needs Assessment Report*, 31 October 2018, p. 12, 85, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2018-12/updated_needs_assessment.pdf.

⁵² World Bank, “Evaluation of the EU-Turkey Customs Union”, in *World Bank Reports*, No. 85830-TR (28 March 2014), <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/20444>.

⁵³ Doruk Arbay, “The Modernization of the European Union’s Customs Union with Turkey”, in *SWP (CATS) Working Papers*, No. 5 (September 2020), <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2020WP09>.

⁵⁴ Calculated from: European Commission-Directorate General for Trade, *Turkey*, updated 31 March 2022, https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/isdb_results/factsheets/country/overview_turkey_en.pdf; Eurostat, *Turkey-EU: International Trade in Goods Statistics*, updated February 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Turkey-EU_-_international_trade_in_goods_statistics.

the volume of trade in these two sectors suggests that if there were to be some liberalisation of trade in agricultural goods, the economic activity that would follow could lead to employment opportunities benefiting both refugees and locals. Furthermore, both the agricultural sector and the industrial sector processing agricultural goods suffer from labour supply shortages often filled by Syrian refugees employed under adverse and precarious conditions.⁵⁵ The shortage, especially of seasonal agricultural workers, has persisted during the pandemic, although under even more adverse and precarious conditions than usual.⁵⁶

Another related policy idea that could be explored is the establishment of a Qualified Industrial Zone (QIZ) near the Syrian border, where nearly a million and a half registered Syrian refugees live. The region (the provinces of Hatay, Gaziantep, Kilis and Şanlıurfa) is known for its diverse industrial and agricultural production. Kilis, only a few miles from the Syrian border, would be an ideal location. Such a zone would also have an added long-term advantage of spurring economic development and reconstruction across the border in Syria once the conflict is finally resolved. Previous examples of such zones include the US-backed QIZs put into place in 1996 in Jordan and Egypt to generate employment and support Arab-Israeli peace.⁵⁷ Furthermore, such a QIZ could also attract foreign direct investment interested in benefiting from concessional access to EU markets. In the spirit of burden-sharing underlined in the GCR, developed countries beyond the EU, such as Australia, Canada, Japan and South Korea, could also be invited to support this QIZ, especially if the product range is expanded. Clearly such mechanisms would need to be tied to the formal employment of Syrian refugees in a manner that meets ILO and EU labour standards. A certification and monitoring mechanism could be envisaged that would ensure compliance with implementation terms to be agreed upon by both sides.

⁵⁵ FAO, *Turkey: Syrian Refugees and Resilience Plan 2018-2019*, 2018, p. 5, 9, <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/I9240EN>; United Nations, *Turkey: 3RP Country Chapter – 2019/2020*, cit., p. 40.

⁵⁶ Besim Can Zırh et al., *Virus or Poverty. Impact of Coronavirus Outbreak on Seasonal Migrant Agricultural Workers and their Children and on Crop Farming. A Rapid Assessment*, Ankara, Development Workshop and ILO Turkey, 2020, <https://www.ka.org.tr/dosyalar/file/Yayinlar/Cocuk-Haklari/Raporlar/Virus-or-Poverty.pdf>.

⁵⁷ “Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZs) in Jordan and Egypt: Background and Issues for Congress”, in *CRS Reports*, No. R43202 (August 2013), <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/R43202.html>.

Conclusion

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Ultimately, such cooperation between the EU and Turkey would result in a “win-win-win” approach. Most importantly, it would improve the self-reliance of refugees by enabling them to access decent, formal work in the agricultural sector, which is in the interest of all parties. For Turkey, implementing these policy recommendations would help refugees stand on their own feet, become productive members of Turkish society, diffuse public resentment and reduce the likelihood of crime, while at the same time helping the economy grow. Furthermore, and considering the persistent structural problem of informality in the Turkish economy, these two policies could help graduate at least some Syrian refugees to the formal economy, even if in modest numbers. These two “wins” would also be in line with the Sustainable Development Goals of Agenda 2030 and the commitment “to leave no one behind”.

Liberalising trade in agricultural goods has been a notoriously difficult policy subject and is likely to meet resistance in several EU member countries. However, adopting a policy that improves refugee self-reliance and host community resilience would be in the EU’s own interest by reducing the likelihood of secondary movements of refugees towards Europe. This would be in line with the EU’s long-standing policy of supporting refugees in their respective countries of asylum. This policy was expressed by the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz during his visit to Turkey in March 2022 when he remarked that “we [the EU] should not only help refugees when they arrive in Europe but should help them where they are”.⁵⁸ Adding such a developmental angle to EU-Turkish cooperation would, in the long run, also reduce the need to keep raising funds for humanitarian assistance as refugees become more independent. It would also reduce the inevitable competition for scarce funds for humanitarian assistance that the massive displacement crisis caused by the war in Ukraine is likely to engender. Furthermore, it would align with an innovative policy idea put forward by the GCR.

⁵⁸ Paraphrased from: DW News, “German Chancellor Scholz Holds Talks with Turkey’s President Erdoğan” (video), 14 March 2022, between minutes 38:30 and 40:30, https://youtu.be/XP_n9u0C6ao.

Ultimately creating sustainable employment for refugees will benefit both the EU and Turkey, but for it to be realised both sides will need to make very difficult compromises: Turkey will need to recognise that refugees have become very much settled in Turkey and that their economic welfare is organically linked to Turkey's own welfare, while the EU will need "to bite the bullet" and agree to liberalise trade in agricultural goods with Turkey as a long-term investment that is in line with EU rhetoric in support of refugees and its underlining objective of limiting population movements towards Europe itself – at least as long as the political mood in Europe continues to be against further refugee reception from Syria and the broader Middle East and North Africa.

3. Turkey–EU Cooperation on Afghanistan

by Ömer Aslan

The second fall of Kabul to the Taliban in August 2021 caught the European Union and Turkey off-guard. Both parties had invested in the post-9/11 NATO mission in Afghanistan. Turkey and key EU member states had contributed soldiers, provided development aid and supported the Afghan security sector over a span of two decades. At first glance, the contentious turn in Turkey–EU relations since 2016 makes the prospect for propitious Turkey–EU cooperation over Afghanistan difficult. That said, Afghanistan may offer more opportunities for cooperation than initially meets the eye.

Turkey and the EU do share common interests and priorities in Afghanistan. These range from ensuring a broad-based, inclusive government and preventing an Afghan exodus to moderating the Taliban, addressing the unfolding humanitarian crisis and preventing Afghan soil from becoming a fecund environment for militancy and extremist groups. The EU and Turkey have already acted on some of these priorities. Turkey was able to keep its schools open following the Taliban takeover and Ankara added to the EU's voice in defending girls' education in Afghanistan; and both provided emergency humanitarian assistance to mitigate the brewing humanitarian catastrophe in the country. The EU's recent decision to be present on the ground, by opening a joint diplomatic mission in Kabul and engaging the Taliban *de facto* government,¹ parallels Turkey's earlier decision to remain in Afghanistan and keep the Turkish embassy open.

¹ "France, Europeans Working to Open Mission in Afghanistan: Macron", in *Al Jazeera*, 4 December 2021, <https://aje.io/vk3nqj>; German Federal Foreign Office, *Statement by Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock on Afghanistan*, 23 December 2021, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/statement-baerbock-afghanistan/2503652>; also see speech by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the European Parliament debate on the situation in Afghanistan, Strasbourg, 5 April 2022, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-04-05_EN.html.

While Turkish unilateralism in Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean amidst a lack of concrete foreign policy action by Brussels has undermined Turkey–EU cooperation, this is not the case for Afghanistan. As demonstrated by the slow progress in Turkey’s bid to repair and operate Kabul international airport and the surfacing of differences between Turkey and its primary regional ally Pakistan over visions for Afghanistan, Turkey does not currently possess the capacity or the will to undertake unilateral initiatives in Afghanistan.

In response to the Taliban takeover, the EU rebounded rather quickly from the initial shock the sudden US withdrawal created. The EU mobilised an important amount of humanitarian assistance, evacuated significant numbers of personnel and Afghan nationals, identified conditions of engagement with the Taliban government and communicated with neighbouring countries to address the issue of a possible refugee exodus. If the EU can commit and remain involved politically as well as in the humanitarian domain, providing a counterbalance to Russian and Chinese influence by implementing soft infrastructure, engaging Afghanistan’s neighbours, lobbying the United States, facilitating loans and providing technical assistance, there may be wider room for increased EU–Turkey cooperation on Afghanistan.

That said, the EU’s recurring failures to enhance its strategic autonomy, combined with the distraction caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the consequent prioritisation of the Eastern European theatre over that of other regions may damage such prospects of cooperation on Afghanistan. The 2023 elections in Turkey and where Turkey’s relations with the West will stand in the aftermath will also be key in this regard. If the AKP wins and EU–Turkey relations relapse into conflictuality, Turkey’s actions in Afghanistan may mirror its belief in the post-Western world, disposing Ankara toward enhanced cooperation with Russia and China as opposed to the EU.

Moreover, and looking to the future, two “black swan” events could heavily impact EU–Turkey relations in Afghanistan. First, if the humanitarian crisis continues unabated into the spring and summer, a surge in the flow of refugees and migrants from Afghanistan will be very likely. This may increase the pressure on states bordering Afghanistan as well as Turkey despite ongoing EU-supported efforts to enhance Ankara’s border management and surveillance capabilities.

Second, possible spillovers from heightened China–US rivalry, West–Russia tensions and the reverberations of these rivalries on Pakistan, currently in the grip of a deep political crisis leading to the downfall of Imran Khan’s government, may foreshadow Afghanistan’s (re)turn to being an object of great power rivalry. This would be an extremely negative event that may have wider repercussions for Turkey–EU relations depending in part on the direction of the political environment in both. To fend off this possibility, the EU and Turkey can cooperate on a multilateral initiative that is risk-free for both sides to bring together Afghanistan’s neighbours as well as big powers.

3.1 An incipient Turkish debate on Afghanistan

In 2008, Ali Babacan, then foreign minister in the AKP government, suggested that Turkey’s historic ties to Afghanistan provided a cushion against having to explain to the Turkish public its post-2001 involvement in the country.² This held largely true until a low-key debate emerged after 12 Turkish soldiers died in a crash in Afghanistan in 2012. After the incident, the political opposition – then consisting primarily of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP) and Republican People’s Party (CHP) – questioned the purpose of Turkey’s Afghanistan engagement, calling on the government to reconsider Turkey’s military presence while implicitly criticising Turkey’s cooperation with the United States in Afghanistan.³

That modest debate, however, was nowhere near the controversy generated by the Taliban’s second rise to power in 2021. A potential Afghan refugee wave against a backdrop of mounting popular discontent and a declining economy, together with a possible backdoor refugee deal between the government and the EU/US, dominated the national discussion. Although the AKP government resisted criticisms from the opposition that Turkey should immediately

² “Turkey–Afghanistan–Pakistan: Summit Dates Being Finalized; Dostum Arrest Would Threaten Turkish–Afghan Relations”, in *WikiLeaks*, 24 April 2008, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08ANKARA767_a.html.

³ “Turkish Military to Stay Course in Kabul”, in *Hürriyet Daily News*, 19 March 2012, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-military-to-stay-course-in-kabul-16295>; “Gov’t Stands Firm on Kabul Duty after Crash”, in *Hürriyet Daily News*, 20 March 2012, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/govt-stands-firm-on-kabul-duty-after-crash--16416>.

withdraw from Afghanistan and abandon its bid to try to secure and operate the Kabul airport,⁴ it had to admit this time that Turkey would not act as “Europe’s refugee warehouse”.⁵ Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of the government’s nationalist ally MHP, added that Turkey cannot afford a new wave of irregular migration on its borders. He urged the government to engage the Taliban to stem possible tides of migration and ensure that Afghans residing in Turkey return to the country.⁶

Besides forestalling refugee flows, Turkey still wants to protect and maintain its personnel and infrastructure investments in the country. Although the exact figure is not known, Turkey is thought to have trained more than six thousand Afghan male and female police officers since 2011.⁷ The number of Afghan military officers, including female officers, trained by the Turkish armed forces in Turkey over the years is more than two thousand. More than ten thousand Afghan students have studied in Turkey on national scholarships.⁸

Although the future of Turkey’s local allies in Afghanistan has not been in the limelight, in his very first reaction to the Taliban takeover Bahçeli recalled that eight million Turks living in Afghanistan gave Turkey responsibility to make sure that the new Afghan political architecture accommodates all ethnic groups on a fair and equal basis.⁹ While Turkey pursues the objective of a broad-based and inclusive government, it does not have the means or the ambition to turn these groups into a political, let alone military, opposition to the Taliban. After a visit to the Afghan embassy in Ankara in mid-March, the Afghan Foreign Ministry

4 “CHP Urges Gov’t Not to Make Any Deal with West over Afghan Refugees”, in *Hürriyet Daily News*, 17 August 2021, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/chp-urges-govt-not-to-make-any-deal-with-west-over-afghan-refugees-167149>; Ezel Sahinkaya, “Erdogan Reiterates Interest in Securing Kabul Airport, Faces Criticism”, in VOA, 21 August 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/a/6209814.html>.

5 Ayla Jean Yackley, “Turkey Will Not Act as EU ‘Warehouse’ for Afghan Refugees, Says Erdogan”, in *Financial Times*, 26 August 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/09abc27e-607c-4d83-8e39-84eaa179565e>.

6 Özcan Yıldırım, “Bahçeli: Afganistan’daki yeni yönetimle düzensiz göçün önlenmesi hususunda muhakkak surette anlaşılması şarttır” [Bahçeli: With the new administration in Afghanistan, it is absolutely essential to agree on the prevention of irregular migration], in *Anadolu Agency*, 16 August 2021, <http://v.aa.com.tr/2336974>.

7 Polis Dergisi website: *Afgan Ulusal Polis Eğitimi* [Afghan National Police Education], <https://polisdergisi.pa.edu.tr/afgan-ulusal-polis-egitimi-1476-haber>.

8 Jeyhun Aliyev, “Turkey Proposes Creation of Working Group on Afghanistan within G20”, in *Anadolu Agency*, 12 October 2021, <http://v.aa.com.tr/2389998>.

9 Özcan Yıldırım, “Bahçeli...”, cit.

quickly pre-empted any notion that the Taliban's acting foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi had met with Afghan political parties in Ankara.¹⁰

3.2 Two dynamics of Turkey's Afghanistan engagement

In addition to mounting domestic opposition coalescing around the issue of refugees, two factors will shape Turkey's evolving engagement with Afghanistan in the short and mid-term. The first is a regional dynamic. Since the 1920s, close coordination with Western partners is what has allowed and encouraged Turkish activism in South Asia.¹¹ Barring Western encouragement, Central and South Asia has never been a theatre of major Turkish activism, differently from what has been the case in Syria, Libya, the Eastern Mediterranean or the Nagorno-Karabakh. In the absence of tangible Western commitments to Afghanistan or Central and South Asia more broadly, Turkey will hardly be motivated to act or assume risks in an increasingly multipolar Central and South Asia where Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Iran and other Central Asian states are vying for influence.¹² Such a reading could change if the AKP government secures power after the 2023 elections and Turkey's relationship with the West drifts back into contention, forcing Turkey to consider possible cooperation and coordination with Russia and China.

The conundrum Turkey faces in Afghanistan is best exemplified by the lack of coordination between Turkey, Pakistan and to some extent Qatar on Afghanistan before and after the Taliban takeover.¹³ In his first reaction to events in Afghanistan, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had said that his government will work closely with Pakistan to help stabilise and bring peace to Afghanistan.¹⁴ This has not materialised, and is not surprising. Pakistan and

¹⁰ Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *The IEA Delegation Led by Foreign Minister Met with Large Number of Afghans in the Afghan Embassy in Ankara, Turkey*, 19 March 2022, <https://mfa.gov.af/?p=8585>.

¹¹ Ömer Aslan, "The Evolution of Turkey's South Asia Policy: Continuities and Ruptures in Outlook, Roles, Actors and Constraints", in *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, 3 March 2022, DOI 10.1177/23477970221076754.

¹² Galip Dalay, "Will Turkey's Afghanistan Ambitions Backfire?", in *Chatham House Expert Comments*, 6 October 2021, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/node/27150>.

¹³ "Turkey and Pakistan Vying for Influence in Afghanistan After Taliban's Takeover", in *Middle East Eye*, 21 November 2021, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/node/232241>.

¹⁴ "Turkey to Exert Every Effort for Afghanistan's Stability: Erdoğan", in *Hürriyet Daily News*, 15 August 2021, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-to-exert-every-effort-for-afghanistans-stability-erdogan-167098>.

Turkey previously worked at cross purposes when the Taliban captured Kabul for the first time in 1996–1997. Pakistan was visibly not pleased with Turkey's reconciliation attempts among anti-Taliban Afghan groups first and between Taliban and other Afghan war parties later, as well as Turkey's attempt to organise an Afghanistan peace conference in Istanbul in 1997.¹⁵

The recent recalibration in Turkish foreign policy provides a second dynamic. At a time when the AKP government is pursuing de-escalation out of economic exigencies, as shown by the rapprochement with the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Greece, Israel and a possible (re)opening with Armenia, it is not reasonable to expect Turkey to make drastic, cost-ridden moves on Afghanistan. Turkey is therefore treading very carefully in its policy toward the Taliban and mimicking the global rules of engagement. The fact that Afghanistan is not a national red-line issue makes it a “high-risk, low reward” policy file for Ankara.

How Turkey handled relations between the Afghan embassy in Ankara and the Taliban *de facto* government appears to be a good example of this. Whereas Russia and Pakistan turned over Afghan embassies to the Taliban,¹⁶ several Afghan embassies in Europe (for instance, in Italy) have spoken publicly against the Taliban government. It appears that Turkey found somewhat of a middle ground in managing the status of the Afghan embassy in Ankara. The visit by acting foreign minister Muttaqi, after speaking at the Antalya Diplomacy Forum in mid-March, and his meeting with some embassy personnel and Afghan students including at least one woman, albeit in front of the former three-coloured Afghanistan flag, is an indication of this balancing act.¹⁷

Assuming that the current economic crisis in Turkey will continue and migration will remain a key driver of domestic political competition¹⁸ heading into 2023

¹⁵ Bilge Cankorel, *Afghanistan and Beyond. Diplomacy under Siege, 1995–1997. Journal of a Turkish Diplomat*, Istanbul, The ISIS Press, 2017.

¹⁶ Javed Ahmad Kakar, “Afghan Embassy in Moscow Handed Over to New Diplomat”, in *Pajhwok Afghan News*, 9 April 2022, <https://pajhwok.com/?p=450800>.

¹⁷ “Islamic Emirate in Contact with Many Afghan Embassies: Muttaqi”, in *TOLONews*, 16 March 2022, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-177138>.

¹⁸ Sinem Adar and Friedrich Püttmann, “Making Turkey-EU Cooperation on Migration Sustainable”, in *SWP Comments*, No. 7 (February 2022), <https://doi.org/10.18449/2022C07>; also Firat Kimya, “Syrian Immigration in Turkish Party Politics”, in *Al-Sharq Research Papers*, 7 April 2022, <https://research.sharqforum.org/?p=31538>.

elections, the AKP government will have an additional motivation to prevent any Afghan refugee wave. The AKP will therefore have an incentive to maintain cooperation with the EU to bolster Turkey's border fencing efforts and border surveillance capabilities as well as receiving technical and financial assistance on integration as well as voluntary return programmes for refugees.

Turkey will also seek to preserve its non-military engagement in Afghanistan by way of keeping Turkish schools open, increasing their number,¹⁹ and humanitarian work through the Turkish Red Crescent, Islamic charities and *Diyanet* (Directorate of Religious Affairs) channels. To that end, Turkey will still try to enlist Pakistan's support, as arguably evidenced by the February 2022 visit to Pakistan by the Head of Turkey's *Diyanet*. To prevent a mass exodus from Afghanistan, Turkey will also continue to call for international attention and more humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan.²⁰ Muttaqi's participation in the Antalya Diplomacy Forum is an additional reminder of Turkey's possible value in providing an international platform for the Taliban government to continue to engage the West at a time when deepening economic recession increases the pressure on the Taliban to begin to deliver benefits to its constituents.

In the event of an electoral victory by the Turkish opposition coalition in the 2023 elections, however, Afghanistan will likely slip further down the new government's agenda, possibly leading to a further reduction in the intensity of Turkey's engagement in Afghanistan and South and Central Asia more broadly. In such a scenario, the new Turkish government will likely increasingly look at Afghanistan through the narrower lenses of refugees.

3.3 EU debates and the future of Afghanistan

Despite the initial shockwave from the US withdrawal and sudden Taliban takeover, the EU was able to formulate a cohesive response to the crisis. While

¹⁹ Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *IEA Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi Met in Antalya with Maarif Foundation President, Prof. Dr. Birol Akgün*, 13 March 2022, <https://mfa.gov.af/?p=8553>.

²⁰ "Turkey Proposes G20 Working Group for Afghanistan", in *Hürriyet Daily News*, 12 October 2021, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-proposes-g20-working-group-for-afghanistan-168586>; "Turkey Calls for Coordinated Humanitarian Aid to Afghanistan", in *Hürriyet Daily News*, 19 December 2021, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-calls-for-coordinated-humanitarian-aid-to-afghanistan-170168>.

key EU member states such as Germany, France and Italy started evacuating their personnel and local Afghans at risk, the spectre of the 2015 refugee wave triggered a heated debate inside the EU. Figures from the French far-right, including potential presidential contenders in the 2022 presidential elections, identified the Taliban as an “ideological adversary”, demanded more punitive action against it, as well as a stricter application of the right of asylum at the EU level and the prioritisation of security over human rights concerns.²¹ The French approach to Afghanistan will likely remain in the direction of “security first”, including a stricter application of asylum procedures and delegation of the task of containing irregular migration to neighbouring and transit countries. Italian far-right parties also demanded more drastic actions against possible refugee flows and opposed the idea of a humanitarian corridor.²² The far-right “Alternative for Germany” found the number of Afghans evacuated by the German government too high and expressed a fear of asylum abuse as well. They called for more preventive action to be taken locally in the region instead of allowing Afghans to arrive at the EU’s borders.²³

Despite fiery rhetoric coming from the opposition parties in key EU member states, the EU was on the whole able to reach a consensus to evacuate more Afghan civilians, contain refugee flows inside the region, suspend development aid to Afghanistan to avoid benefitting the Taliban, establish a regional political platform of cooperation with Afghanistan’s neighbours and identify five benchmarks the Taliban government has to satisfy for the EU to resume its development aid.²⁴ The EU also provided key emergency

²¹ “Présidentielle : ‘Il n’y a pas de guerre en Afghanistan’, affirme Marine Le Pen pour justifier son souhait de ne pas accueillir de réfugiées afghanes en France”, in *Franceinfo*, 3 March 2022, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/politique/marine-le-pen/video-presidentielle-2022-il-n-y-a-pas-de-guerre-en-afghanistan-repond-marine-le-pen-pour-justifier-son-souhait-de-ne-pas-accueillir-de-refugiees-afghanes-en-france_4990822.html; Marine Le Pen, “Talibans : un avertissement qui appelle une initiative internationale de grande envergure”, in *Communiqués RN*, 16 August 2021, <https://rassemblementnational.fr/?p=46535>.

²² “Afghanistan, Meloni: ‘Soluzione non sono corridoi umanitari’”, in *Adnkronos*, 24 August 2021, https://www.adnkronos.com/afghanistan-meloni-soluzione-non-sono-corridoi-umanitari_2io8OZRYntzMrlc1ZSE0Lv.

²³ Tim Stickings, “Far-Right Uses German Election Debate to Stoke Afghan Asylum Fears”, in *The National*, 14 September 2021, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/europe/2021/09/14/far-right-uses-german-election-debate-to-stoke-afghan-asylum-fears>; Mark Hallam, “Exclusive: Afghans Should Be ‘Sent Back at Border’, Says AfD Lead Candidate Tino Chrupalla”, in *Deutsche Welle*, 2 September 2021, <https://p.dw.com/p/3zo2r>.

²⁴ German Federal Foreign Office, *Statement by Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock on Afghanistan*, cit.; Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on Afghanistan* (11713/2/21 REV 2), 15 September 2021, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11713-2021-REV-2/en/pdf>.

humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan via the UN and international NGOs to prevent funds from falling into the Taliban's hands. Incumbent governments in France, Germany and Italy cooperated successfully on these objectives, although multiple elephants are still in the room: the political problem of whether to engage the Taliban government or not, the feasibility of continuing to deliver aid without recognising the Taliban and how to ensure that Western aid provided to prevent Afghanistan's collapse does not become a windfall for China and Russia.

Admittedly, the fact that the feared refugee influx has not materialised (yet) has helped the EU policy process. To address the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan, assist its Central Asian neighbours in managing migration flows, fight organised crime and the narcotics trade while preventing the spread of terrorism, the EU assembled a financial assistance package worth 1 billion euro.²⁵ So far, none of the three European governments has called for armed mobilisation against the Taliban. The EU's latest decision to open a joint diplomatic mission in Afghanistan without recognising the Taliban government²⁶ converges with Turkey's earlier decision to keep the Turkish embassy in Kabul open.

3.4 Grounds for cooperation

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Turkey and key EU member states share a similar hierarchy of priorities in Afghanistan. Both would like to prevent an influx of irregular migration from Afghanistan and alleviate the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the country. Turkey has already dispatched humanitarian aid to Afghanistan²⁷ and continues to support the plan in the Organization for Islamic Cooperation to set up a "humanitarian trust fund" for Afghanistan.

²⁵ Council of the European Union, *Operationalization of the Pact [...] Draft Action Plan Responding to the Events in Afghanistan* (10472/1/21 REV 1), 10 September 2021, <https://www.statewatch.org/media/2726/eu-council-afghanistan-com-draft-action-plan-migration-10472-1-21-rev1.pdf>; <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10472-2021-REV-1/en/pdf>; European Commission, *Afghanistan: Commission Announces €1 Billion Afghan Support Package*, 12 October 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_5208.

²⁶ "France, Europeans Working to Open Mission in Afghanistan: Macron", cit.; German Federal Foreign Office, *Statement by Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock on Afghanistan*, cit.

²⁷ "Turkey Sends Third Aid Train to Afghanistan", in *Hürriyet Daily News*, 26 February 2022, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-sends-third-aid-train-to-afghanistan-171796>.

Turkey and the EU also agree on the need to engage without recognising the Taliban government, although the Taliban remains more of an “ideological adversary” for the EU, especially France, compared to Turkey.²⁸ Dialogue with the Taliban has helped Turkey to keep Turkish schools, including those for girls only, open and running when most are shut in the country,²⁹ and to allow Turkish humanitarian aid organisations to operate in Afghanistan. This engagement is also helpful to motivate the Taliban to maintain their current policy of pressure on ISIS-K and Al-Qaeda in the country.³⁰

The ceiling to EU–Turkey cooperation in Afghanistan would be a strategic alignment where both commit to hard infrastructure investment à la China to rescue Afghanistan from aid-dependency and connect it to its neighbours for trade, electricity and markets. This however is beyond reach at the moment. The EU had expressed intention to support transit, transport and energy corridors, and regional economic cooperation between Central Asia, Afghanistan and the rest of South Asia in its previous strategy documents on Afghanistan and Central Asia.³¹ To boost “Euro-Asian connectivity” the EU is exploring ways to extend the “Trans-European Network” to Afghanistan and Central Asia by way of an extended “Eastern Partnership”. The EU Commission recently started a study on sustainable transport corridors connecting Europe with Central Asia and what actions can be taken in terms of both hard and soft connectivity.³² However, it is questionable whether these EU strategy documents remain valid

²⁸ “Afghanistan: Taliban Envoys Start Talks in Norway”, in *Deutsche Welle*, 23 January 2021, <https://p.dw.com/p/45xxl>; “Taliban Pays First Visit to Turkey after Takeover of Afghanistan”, in *Hürriyet Daily News*, 14 October 2021, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/taliban-pays-first-visit-to-turkey-after-takeover-of-afghanistan-168621>; “Afghanistan on Agenda at Antalya Diplomacy Forum”, in *TOLOnews*, 11 March 2022, <https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-177066>.

²⁹ “Afghan Girls Resume Education at Turkey’s Maarif Foundation Schools”, in *Daily Sabah*, 10 November 2021, http://sabahdai.ly/_10b6; “Afghan Girls Take Exams for Turkish-Run Schools in Kabul”, in *Reuters*, 26 November 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/afghan-girls-take-exams-turkish-run-schools-kabul-2021-11-26>; US Office of the Director of Intelligence, *Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community 2022*, February 2022, p. 28, <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/reports-publications/reports-publications-2022/item/2279>.

³⁰ US Office of the Director of Intelligence, *Annual Threat Assessment*, cit., p. 26.

³¹ Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on the New Strategy on Central Asia*, 17 June 2019, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10221-2019-INIT/en/pdf>; Council of the European Union, *Afghanistan – Council Conclusions*, 16 October 2017, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13098-2017-INIT/en/pdf>.

³² European Commission, *Study on Sustainable Transport Connections with Central Asia*, 3 December 2021, <https://europa.eu/lbq3GvG>.

in a new era marked by the after-effects of Covid-19, the NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

France's resumption of the Presidency of the EU Council in 2022 may not be exactly helpful in this respect either. A Macron government would likely continue to view Afghanistan as a security problem, prioritising the fight against radicalisation and terrorism. The French programme for the Council prioritises Africa, the Western Balkans and the Indo-Pacific, although the Russian aggression against Ukraine may generate a change in focus.³³

For EU–Turkey cooperation to move forward in Afghanistan, key EU member states and Turkey will need to resolve a looming dilemma that involves the balancing of values and interests. The tragic fact in Afghanistan is that the “current [Taliban] government can neither govern [without external assistance] nor be replaced”.³⁴ Since it does not appear feasible to keep a population of 38 million afloat forever through external humanitarian aid and given that the Taliban may decide to allow a larger number of people to leave Afghanistan, oversee a rudimentary economic system and tax the drug trade than completely submitting to international conditions,³⁵ the EU and Turkey may have to rescale their expectations and rethink how to protect their values, interests and freedom of action in Afghanistan. Turkey–EU dialogue and cooperation could be instrumental in this domain, but in order for this to come about and be sustainable, both sides will need to consider the interests of the other and work to further improve the bilateral relationship, including by addressing other outstanding issues which have caused much harm to Turkey–EU relations in the recent past.

³³ Council of the European Union, *Recovery, Strength and a Sense of Belonging. Programme for the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union*, January 2022, p. 34, https://presidence-francaise.consilium.europa.eu/media/qh4cg0qq/en_programme-pfue-v1-2.pdf.

³⁴ John Raine, “Afghanistan's State Failure and the Problem of ‘Humanitarian Containment’”, in *IJSS Analysis*, 28 January 2022, <https://www.ijss.org/blogs/analysis/2022/01/afghanistans-state-failure-and-the-problem-of-humanitarian-containment>. As the US Intelligence Community report states, “near-term prospects for regime-threatening resistance are low because large swathes of the Afghan public are weary of war and fearful of Taliban reprisals, and armed remnants lack strong leadership and external support”. See: US Office of the Director of Intelligence, *Annual Threat Assessment*, cit., p. 28.

³⁵ US Office of the Director of Intelligence, *Annual Threat Assessment*, cit., p. 28.

3.5 Planning for uncertainties

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If the Taliban's takeover has not caused a new bone of contention between Turkey and the EU thus far, this is primarily because the much-feared Afghan exodus has not (yet) taken place. The UN Transitional Engagement Framework predicts that eight billion dollars will be needed to save Afghan "lives, sustaining essential services, and preserving social investments and community-level systems addressing basic human needs" until the end of 2022.³⁶ Given that Afghanistan may soon drop further down the list of international priorities after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, whether such a high level of assistance is sustainable is a legitimate question. "Refugee flows could spike if the Taliban attempted to relieve pressure by allowing larger populations to leave Afghanistan or conditions sharply deteriorated."³⁷ Recalling anti-immigrant sentiment in both Europe and Turkey, this contingency may exacerbate EU–Turkey divergence on the migration domain. This increases the urgency with which both Turkey and the EU should increase dialogue with the Taliban, maintain humanitarian assistance through the summer, and intensify EU's cooperation with Turkey, Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan's Central Asian neighbours.

Second, with the Russian invasion of Ukraine as well as the process of Imran Khan's fall from power in Pakistan, Central and South Asia broadly and Afghanistan in particular sit on the edge of a new great power rivalry.³⁸ This however may provide a possible ground for EU–Turkey cooperation. Taking advantage of the fact that none of the actors from the US and EU to China and Russia has an interest in an unstable Afghanistan, a multilateral initiative by such middle powers as Turkey, Pakistan and Qatar that brings together Afghanistan's neighbours as well as big powers possibly under the UN umbrella may be what Afghanistan needs the most under current circumstances. The fact that Turkey's relations with Pakistan now headed by an interim government led by Shehbaz Sharif are bound to improve, the likelihood of a closer coordination between

³⁶ United Nations Afghanistan, *United Nations Transitional Engagement Framework (TEF) for Afghanistan*, January 2022, p. 8, <https://unsdg.un.org/node/73363>.

³⁷ US Office of the Director of Intelligence, *Annual Threat Assessment*, cit., p. 28.

³⁸ Tanvi Madan, "Major Power Rivalry in South Asia", in *Discussion Paper Series on Managing Global Disorder*, No. 6 (October 2021), <https://www.cfr.org/node/237528>.

Turkey, Qatar and Pakistan has increased. Turkey's previous experience of bringing together Afghanistan's neighbours in the framework of the "Heart of Asia" initiative several times in the past may be helpful as well.

Elections in both Turkey and Pakistan make 2023 a critical juncture possibly influencing many dynamics. Economic crisis in Turkey motivated the AKP government to "pause" the conflictual path in EU–Turkey relations. Its efforts to use its willingness to operate Kabul airport and its role throughout the Russian invasion of Ukraine have so far gone unrecognised and unrequited. In a scenario where the AKP wins the 2023 elections, Turkey and the West drift further apart again, the AKP sees it politically and economically cost-free or tolerable, and Russia, China and a post-2023 Pakistan headed by Imran Khan offer mechanisms and benefits to give some semblance of order to Afghanistan and its neighbourhood, Turkey may, for the first time in Central and South Asia, engage the region in cooperation with non-Western powers.

4. Promoting EU–Turkey Cooperation in Iraq: Challenges and Prospects

by Meliha Benli Altunışık

Developments in and around Iraq over the last two years have led to increased engagement in the country by Turkey and certain EU member states. Reflecting on this evolving context and a new era of engagement to weigh possible areas of Turkey–EU cooperation or competition in Iraq, it is first necessary to take stock of Turkey’s interests and foreign policy objectives in the country, while also considering the perspectives of Turkish opposition parties in light of possible governmental changes in the upcoming national elections of 2023.

4.1 An evolving context

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Several factors have influenced the new context of Turkey’s relations with Iraq. These include the process of US retrenchment from Iraq, developments in Iraqi politics as well as Turkish security and economic interests. First, the withdrawal of the US combat troops from Iraq and limitation of its mission to training has led to the question as to whether this will create a vacuum in Iraq and how Iraq’s political and security environment will be affected by it. Although it is sometimes argued that this withdrawal is mostly symbolic,¹ domestic actors in Iraq and regional powers have been bracing themselves for the possible repercussions. Turkey is clearly one of these regional actors with significant interests in Iraq. Parallel to the US redefining its presence in Iraq, NATO decided to expand the NATO Mission in Iraq (NMI) in terms of size, coverage and mission.² This also seemed to provide new opportunities for

¹ It is reported that the US has made the transition from a combat mission to one aiming to “advise, assist and enable”, and will continue to keep around 2,500 soldiers in Iraq. Jane Arraf, “U.S. Announces End to Combat Mission in Iraq, but Troops Will Not Leave”, in *The New York Times*, 9 December 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/09/world/middleeast/us-iraq-combat-mission.html>.

² At the end of NATO Defense Ministers Summit on 17–18 February 2021, it was announced that on the request of the Iraqi government NATO decided to expand its mission in Iraq. It seems there will be an expansion in three areas: (1) in terms of size the aim is to increase the number from 500 to eventually 4,000; (2) in terms of coverage the expanded mission will be responsible beyond Baghdad; (3) in terms of mission – although it will continue to be a non-combat mission, in addition to training with an aim

Turkey in terms of its influence in Iraq as a member of NATO. So far Turkey has sent 38 military personnel to the NMI on two different occasions.³ All these dynamics have also affected the priorities and policies of the EU and certain member states, particularly Italy and France, when it comes to Iraq. Italy will be heading the NMI starting in May 2022. France, on the other hand, has levelled up its relations with Iraq in the last two years in line with its geostrategic and economic interests.⁴ Taken together, these developments may open up new possibilities for Turkey–EU engagement in Iraq.

The new strategic environment in Iraq has also led Turkey to look for ways to enhance its relations, particularly with the central government, as well as to soft-balance other regional powers. In that respect, another relevant development has been the resumption of nuclear negotiations with Iran in Vienna by the Biden administration and other world powers party to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreement. The success or failure of those negotiations can be expected to have repercussions on Iraq, as since 2003 Iran has been the most important regional power with influence in Iraq. Similarly, Gulf monarchies have also been eager recently to expand their presence and influence in Iraq. Thus, the shifting geopolitical context in and around Iraq has increased Turkey's interest in engaging Iraq more widely.

In addition to the real or perceived shifts in regional and global actors' engagements in Iraq, developments in Iraqi domestic politics have also created opportunities for Turkey's improving relations with both the central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). As to Turkey's opening to the central government, the coming to power of Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi in 2020 has been significant. His development of an independent and multi-dimensional foreign policy in the neighbourhood, alongside Iraq's dire need for economic development and reconstruction after the defeat of ISIS and the Iraqi protests in 2019–2020 over socio-economic problems, have provided new

to strengthen Iraqi institutions and forces – the expanded NMI aims “to help strengthen Iraqi security forces and institutions so that they can prevent the return of ISIS, fight terrorism and stabilise their country”. See: NATO, *Relations with Iraq*, last updated on 1 June 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_88247.htm.

³ Jeyhun Aliyev, “Turkish Army Consultants to Serve in NATO Mission Iraq”, in *Anadolu Agency*, 26 January 2021, <http://v.aa.com.tr/2123360>; Personal communication with an official.

⁴ Munqith Dagher, “The Secret Behind the French Interest in Iraq: A Geostrategic Analysis”, in *CSIS Commentaries*, 23 September 2021, <https://www.csis.org/node/62401>.

opportunities for the development of Turkish-Iraqi relations as Baghdad has become more positive towards Ankara. Similarly, the KRG, concerned about the emergence of a conflict with Baghdad after the US retrenchment⁵ and facing economic hardship, has been eager to renew its close relations with Turkey, which were negatively affected by the independence referendum of 2017.

4.2 Turkey's foreign policy towards Iraq

Turkey's relations with Iraq have been dominated by three issues: security, economy and water. Security issues involve Turkey's concerns about the PKK's presence in Iraq and recently the human and material supply link between the PKK in Iraq and the PYD/YPG in Syria.⁶ In that regard, Turkey aims to force the PKK to retreat from the border regions towards the interior of Iraq and cut the links between the PKK in Iraq and the PYD/YPG in Syria, especially in the Sinjar region in the northwest of Iraq. After the defeat of ISIS in 2015, the town of Sinjar and the greater Sinjar region came to be dominated by pro-Iranian forces, as well as the PKK on the ground. This reality has worried Ankara but also Baghdad and Erbil. As a result, on 9 October 2020, Baghdad and Erbil signed an agreement under the aegis of the UN Iraq Assistance Mission with the aim of normalising the situation in Sinjar through the gradual implementation of administrative, security and development measures.

Turkey welcomed this agreement and closely monitored its implementation, which however quickly encountered problems.⁷ Thus, when Ankara felt that Iraqi actors were less eager or were ineffective in preventing the existence and activities of the PKK in Iraq, particularly in the KRG region as well as in Sinjar, Turkey resumed cross-border military operations. Operation Claw, launched in 2019, has consisted of several specific air and land operations targeting PKK military presence across the border in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The latest of these operations started on 18 April 2022, few days after a visit by KRG prime

⁵ Morgan L. Kaplan, "The U.S. Withdrawal from Iraq and Its Impact on Baghdad, Erbil, and the Relations Between Them", in *ISPI Commentaries*, 18 October 2021, <https://www.ispionline.it/en/node/31958>.

⁶ PKK is Kurdish Workers' Party of Turkey which has been considered as a terrorist organisation by Turkey and also the EU and the US. PYD is a Syrian Kurdish group, the Democratic Union Party, and YPG is its military wing, both are linked with the PKK.

⁷ "Why Sinjar Agreement Is Not Yet Implemented? The Mayor Explains", in *Shafaq News*, 22 November 2021, <https://shafaq.com/en/Kurdistan/Why-Sinjar-Agreement-is-not-yet-implemented-The-mayor-explains>.

minister Masrour Barzani to Ankara for talks with President Erdoğan, after which Barzani said that “he welcomed ‘expanding cooperation to promote security and stability’ in northern Iraq”.⁸ However, at times such operations as well as Turkey’s increasing military presence inside Iraq have led to criticism by the central government as an infringement of Iraqi sovereignty. Thus, in security matters, although there seems to be increasing cooperation with the KRG and now with Baghdad as well, there are also embedded tensions.

The second bilateral issue revolves around water. Due to years of instability in Iraq, the water issue has tended to remain on the backburner, but it has begun to affect bilateral relations in recent years. The two countries started to deal with this issue through cooperation and dialogue in 2014. These efforts have led to several initiatives and meetings between governmental and expert communities. Due to Iraqi concerns, Turkey stalled the filling of the Ilisu Dam. As a result of the efforts, an Action Plan is also being drafted.⁹ However, a long-term agreement has not materialised. Continuous droughts and mismanagement of water resources due to instability and increasing utilisation of water resources by the two upstream countries, Turkey and Iran, have led to water scarcity in Iraq. In turn, the lack of water has led to protests in Iraq, including in the KRG region. Thus, although there seems to be political will to deal with the water issue through cooperation and dialogue, it continues to be a source of tension between the two countries.

The third issue concerns economic relations. In contrast with the other issues addressed above, economic dealings between Turkey and Iraq are relatively free of friction and both sides are eager to expand them. Turkey’s economic ties with the KRG have been at an excellent stage since the normalisation of relations in 2008. Now there seem to be efforts to develop economic relations with Baghdad as well.¹⁰ Iraq has also become important for Turkey’s trade with the Arab monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula as a transit country since the onset of the Syrian conflict. During the Kuwait Conference on the Reconstruction of

⁸ “Turkey Launches New Offensive against Kurdish Rebels in Iraq”, in *Al Jazeera*, 18 April 2022, <https://aje.io/avajhp>.

⁹ Ayşegül Kibaroglu and Ramazan Caner Sayan, “Water and ‘Imperfect Peace’ in the Euphrates-Tigris River Basin”, in *International Affairs*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (January 2021), p. 139-155 at p. 150-151.

¹⁰ Sinem Cengiz, “Turkey Keen to Expand Its Links with Iraq and KRG”, in *Arab News*, 22 January 2021, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1796851>.

Iraq that was held in February 2018, Turkey announced a pledge of 5 billion US dollars credit facility and 50 million US dollars project-based assistance.¹¹ At the time of al-Kadhimi's visit to Turkey in 2019, the overall trade between the two countries was about 9 billion US dollars, and the aim was set to increase it to 20 billion US dollars.¹² Despite the pandemic, that objective was surpassed with 20.7 billion US dollars in trade volumes registered at the end of 2020, making Iraq Turkey's fourth trading partner and Turkey Iraq's third export destination.¹³ In addition to trade, there has been more emphasis recently on increasing investment. Finally, despite instability and insecurity Turkish contractors have taken up 1,034 projects valued at 31 billion US dollars.¹⁴

Turkey has been pushing for the opening of other border crossings to Iraq, which would tie Turkey directly to the regions of the central government in Ovaköy-Fishabur and Derecik-Meregesur. But this has not been realised so far. Turkey's proposal to open new border crossings is also linked with the Istanbul-to-Basra railway and road project. There seem to be bureaucratic obstacles that affect bilateral economic relations negatively. In order to deal with such barriers, a meeting of trade ministers in 2021 led to the formation of a joint committee.¹⁵

In addition to the limitations originating from bilateral relations, such as Turkey's cross-border struggle with the PKK and the water issue, there are also possible constraints arising from Iraq itself. The possibility of intra-Iraqi tensions and conflicts can limit Turkey's developing ties with Iraq. Turkey has been careful to give the message that it does not approach its relations with the central government and the KRG in zero-sum terms. All the delegations that visit Iraq make sure to include Erbil in addition to Baghdad in their visits. The high-level economic meeting that was held in Istanbul in November 2021

¹¹ Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs website: *Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu's visit to Kuwait to attend the International Counter-DEASH Coalition Foreign Ministers Meeting and the International Conference for Reconstruction of Iraq*, 12-14 February 2018, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-mevlut-cavusoglunun-kuveyti-ziyareti-12-subat_en.en.mfa.

¹² Bilgay Duman, "Türkiye-Irak ilişkilerinde yeniden ekonomi" [Back to economy in Turkey-Iraq relations], in *Rûdaw*, 28 November 2021, <https://www.rudaw.net/turkish/opinion/28112021>.

¹³ Gökhan Ergöçün, "Turkish-Iraqi Business Circles Meet in Istanbul", in *Anadolu Agency*, 19 November 2021, <http://v.aa.com.tr/2425429>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Dilan Sirwan, "Iraq, Turkey to Form Joint Economic Committee", in *Rûdaw*, 19 August 2021, <https://www.rudaw.net/english/business/190820211>.

also included government officials and business representatives from the KRG. Nevertheless, any deterioration of relations between the central government and Erbil can put limitations on burgeoning relations. Similarly, increasing instability in Iraq could also limit possibilities for cooperation. The attempts to form a new government have failed since the elections in October 2021 and this not only creates a political crisis but also prevents any effective solution to Iraq's mounting problems. Finally, the presence of other regional powers in Iraq may have an impact. Other regional powers may try to hamper Turkey-Iraqi cooperation if they see it challenging their interests in Iraq. Furthermore, Iraq could become an arena for regional conflicts as demonstrated by recent Iranian attacks in the KRG region due to claims by Iran about increasing Israeli presence there.

4.3 Domestic debates in Turkey

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Turkey's Iraq policy has tended to slip from domestic debates as, for instance, the Syrian issue has largely come to dominate news cycles and debates. Thus, a visit by a delegation headed by one of the vice-chairs from the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP is the Turkish acronym), to the KRG in September 2021 came as a surprise. The delegation visited Erbil and Kirkuk and met with officials from the KRG as well as other political parties, including the Turkmen Front. The visit was portrayed by the media close to the ruling AKP government as an effort by the CHP to attract the Kurdish vote in Turkey in light of the upcoming elections.¹⁶ However, irrespective of its domestic politics dimension, the visit presented some signals about the CHP's foreign policy vision on two issues that have been of interest and questions as to whether there would be a significant shift in Turkey's policy towards Iraq if the CHP-led opposition comes to power.

The first question has been whether Turkey's close relations with the KRG – which have intensified under the AKP especially since 2008, although with a two-year setback in response to the independence referendum of 2017 – would

¹⁶ Özel Haber, "CHP Erbil'e neden gitti?" [Why did the CHP visit Erbil?], in *A Haber*, 7 September 2021, <https://www.ahaber.com.tr/ozel-haberler/2021/09/07/chp-erbile-neden-gitti-barzani-gorusmesinin-arka-planini-a-haberde-anlatti-tek-nedeni-siyaset-muhendisligi>.

continue or whether Turkey would return to its previous policy of isolating and even strangling the KRG. The second issue is whether Turkey would continue to be a significant actor in the Middle East including in Iraq and, if so, what kind of actor it would be. In other words, would Turkey “withdraw” from the Middle East if the opposition comes to power, as is sometimes claimed by the AKP? The visit provided some answers to these questions. The CHP, the main opposition party and the architect of the opposition bloc, the so-called Nation Alliance (*Millet İttifakı*), declared through this visit that they are in favour of continuing close relations with the KRG and that they would continue to be engaged in Turkey’s immediate Middle East neighbourhood. More importantly, this engagement would be based on dialogue and cooperation rather than military engagements. The CHP came up with a new policy proposal of establishing a Middle East Peace and Cooperation Organisation (OBİT is the Turkish acronym), which may initially be composed of Turkey and its immediate Middle East neighbours, including Iraq.¹⁷ It has been reported that the CHP delegation also explained this proposal to the KRG authorities during the visit.

Overall, although there may be some shifts in foreign policy towards the Middle East in general and Iraq in particular, if the opposition comes to power in the upcoming elections it is safe to argue that there will also be important continuities. For instance, one can expect continuation of close relations with the KRG as well as efforts to develop relations with the central government. Beyond that there is still not a comprehensive programme by the opposition bloc on their foreign policy vision.

4.4 Possibilities for Turkey–EU cooperation in Iraq

Given the evolving geostrategic and economic context in and around Iraq there seem to be some areas of possible cooperation emerging between Turkey, the EU and certain members states. In light of the previous analysis, we can identify the following areas of cooperation, some of which also entail challenges that could spark competition.

¹⁷ For an explanation of OBİT by a former ambassador and current vice president of CHP responsible for Foreign Policy, Ünal Çeviköz, see “OBİT giriřimi, huzurlu bir Ortadoęu’nun güvencesidir” [OBİT initiative is the assurance of a peaceful Middle East], in *PolitikYol*, 20 September 2021, <https://wp.me/p839bE-M8Z>.

The first area is security. As already mentioned, the expanded NATO mission provides a significant framework for cooperation. Turkey as a NATO member has supported this expansion and is ready to work with its NATO allies for the common aim of stability in Iraq through strengthening Iraqi institutions and forces. Turkey, like its allies, has been supporting the territorial integrity and political independence of Iraq. Despite the potential for cooperation in the security realm, however, one can also identify possible tensions as to Turkey's own security threats emanating from Iraq. It is expected that Turkey would insist that its allies take these security concerns into consideration and include Turkey's fight with the PKK within the framework of fighting terrorism. Non-responsiveness to these concerns may lead to tensions.

The second area is economic reconstruction. As a neighbour of Iraq and considering its economic ties with this country, especially with the KRG region, Turkey is well-positioned to take an active part in reconstruction and development projects. In addition to the construction sector, Turkish businesses are interested in energy, agriculture and mining. There could be opportunities for joint projects with EU member states in these areas as all the parties have their own advantages and disadvantages. Again, there may also be potential competition in terms of securing projects and eventual economic returns.

The third area of possible cooperation could be the water issue and environmental projects. The literature demonstrates the positive impact of the accession negotiations on Turkey's water quality management and environmental protection, as reflected in Turkey's policies in the Euphrates-Tigris basin.¹⁸ Although the EU has lost its anchor vis-à-vis Turkey since the freezing of accession negotiations, the EU could still provide technical expertise and institutional support for bilateral mechanisms established between Turkey and Iraq on the water issue. The EU could also support the establishment of a trilateral mechanism that would include Iran in water management. Iran for a long time externalised the cross-border water issue, claiming this was an issue between Turkey and Iraq and criticising Turkey for Iraq's water scarcity.

¹⁸ Burcin Demirbilek and David Benson, "Between Emulation and Assemblage: Analysing WFD Policy Transfer Outcomes in Turkey", in *Water*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2019), Article 324, <https://doi.org/10.3390/w11020324>.

However, recently Iraq has begun to openly blame Iranian water policies, and there have been some calls to include Iran in the bilateral mechanisms that have been established between Turkey and Iraq.¹⁹

Finally, there could be possibilities of cooperation in building a regional security framework as Iraq itself is a significant actor for regional cooperation in establishing platforms for regional dialogue. The EU has experience in promoting regional cooperation, and so does Turkey. Specifically, Turkey launched an Iraq and Its Neighbours Initiative first in 2003 just before the war, and reinvigorated it in 2007 and 2008 in an enlarged form, including Egypt in addition to Iraq, Iran and Syria, to discuss issues such as border security, refugees and energy.²⁰ The region needs such nascent initiatives by regional actors in different issue areas, and the EU as an external actor is well placed to support such initiatives.

Recently some of the larger challenges to cooperation between Turkey and the EU in general have started to soften. Although Turkey's relations with France had been highly competitive in the MENA region and the eastern Mediterranean, and French bilateralism in Iraq was also problematic for Turkey, there has been some understanding recently between the two countries on managing competition in their relations and increasing dialogue. Furthermore, especially after the start of the Ukraine war, Turkey's relations with NATO and EU member states have witnessed renewed attention and growth. This rapprochement could be reflected in their relations in Iraq as well.

An important uncertainty continues to be the future of the JCPOA talks. Multiple ballistic missile attacks on an area close to the US consulate in Erbil on 13 March 2022, claimed by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, demonstrated that Iraq could easily be turned into an area of escalation between Iran and the US and its allies. Thus, developments in the JCPOA talks – and notably whether

¹⁹ Arife Delibaş, "Iran Reactions to the Inauguration of the Ilisu Dam", in *IRAM Opinions*, 17 November 2021, <https://iramcenter.org/en/irans-reactions-to-the-inauguration-of-the-ilisu-dam>; Khazan Jangiz, "Turkey, Iran Say Will Cooperate with Iraq on Water Issues", in *Rûdaw*, 13 March 2021, <https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/130320214>; Muhammad Jawad Adib, "Iran, Iraq Exchange Accusations over Water Flow", in *Al-Monitor*, 25 January 2022, <https://www.al-monitor.com/node/46627>.

²⁰ Meliha Benli Altunışık, "The Role of Turkey in the Middle East", in *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2009*, p. 210-213, <https://www.iemed.org/publication/the-role-of-turkey-in-the-middle-east>.

the agreement this time would be a comprehensive one that also touches upon Iran's presence in other areas in the Middle East – will have significant repercussions not only on Iraq itself but also on how other external powers, including Turkey and the EU member states, engage with Iraq in future.

Ultimately, as a key neighbour of Iraq, Turkey maintains a presence and influence and has significant strategic and economic interests in the country. All this may mean possibilities of working together with the EU and interested member states, some of which are increasing their own engagements with Baghdad in the wake of a diminishing presence and resolve of the US. Both Turkey and the EU share common concerns in achieving the aim of helping to construct a stable, secure and prosperous Iraq with territorial integrity and political unity; and both support recent efforts by Iraq to promote de-escalatory regional dialogue frameworks and negotiations. On this basis, and while tensions and possible areas of competition or disagreement remain, there is room for Turkey and the EU to further enhance their dialogue and cooperation with regard to Iraq, while coordinating policy approaches to also prepare for unexpected shocks or disruptions both within Iraq and in its neighbourhood, given that both sides maintain a fundamental interest in mitigating such eventualities to preserve stability and their respective interests vis-à-vis Iraq.

5. Energy, Delimitation and Geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean: Competition or Cooperation between Turkey and the EU?

by Mitat Çelikpala

The Eastern Mediterranean has occupied a prominent place on international security and global political agendas in recent decades. The discovery of offshore energy resources, primarily natural gas, in Cypriot, Israeli, Egyptian, Palestinian and Lebanese waters since 2009 was viewed as a game-changer in this sub-region. Those resources were initially seen as a newly introduced element that could change the existing energy and power equation in the area and constitute a means to bring various parties in the Middle East and Europe together and potentially provide new modes of integration and cooperation beneficial for all sides. Nevertheless, competition and recriminations, as opposed to cooperation and integration, have come to dominate relations between riparian states in the Eastern Mediterranean. Since 2018, a more general geopolitical and strategic confrontation has emerged, transforming the Eastern Mediterranean into “the eye of a [gathering] geopolitical storm” with widespread implications at both the regional and international levels.¹

This tense competition was elevated to a new level of escalation with the outbreak in April 2019 of a new phase of the civil war in Libya, the agreements signed between various regional players on maritime boundaries,² reciprocal

¹ Michaël Tanchum, “How Did the Eastern Mediterranean Become the Eye of a Geopolitical Storm”, in *Foreign Policy*, 18 August 2020, <https://bit.ly/2Ydgny3>.

² Turkey recognises the northern part of the island of Cyprus as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). The non-recognition of the TRNC by the international community, which Turkey recognises as the legitimate government of the Turkish Cypriot community, is a political challenge to be settled by the two communities living on the island of Cyprus. The current situation cannot be interpreted as not recognising or disregarding the rights of the Turkish Cypriot community concerning the future of the Island. The Republic of Cyprus (ROC) and Egypt were the first countries in the Eastern Mediterranean to conclude an agreement delimiting their exclusive economic zones (EEZs) in 2003. The ROC and Lebanon reached an agreement in January 2007 but it has not yet been ratified by the Lebanese parliament. The ROC signed another EEZ delimitation agreement with Israel in December 2010. Greece has also signed successive agreements with Egypt, Italy and Albania in 2020. Turkey signed agreements with the Turkish

and mutually exclusive NAVTEX announcements³ and high-pitched political statements made in the shadow of increasing numbers of military exercises involving regional and extra-regional players. In sum, the Eastern Mediterranean turned into a ticking geopolitical time bomb with a potential of spill-over effects for broader conflicts.

Recent developments ranging from the Libyan civil war to the Abraham Accords brokered by the US Trump administration and involving Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain (later joined by Morocco and Sudan) have created a space in which the strategic approaches of the Eastern Mediterranean, Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula have become more interwoven than ever before.⁴ With the beginning of the Biden administration in the US, increased focus on the long-term security implications of these developments as well as mounting socio-economic stress in numerous regional states led to a hesitant diminishing of tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean. One element of this involves Turkey's new approach to normalising its relations with Israel and Egypt (as well as the UAE) and the resumption of Turkish-Greek exploratory talks.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine represents another important game-changer, making the global and regional security environment more complex, with some direct implications for the Eastern Mediterranean. Reacting to the Russian invasion, European actors and the US imposed extensive sanctions on Russia and mobilised to diminish Europe's excessive dependence on Russian energy imports. In parallel with the development of Europe's Strategic Compass document,⁵ the EU is struggling to develop a more permanent strategic

Cypriot community in September 2011 and with Libya in late November 2019.

³ Navigational telex or NAVTEX is a maritime communications system that allows ships to inform other vessels about their presence in an area as well as other information. Throughout the summer of 2020, Turkey and Greece announced reciprocal NAVTEX for seismic research activities or military drills in the Eastern Mediterranean. These declarations and the deployment of warships, leading the other actors to mobilise their own warships, further escalated the situation rather than calming things down. "What Is a NAVTEX and Why Did Turkey Issue One to Greece?", in *TRT World*, 23 July 2020, <https://www.trtworld.com/article/38358>.

⁴ Yoel Guzansky and Gallia Lindenstrauss, "The Growing Alignment Between the Gulf and the Eastern Mediterranean", in *MEI Articles*, 25 May 2021, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/growing-alignment-between-gulf-and-eastern-mediterranean>.

⁵ European External Action Service (EEAS), *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence. For a European Union that Protects Its Citizens, Values and Interests and Contributes to International Peace and Security*, 21 March 2022, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-0_en.

posture vis-à-vis the EU's eastern neighbourhood as well as in the Eastern Mediterranean, an objective that requires increased cooperation with regional partners. This new posture may enhance Turkey's importance as a partner for the EU and a contributor to Europe's common security and defence as well as in the domain of energy security.

5.1 Trajectories of cooperation and competition in the Eastern Mediterranean

It is possible to identify three sets of actors involved in the spiral of competition and cooperation that has dominated the Eastern Mediterranean. The first group is European or the westernmost members of the geopolitical equation, namely Greece and the Republic of Cyprus (ROC). The course of events also leads to increased engagement by France and Italy in the area, although Rome and Paris have not always been aligned in the Eastern Mediterranean. The EU, in turn, has defined the Eastern Mediterranean as an area of strategic importance for its security and stability. As a result, the EU has emerged as an involved actor, seeking to develop policy perspectives to defend and serve its member countries' common interests.

The Levantine members of the Eastern Mediterranean, Israel and Egypt as well as Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon, form the second group. It is hard to say that these nations, who share a common geographical space, have similar interests and expectations. Almost all of them are immersed in their own internal problems and do not appear to be particularly engaged in forms of energy competition for the time being, although their inclusion in efforts to support regional cooperation remains essential. Other involved parties from the Persian Gulf, particularly the UAE and Qatar, can also be considered within this second cluster. The last group comprises non-regional international actors: the US, Russia and China.

The 2009–11 gas discoveries in Israeli and Cypriot waters laid the foundations for an energy relationship between Israel, the ROC and Greece around shared interests. The relationship deepened further with the participation of Egypt after the 2015 discovery of new natural gas deposits in the Zhor field by the

Italian energy giant Eni. Those actors then moved to establish the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) during the tripartite summit of Egyptian, ROC and Greek leaders held in October 2018 in Crete, Greece. The Energy Ministers of the ROC, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Italy, Palestine and Jordan gathered in Cairo in January 2019, backed by the US and the EU, to discuss the structure of the EMGF, and declared their intentions to establish the Forum.⁶ Then in March 2019, leaders from Greece, the ROC and Israel signed an agreement on the proposed East Med Pipeline with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.⁷ The final step was the participation of Egypt, which hosted the headquarters of the EMGF in Cairo in October 2019. The Forum took on institutional form in September 2020 and transformed into an international organisation, whose membership includes Greece, the ROC, Egypt, Israel, Italy, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. France joined the EMGF in March 2021, while the US and EU are recognised as observers (the UAE similarly had applied to join as an observer but its application was vetoed by the Palestinian Authority). While officially focussed on energy cooperation, the EMGF raised significant concern in Turkey, due to Ankara's exclusion from the grouping and the fact that its members also began to engage in security and defence cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean.

5.2 Turkey and the Eastern Mediterranean: The Blue Homeland Doctrine

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For Turkey, the Eastern Mediterranean means more than natural gas. The maritime zone delimitation has been the primary source of discomfort. The Turkish argument is based on Turkey's sovereign rights in its continental shelf⁸

⁶ For the official webpage see <https://emgf.org>.

⁷ The planned EastMed pipeline, a 6 billion euro project, was meant to ship gas from deposits offshore Israel and Egypt through approximately 1,900 km pipeline running via Cyprus and Greece to European markets. The pipeline was expected to carry 10 billion cubic metres of gas per year (sufficient to satisfy roughly 10 per cent of Europe's demand). Simon Papagiorcopulo, "Leaders of Cyprus, Greece and Israel to Sign Agreement on EastMed Pipeline", in *Foreign Brief*, 20 March 2019, <https://foreignbrief.com/?p=54184>.

⁸ "Turkey, which has the longest continental coastline in the Eastern Mediterranean, has rejected maritime boundary claims by Greece and the [ROC], stressing that these excessive claims violate the sovereign rights of both Turkey and the [Turkish Cypriot community]. [...] The disagreements over the boundaries of Greek territorial waters and the ownership of particular islands or islets in the Aegean Sea [should be added to this]. In addition to these matters, Turkey also argues that several other related

and the protection of the equal rights of the Turkish Cypriot community.⁹ From this perspective, the Eastern Mediterranean issue poses two particularly awkward questions for Turkey: How to uphold Turkey in the regional balance and end its increasing isolation and exclusion from the EMGF? Secondly, how to manage Turkey's relations with the EU, avoiding a further worsening of ties?

The initial answer to Ankara's strained relations with all related actors in the Eastern Mediterranean between 2019 and 2021 arrived in the form of the famous concept of Blue Homeland or *Mavi Vatan*, which the other parties define as Turkey's ambitious plan for geopolitical supremacy in the Eastern Mediterranean.¹⁰ This strategy rests on the pillars of defining, safeguarding and developing Turkey's maritime rights and national interests regarding maritime jurisdiction areas (the territorial waters, the continental shelf and the exclusive economic zone or EEZ). Additionally, *Mavi Vatan* encompasses secondary doctrines such as the deployment of the navy, the development of a domestic defence industry, the use of seismic research vessels and drilling rights, the development of support bases for the national and allies' fleets and legal instruments and arguments for signing boundary agreements with other littoral states.

This strategy, endorsed with a chronic siege mentality (believing itself to be surrounded by hostile forces that threaten its core interests), led Turkish decision-makers to react by employing "gunboat diplomacy" to protect Turkish interests and prerogatives. The emergence of the EMGF is viewed in Ankara

issues, such as the sovereignty or demilitarised status of certain Greek islands, remains unresolved and needs to be addressed. Beyond that, how the EEZs in the Eastern Mediterranean are defined is also on the table." Mitat Çelikpala, "Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean: Between Energy and Geopolitics", in Valeria Talbot (ed.), *The Scramble for the Eastern Mediterranean. Energy and Geopolitics*, Milan, Ledizioni, 2021, p. 46-60 at p. 51, <https://www.ispionline.it/en/node/31250>.

⁹ For Turkey, "the Turkish Cypriots have equal rights and should have a say in managing the island's resources, independently of the outstanding Cyprus problem. [...] Turkey objects to the EEZ claims of the [ROC] on the grounds that [...] these claims deny the co-ownership rights of the Turkish Cypriot community, [...] do not respect the rights and interests of all stakeholders [and] distort the equitable delimitation of maritime boundaries under the principles of international law." See, Mustafa Çıraklı, "High Time for Dialogue in the Eastern Mediterranean", in *Horizons*, No. 20 (Winter 2022), p. 230-240 at p. 232, <https://www.cirsd.org/en/horizons/horizons-winter-issue-20/high-time-for-dialogue-in-the-eastern-mediterranean>.

¹⁰ See Cem Gürdeniz, "What Is the Blue Homeland in the 21st Century?", in United World International, 31 July 2020, <https://unitedworldint.com/?p=12952>; Lorenza Vita, "What Turkey Wants", in *InsideOver*, 8 September 2020, <https://www.insideover.com/?p=288723>.

as an anti-Turkey grouping, further reinforcing this siege mentality. President Erdoğan's assertion that "it is absolutely not a coincidence that those who seek to exclude us from the eastern Mediterranean are the same invaders as the ones who attempted to invade our homeland a century ago"¹¹ underscores such Turkish anxieties. The dramatic political transformation in Syria, Libya and the Caucasus together with deepened disagreements regarding the resolution of those issues between Turkey and its Western allies also served as a catalyst as Turkish elites perceived rising security challenges as a threat to Turkey's sovereignty and territorial integrity but felt that Ankara's partners in the West were unforthcoming with regard to Turkish sensitivities.

Energy, an integral part and even a determinant of Turkish foreign and security policies, emerges as another pillar of Turkish policies after those of maritime and regional geopolitical rivalry. The main reason behind Ankara's sour relations with Cairo and Tel Aviv was not the natural gas exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean. In the beginning, there was even a consensus on the transportation of natural gas to be produced by these countries via Turkey to European markets. The primary goal has been to maintain Turkey's position as an energy hub between the east-west and north-south corridors. Turkish decision makers appraised the ROC and Greece as the two main factors that turned the Eastern Mediterranean-related issues into an opportunity for pushing for the isolation of Turkey. Other political differences with Ankara also caused Israel and Egypt to engage with other regional actors over energy cooperation, which was initially exclusionary in nature but increasingly became isolationist vis-à-vis Turkey with the passage of time. Ankara's transition towards a hardened approach supported by military discourse came after the ROC and Greece signed EEZ agreements with the other littoral states without consulting Turkey. Additionally, the idea that Ankara was no longer considered the only export hub for Eastern Mediterranean gas added to Ankara's efforts to retaliate through limited naval actions.¹² The developing energy alliance in the Eastern Mediterranean has also threatened to upend Turkey's energy

¹¹ Andrew Wilks, "Turkey Marks 1922 Victory over Greece amid Med Tensions", in *AP News*, 30 August 2020, <https://apnews.com/31cb00c71b98ea8944a26f6409eb33c8>.

¹² "The Turkish navy blockaded an Eni drillship before it could reach its destination on the east coast of Cyprus, [...] forcing the vessel to withdraw [...] on 23 February 2018." Mustafa Çıraklı, "High Time for Dialogue in the Eastern Mediterranean", cit., p. 234.

policy.¹³ As Turkey upped its rhetoric against the ROC and Israel (Greece and Egypt joined the EMGF later), France and the US, and less so Italy, proceeded to back the other members of the EMGF, thereby increasing Ankara's concern that its interests would be ignored. In response, Turkey deployed its gunboat diplomacy in the Eastern Mediterranean, seeking to block exploratory drilling by other members of the EMGF.

On that point, it is worth mentioning that the Turkey–GNA/Libya memorandum of understanding in November 2019¹⁴ was considered in Ankara as a significant counterbalancing move with a direct impact on the geostrategic posture in the Eastern Mediterranean. Ankara believed that with these agreements, Turkey's Eastern Mediterranean border expanded westward and the country brought its grievances over its maritime area toward the top of the international agenda. It was a strategic move against the ROC's decision to give licenses to international energy companies to search for energy resources without consulting with Turkey and the Turkish Cypriot community, and to confine Ankara to a smaller maritime zone in the Mediterranean. Ankara believed that the deal created legitimate grounds for Turkey to declare its own EEZ in the Mediterranean and prevent Athens from hammering out maritime jurisdiction deals with the ROC and Egypt.¹⁵

The *Mavi Vatan* discourse and general approach in the Eastern Mediterranean are well accepted among Turkish public opinion and the other political parties beyond the ruling coalition bloc of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Nationalist Action Party (MHP). Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the leader of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), has noted how “foreign policy is a national policy, and it has to be national. There is no party in power or the opposition in foreign policymaking”.¹⁶ Meral Akşener, the leader of the

¹³ Emre Erşen and Mitat Çelikpala, “Turkey and the Changing Energy Geopolitics of Eurasia”, in *Energy Policy*, No. 128 (May 2019), p. 584–592.

¹⁴ *Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the Government of National Accord–State of Libya on Delimitation of the Maritime Jurisdiction Areas in the Mediterranean*, 27 November 2019, <https://treaties.un.org/Pages/showDetails.aspx?objid=080000028056605a>.

¹⁵ Galip Dalay, “Turkey, Europe, and the Eastern Mediterranean: Charting a Way Out of the Current Deadlock”, in *Brookings Doha Center Policy Briefings*, January 2021, <https://brook.gs/2Mr4Jg4>; Ragıp Soylu, “Turkey and Libya Sign Maritime Deal to Counter Greek Drilling”, in *Middle East Eye*, 28 November 2019, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/node/150581>.

¹⁶ Barış Gündoğan, “CHP Genel Başkanı Kılıçdaroğlu: Dış politika Türkiye'nin çıkarları üzerine inşa edilir” [CHP Chairman Kılıçdaroğlu: foreign policy is built on Turkey's interests], in *Anadolu Agency*, 24

lyi Party, said that “we have to be in the Eastern Mediterranean for the sake of Turkey’s national interests”.¹⁷ The main difference between the government and the opposition is the tone and the means to pursue Turkey’s interests. The opposition is largely critical of the harsh rhetoric and military means adopted against other involved countries. In this, it argues that the AKP’s foreign policymaking style isolates and marginalises Turkey. It insists on more inclusive and reconciliatory policymaking and rhetoric. This narrative is clearly identifiable in Kılıçdaroğlu’s words: “We also have some basic rights in the Eastern Mediterranean, which we called Blue Homeland. The way to do this is to sit down with all countries and their leaders to establish a healthy and sincere dialogue.”¹⁸

The inclination on the part of Greece and the ROC to turn the topic into an EU issue, with the support of the US and France, was also considered a further means to marginalise Turkey.¹⁹ To create a breakthrough, Ankara largely refrained from utilising high-pitched militarised political statements against Cairo and Tel Aviv, instead focussing on Athens as the primary target. The initial Turkish tactic attempted to resolve the issue bilaterally with Greece without outside interference. This runs counter to Greece’s efforts to solve the issue, including involving newly established regional alliances and the EU, in an effort to internationalise the debate.

5.3 The EU and the Eastern Mediterranean

The EU has a significant interest in upholding its member states’ sovereignty and territorial integrity, securing its energy interests, advancing a political resolution to the conflict in Libya, and effectively managing related refugee

April 2021, <http://v.aa.com.tr/2219143>.

¹⁷ “Akşener: ‘Türkiye’nin Çıkarları İçin Doğu Akdeniz’de Olmalıyız” [Akşener: ‘We should be in the Eastern Mediterranean for Turkey’s interests’], in *Haber365*, 15 August 2020, <https://www.haber365.com.tr/amp/aksener-turkiyenin-cikarlari-icin-dogu-akdenizde-olmalyiz-h225301>.

¹⁸ “Kılıçdaroğlu Doğu Akdeniz’de bizim hakkımız var” [Kılıçdaroğlu: We have a right in the Eastern Mediterranean], in *Hürriyet*, 14 January 2020, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/kilicdaroglu-dogu-akdenizde-bizim-hakkimiz-var-41419713>.

¹⁹ US President Donald Trump’s signature of the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act, which put Greece and the ROC at the forefront of US policy in the region in December 2019, was also alarming for Ankara, prompting it to take some strong steps for the sake of Turkish interests in the Eastern Mediterranean.

and security challenges. This approach towards Turkey is clear in all European Council statements and documents since 2019. These call for constructive cooperation and reiterate warnings to Ankara to engage “constructively” with the EU and its member states.²⁰ The EU, in order to show its solidarity with its member states, namely Greece and the ROC, adopted a framework regime of restrictive measures against Turkey in late 2019 and reiterated its solidarity with Greece and the ROC. These measures targeted natural and legal persons responsible for or involved in illegal drilling for hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean²¹ but did not affect the Turkish position on the Eastern Mediterranean.

While there is consensus among EU states that Turkey’s actions in the Eastern Mediterranean run counter to broader EU interests, they diverge on how to best respond to Ankara.²² There has been a heated discussion in the EU since the European Council’s December 2020 meeting on whether the EU should have imposed new sanctions on Turkey. The leaders could not make a decision and postponed it by reiterating European willingness to explore the possibility of implementing a positive agenda with Turkey. This indicates a lack of consensus among EU member states vis-à-vis Turkey, despite Greece and ROC expectations of implementing harsher sanctions on Ankara. For Ankara, France, Italy and Germany come into focus as the main actors within the EU.

Ankara views Paris as the outsider who has desires to dominate the Eastern Mediterranean by establishing and strengthening military cooperation with Greece, the ROC, Egypt and Israel.²³ France’s outspoken position, sending its warships and planes to take part in joint exercises with Greece and the ROC and venturing with its research vessels a naval escorts into disputed waters,

²⁰ Zachary Paikin and Caroline Rose, “Turkey and the Eastern Mediterranean. Geopolitical Europe’s Pathway to Strategic Autonomy?”, in *CEPS Policy Insights*, No. 9 (May 2021), p. 9, <https://www.ceps.eu/?p=33276>.

²¹ Council of the European Union, *Council Decision (CFSP) 2019/1894 of 11 November 2019 Concerning Restrictive Measures in View of Turkey’s Unauthorised Drilling Activities in the Eastern Mediterranean*, <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec/2019/1894/oj>.

²² Laura Lale Kabis-Kechrid, “Conflicts in the EastMed. From Germany’s and France’s Conflicting Strategies to a Dual Approach”, in *Briefings de l’Ifri*, 3 September 2021, <https://www.ifri.org/en/node/20427>.

²³ Antoine Michon, “Building European Strategic Autonomy vs. Turkish Strategic Depth. Macron’s Diplomatic Gamble”, in *Briefings de l’Ifri*, 22 October 2022, <https://www.ifri.org/en/node/21231>.

is deemed an ambitious expansionist move against Turkey's interests.²⁴ In this equation, Germany, with its conciliatory approach, is seen as a more constructive and potent mediator between the EU and Turkey. Ankara sees German mediation within the EU favourably. The new chancellor is seen as a neutral name to shape Berlin's and Brussels' new perspective towards Turkey, following successful diplomatic interventions with Angela Merkel at the helm.²⁵ Italy, as the other player in the EU and the Mediterranean, could also play a pivotal role in a mutually beneficial relationship with Ankara and an oscillating partnership with Paris. Ankara sees Rome as a potential and constructive partner as well as a balancer against Paris with the increasing French involvement in the broader Eastern Mediterranean, but especially in Libya.

These three EU states must bridge their differences and work together to advance common EU positions. In this regard, Paris would do well to compartmentalise its differences with Turkey. Paris could also use its close ties with Athens and other EMGF states to emphasise the importance of dialogue. Berlin, meanwhile, should continue to use its economic and political leverage with Turkey to ensure Ankara remains committed to its de-escalatory approach and seek ways to inject a positive dynamic into the overall EU–Turkey relationship that is sorely lacking. Rome, based on its traditional foreign policy objective of having stable and continuous relations with all Mediterranean nations, could facilitate its already established economic and cultural ties with Turkey to develop an inclusive and fair solution between Turkey and the EU.

5.4 Promoting de-escalation: The search for normalisation

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Since late 2020 the Eastern Mediterranean has been witnessing an era of de-escalation after an almost four-year period of high tensions. There are diverse

²⁴ Jana Jabour, "France vs. Turkey in the EastMed. A Geopolitical Rivalry between a 'Keeper' of the Old Order and Challenging Emergent Power", in *Briefings de l'Ifri*, 6 May 2021, <https://www.ifri.org/en/node/19487>.

²⁵ At the height of the 2020 Greece–Turkey standoff, German diplomacy averted a complete breakdown of relations. It is also well-known that Athens and Berlin clashed at a European Council meeting when Athens demanded a statement to welcome the 11th-hour deal it had reached with Egypt, demarcating the two countries' exclusive zones. Much to Germany's fury, the deal was announced a day before the scheduled announcement of exploratory talks between Ankara and Athens that Berlin had brokered. Mustafa Çıraklı, "High Time for Dialogue in the Eastern Mediterranean", cit., p. 238.

global and regional drivers behind the shift. First of all, economic and financial crises triggered by Covid-19 and increasing energy prices forced all actors to revise their confrontational approach. The new alignments in the wake of the Abraham Accords, the incoming Biden presidency and the success of the counter-revolutionary forces in the Persian Gulf across the post-Arab-uprisings MENA all played a role as drivers towards bridging the divisions in the region.

Against this backdrop, Ankara stepped back from its coercive and unilateral diplomacy and instead undertook steps towards cooperation and de-escalation in its foreign and security policy seeking a “new normalisation” with neighbours and allies. This policy turn is backed by a strong belief in Turkey that, as much as the resort to military instruments has helped Ankara’s interests, these have also reached the limits of their efficiency. In this domain, Turkey has moved towards a more diplomatic approach, keeping its hard power options in the background while seeking to reach political deals with other stakeholders, including the UAE, Armenia, Saudi Arabia, Israel and Egypt. Also in this context, Ankara has sought to repair relations with the EU and the US, demonstrating a willingness to open a new page in relations with Turkey’s Western partners given a growing understanding that such relations would help Turkish efforts to resolve Eastern Mediterranean disputes with Israel, Egypt, Greece and the ROC. Israeli President Isaac Herzog’s landmark visit to Ankara on 9–10 March 2022 is part of this new era in bilateral relations.

Ankara has openly called for an “Eastern Mediterranean Conference” to find a win-win formula serving the interests of all parties to resolve pending issues through peaceful means. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu wrote an article for the Greek *Kathimerini* on 15 September 2020 calling for diplomacy without any preconditions between Turkey and Greece. He stressed that the two nations “have always had only two choices: lock horns in a way that hurts both of us or find a win-win formula to define a mutually beneficial way forward”.²⁶ This approach is also in line with the European Council’s idea of convening multilateral conferences for the Eastern Mediterranean. There is a convergence

²⁶ Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, “Our Preference in Eastern Mediterranean Is Diplomacy without Preconditions”, in *Kathimerini*, 15 September 2020, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/sayin-bakanimizin-kathimerini-makalesi.en.mfa>. Also see “Turkey’s Doors Wide Open for Diplomacy on East Med: Turkish FM”, in *Hürriyet Daily News*, 3 December 2020, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-doors-wide-open-for-diplomacy-on-east-med-turkish-fm-160573>.

of policy proposals and interests among the parties. If the parties develop a joint vision on sharing the maritime areas, energy cooperation can quickly become an area of cooperation. Parties may move forward within the EMGF and find a means to include Turkey as a full and active member, or develop a new mechanism to work together. Greek and ROC authorities are also ending their policy of calling for sanctions against Turkey. Moreover, ROC President Nikos Anastasiades “even spoke about Turkey’s participation in the energy planning of the region when a settlement is achieved”.²⁷ In such a case, he said that “Turkey would have a say and role to play [concerning] its participation in the deliberations about the exploitation of natural wealth”.²⁸ This is a sea change and the key to unlocking the Eastern Mediterranean conundrum with some hope of positive progress in the region.

In sum, extending the diplomatic front through compromises rather than conflicts is the most rational choice for all involved actors. This depends on supporting the approach with a new set of reconciliation initiatives and taking fruitful steps. All capitals have no other pathway than to take diplomatic steps with the necessary political flexibility, including fast transformations and close monitoring of diplomatic approaches. Success lies in diplomacy and expanding alliances, and it is here that much potential remains to be explored and exploited by the EU and Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Conclusions

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Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has impacted the atmosphere of de-escalation and provided a new impetus to enhanced cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean. The war has raised the global and regional stakes and increased Turkey’s value for both the EU and NATO. Due to its geopolitical location, Turkey has

²⁷ “This was made clear [by both] President Anastasiades and his new foreign minister Ioannis Kasoulides. Anastasiades’ confidence-building proposals envisage the handing over of the fenced area of Varosha to the UN, [the opening of Ercan] airport to direct flights under the UN, [...] and the opening of Famagusta port to foreign trade, under EU supervision. With direct flights and lifting of the trade embargo, the isolation of the Turkish would end. In exchange, he had asked to implement the additional Ankara protocol, opening Turkey’s ports to [ROC]-flagged ships and allowing [ROC] planes into Turkish airspace. These proposals were “an indication of a positive step in our efforts to create the suitable and positive climate”, he said. “Our View: We’ve Admitted the Folly of Sanctions, but Is New Approach Too Late?”, in *Cyprus Mail*, 2 February 2022, <https://cyprus-mail.com/?p=502286>.

²⁸ Ibid.

become more visible in the east and south of the transatlantic security areas, and the need for unity against the Russian threat brings opportunities to resolve disputes between the parties in the Eastern Mediterranean as well. The solidarity-oriented agenda within the EU and NATO creates a suitable political environment for constructive talks between Turkey and the EU, as long as all sides agree on the approach and sequencing of talks and interests.

In this context, energy could once more play a catalyst role for bringing parties back to the cooperation scenario. Although energy trade is not among the sanctions imposed by the EU member states against Russia so far, the EU prioritises diversification for decreasing dependency on Russia. The need for new and alternative natural gas resources has brought the Eastern Mediterranean back to the agenda. The natural gas explorations in the Eastern Mediterranean were not the main reason behind Ankara's sour relations with other regional actors. In the beginning, there was even a consensus on the transportation of natural gas to be produced by these countries via Turkey to European markets. This aligns with the role – being an energy hub – that Turkey has defined for itself. Russia's aggressive approach has the potential to revive the idea of energy cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean and bring Turkey-centred transportation scenarios to the forefront. The already established infrastructure in Turkey can flow the Eastern Mediterranean, Iraqi and other alternative resources to Europe via the Trans Adriatic Pipeline. In short, there is a high potential for convergence of energy interests, which also depends on a de-escalation of relations between Turkey and its neighbours in the Eastern Mediterranean.

However, we should remember that “any temporary reduction of tensions should not lead to complacency, as the Eastern Mediterranean conflict is likely to cycle through escalation, de-escalation and re-escalation”.²⁹ Instead, the EU and the other concerned parties “should utilise this narrow window of opportunity to advance a more imaginative policy and plan for the Eastern Mediterranean, which can serve the collective security, economic and energy interests of all main protagonists”.³⁰ In this regard, the EU should play the

²⁹ Galip Dalay, “Turkey, Europe, and the Eastern Mediterranean: Charting a Way Out of the Current Deadlock”, cit., p. 10.

³⁰ Ibid.

facilitator for an Eastern Mediterranean conference or open a window of opportunity for Turkey's accession into the EMGF to explore ways to manage the disputes and cooperate.³¹ But one of the decisive factors for Turkey's path will be the political environment within that country. Turkey is currently moving towards critical parliamentary and presidential elections by mid-2023, and the opposition's choice of a candidate against Erdoğan, who aims to run for a third term, remains crucial. A problematic selection process awaits us under the influence of severe economic conditions and ongoing tensions throughout Turkey.

³¹ Ibid.

6. EU–Turkey Trajectories of Cooperation and Competition over Libya

by Ezgi Uzun

Marred by intense political instability since the fall of the Gaddafi regime in 2011, Libya is fast approaching another crossroads. The German-led Berlin Conference on Libya of 2020, the subsequent ceasefire between the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli and General Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) in Tobruk, and the agreement on an interim unity government under prime minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh in 2021 generated hope for a peaceful political settlement in the country. However, the inability of Libyan political elites to meet the 24 December 2021 deadline for presidential elections has cast doubts on the process, with the vote postponed indefinitely.

The electoral impasse has led to a series of interlocking crises since February 2022, further complicating the diplomatic process. First, Fathi Bashagha took steps to form a new government on 10 February on the grounds that Dbeibeh's term had officially ended in December.¹ While Bashagha has been endorsed by Tobruk-based parliamentarians with a vote of confidence, Dbeibeh refuses to hand over power unless a democratically elected prime minister takes office. This led to another legitimacy crisis in the country which currently has two rival executives in office. Secondly, Bashagha's intention to take over the government in the capital city of Tripoli led to another wave of militia activism in Tripoli and Misrata in support of Dbeibeh, thereby enhancing the risk of militia conflict in the country. The prospect of resumed violence further increased when the eastern representatives of the 5+5 Joint Military Committee announced, on 9 April, the suspension of negotiations with their western counterparts until Dbeibeh steps down.² Even more alarming was their call for Khalifa Haftar to

¹ "Libya'da Taraflar Tansiyonu Artırıyor! Doğu Akdeniz Anlaşmasını Etkiler mi?" [Parties increase tension in Libya! Will it affect Turkey's Eastern Mediterranean agreement?], in *Akşam*, 18 February 2022, <https://www.aksam.com.tr/dunya/libyada-taraflar-tansiyonu-artiriyor-turkiyenin-dogu-akdeniz-anlasmasini-etkiler-mi/haber-1244412>.

² "Libya's 5+5 JMC Wants to Stop Oil Exports and Halt Domestic Flights", in *The Libya Update*, 9 April 2022, <https://libyaupdate.com/?p=8685>.

terminate oil production and export activities and to close the land route and air connections between the east and the west of the country.³ In the following weeks, armed groups attacked important oil production and shipping facilities and their workers, thereby leading to a shutdown of important facilities including al-Feel, Zueitina and Sharara with the National Oil Corporation declaring a force majeure.⁴ The decrease in Libyan oil exports came amidst increased international concern over hydrocarbon markets since the outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine. Given the presence of foreign powers, corruption, grave economic problems and the migration crisis persistently plaguing the country, stability in Libya looks extremely fragile, and international cooperation remains essential for a peaceful roadmap to exit the current crisis.

Despite this pervasive fragility, the Berlin process has essentially produced a favourable context for Turkey, France, Italy and Germany. There may be even greater space for cooperation in the current context, the prospects of which can be judged by identifying what convergence points are likely to bring Turkey and EU countries together in Libya; and secondly how and to what extent areas of divergence can be side-lined to avoid them from poisoning the overall process.

6.1 Pathways for concerted European action

France, Germany and Italy as well as Turkey exhibited varying levels of interest and responses to the outbreak of the Libyan crisis in 2011. France and Italy, two Mediterranean powers with broad interests and a colonial past in Africa, engaged Libya as a result of their economic and energy interests, which ultimately positioned them at rivalling ends of the conflict. French interests in Libya are intrinsically tied to the Sahel, where Paris has engaged former colonies in Mali, Niger and Chad through multifaceted security cooperation.⁵ War-torn Libya, whose security environment has become extremely hybridised and internationalised due to the civil conflict, became a hub for Islamist

³ Ibid.

⁴ Samy Magdy, "Libya's Largest Oil Field Closed as Turmoil Intensifies", in *AP News*, 19 April 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/ccf71ec702cfcdb004231d02a7d319c>.

⁵ Matteo Ilardo, "The Rivalry between France and Italy over Libya and Its Southwest Theatre", in *AIES Fokus*, No. 5/2018, p. 2, <https://www.aies.at/publikationen/2018/fokus-18-05.php>.

jihadism, illicit weapons sales and transborder crime encapsulating its southern neighbours in the Sahel.⁶ Especially alarming was Islamist jihadism, as the Libyan crisis served as a regional gateway for terrorist groups with spill-over effects on Europe as well as the Sahel and Africa more generally. Following the 2015 and 2016 jihadist attacks on French soil, Paris was quick to ally with Haftar with the dual purpose of curbing Islamist terrorism in Libya as well as the rise of popular support for the extreme right at home.⁷ Immigration from Africa, Islamism and terrorism have traditionally been important issues for the French far-right. Emanuel Macron's toughness on terrorism was also intended to peel votes away from his far-right rival Marine Le Pen with a view to the upcoming 2022 presidential elections.

For Italy, Libya, is important first and foremost for energy security and, secondly, due to Libya's geographic location and primary departure point for migration from Africa and the Middle East to Europe via Italy. Libya was an important energy provider for Italy during Ghaddafi's reign, which can explain Italy's initial hesitance to back the 2011 NATO intervention. That said, Italy did ultimately support the intervention, and subsequently decided to keep its oil giant Eni in place while all other oil companies were leaving the Libyan market.⁸ Ranking third after China and Turkey, Italy was also keen to derive benefits from exports to Libya.⁹ Yet, by 2013 and more so in the 2014–15 period, major migration waves departing from the Libyan coast led Italy to adopt more of a security-oriented approach.¹⁰ The EU's externalisation of the migration crisis was further institutionalised through the signing of the Italy-Libya Memorandum of Understanding in 2017, which promoted collaboration with Libyan actors to curb irregular migration through institutional capacity-building and the training of the Libyan coast guard, but also frequently hits the headlines due to alleged human rights abuses inflicted upon migrants stranded in or returned to

6 Farah Rasmi, "Beyond the War: The History of French-Libyan Relations", in *Atlantic Council Issue Briefs*, April 2021, p. 9, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/?p=373513>.

7 Omid Nouripour, "Germany's Disastrous Libya Policy", in *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, 27 May 2021, <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/node/35321>.

8 Chiara Grazia Valenzano, "Mediterranean Equilibria: Italian-Turkish Balancing and Competition over Libya", in *IAI Commentaries*, No. 21|58 (December 2021), <https://www.iai.it/en/node/14458>.

9 "Italy-Libya: Trade Exchanges Exceed 1.7 Billion in the First Quarter of 2021", in *INDiplomacy*, 29 September 2021, <https://indiplomacy.it/en/?p=6804>.

10 Chiara Grazia Valenzano, "Mediterranean Equilibria", cit.

Libya.¹¹ Meanwhile, the Italian business sector remains particularly interested in Libya today, where business giants like Ansaldo Energia, Saipem, Fincantieri and Italtel, as well as Eni, search for opportunities in the infrastructure, energy and technology sectors.¹² Faced with similar problems but different priorities and alliance patterns over Libya, both Italy and France sought to assume mediation roles in the country through the 2018 Palermo and 2021 Paris Conferences respectively, but little of substance followed in their wake.

Following Haftar's attack on Tripoli in 2019, Turkey, but not Italy, agreed to dispatch military assistance to the GNA in Tripoli, helping to turn the tide of the conflict. Turkey's self-confidence as a rising regional power amidst US retrenchment surely informed Ankara's Libya policy at the time. Yet, despite claims relating to its supposed neo-Ottoman motives in North Africa, Turkey's post-2019 Libya intervention was not only about North Africa or Libya per se but rather intertwined with the broader Eastern Mediterranean issue and Turkey's growing feelings of exclusion or isolation in this area.¹³ Turkey, like Italy, was reluctant to support the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya, not least in light of Ankara's broad economic interests and investments in the country. Indeed, at the time, Turkey and Libya had comprehensive infrastructure investment agreements involving 200 Turkish companies.¹⁴ When the GNA requested Turkey's military support to withstand Haftar's assault on Tripoli, Turkey obliged, but requested the latter's endorsement of a 19-mile continental shelf agreement which emboldened Turkey's jurisdictional, geopolitical and energy interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and vis-à-vis other states in the region, most notably Egypt, Israel, Greece and Cyprus.¹⁵ Libya also promised to become a lucrative export market for Turkey, particularly in the construction sector. Libya comes second after China as an export partner for Turkey.¹⁶ On the

¹¹ Nana Kruashvili, "Strategic Lessons Learned from Libya: The EU-Libya Deal and Its Outcome", in *Levan Alexidze Journal of International Law*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2020), p. 125-132, <http://laf.ge/journals/index.php/test/article/view/6>.

¹² Dario Cristiani and Silvia Colombo, "Making Sense of Italy's Renewed Economic Diplomacy Towards Libya", in *IAI Commentaries*, No. 21|35 (July 2021), <https://www.iai.it/en/node/13749>.

¹³ Md. Muddasir Quamar, "Turkey and the Regional Flashpoint in Libya", in *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 44, No. 6 (2020), p. 597-602.

¹⁴ Gökhan Tekir, "Russian-Turkish Involvement in the Civil War in Libya", in *Rusya Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Vol. 3 (2020), p. 190-215 at p. 204, <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/trad/issue/55699/740450>.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 207.

¹⁶ Turkish Ministry of Trade, *Libya Ülke Profili* [Libya country profile], 2021, p. 9, <https://ticaret.gov.tr/yurtdisi-teskilati/afrika/libya/ulke-profil>.

side of the opposition, the National Alliance bloc voted against sending Turkish ground troops to Libya in 2020 on the grounds that Turkey should prioritise diplomacy instead.¹⁷

Under Angela Merkel, Germany gradually emerged as a new important European actor involved in Libyan diplomatic efforts. Benefitting from a more remote geographic location, and therefore less exposure to Libya and other states involved in the conflict, Germany eventually succeeded in bringing multiple actors to the table in the Berlin Conference of 2020 and 2021. Germany adopted a rules-based multilateralist approach, an effort that was motivated by a desire to reassert European cohesiveness as a foreign policy actor in its immediate neighbourhood and vis-à-vis other external actors involved in Libya. Surely, Germany's success lay in a careful reading of divergent national interests and ways to converge them. Against this backdrop, political and military stability in Libya was a basic requirement for curbing migration in line with Italy's interests, to cope with transborder crime and terrorism as France sought and set the stage for economic reconstruction from which all actors including Turkey would benefit.¹⁸ In this respect, the Berlin process could do what the Palermo and Paris conferences had not. A concerted European policy on Libya seemed finally to emerge. In the ministerial meeting of September 2021, all European parties reiterated the objective of a complete withdrawal of foreign forces and mercenaries, a reform of the security sector and institutional and financial reforms to stabilise the oil sector, re-unite key Libyan institutions and revive the post-conflict economy.¹⁹

6.2 Post-Berlin cooperation patterns

One noteworthy accomplishment of the Berlin process was its ability to ease the rigid political polarisation in Libya along GNA and LNA lines. Since the

¹⁷ Yıldız Yazıcıoğlu and Murat Karabulut, "CHP ve İyi Parti'nin Libya Tavrı Değişmedi" [The Libyan attitude of CHP and Good Party has not changed], in *VOA Türkçe*, 30 December 2019, <https://www.amerikaninsesi.com/a/5225197.html>.

¹⁸ *The Berlin Conference on Libya. Conference Conclusions*, 19 January 2020, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/the-berlin-conference-on-libya-1713882>.

¹⁹ Federal Foreign Office of Germany, *Summary of the Co-Chairs Germany, France and Italy of the Ministerial Meeting on Libya Held on the Margins of the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly*, 22 September 2021, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/-/2483886>.

Government of National Unity was formed and the electoral process took off, albeit momentarily, the Libyan political environment is more polyphonic and dynamic than ever with multiple presidential candidates, factions and ever-shifting alliances. While seemingly debilitating for Libya's political stability, this dynamism has merits, as it motivates external players to drop their rigidity, re-evaluate their interests and open themselves to engaging with a diverse set of actors.

Turkey is a major case in point. Repeatedly criticised by Turkish opposition parties for its one-sided Libya policy, Turkey had already started to reconsider its position in Libya as early as December 2021, once it was sure that an electoral process was not going to materialise. On 15–16 December, the Turkish parliament received a delegation from the Libyan House of Representatives which also included pro-Haftar representatives from the east.²⁰ Turkey's speaker of parliament commented that Turkey "embrace[s] all the regions and parts of Libya, no matter if it is the West, East or South".²¹ Turkey's ambassador in Tripoli paid two visits to East Libya controlled by Haftar in January 2022, met with the speaker of the House of Representatives Aguila Saleh for the first time and later visited local administrators in Benghazi in the company of Turkish businessmen to explore investment and trade opportunities.²²

These developments took place almost in parallel with the contestation over the post of prime minister that kicked off when Bashaga, a political figure considered to be close to Turkey, declared himself the new prime minister and was endorsed by the representatives of the east as well as Haftar.²³ Turkey has signalled ambivalence towards this contestation between Bashagha and Dbeibeh. Observing the ambivalence, Dbeibeh reportedly asked the head of the High State Council, Khaled Al-Mishri, to visit Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.²⁴ Erdoğan stated that "the attempt against Dbeibeh was worrying",

²⁰ Grand National Assembly of Turkey, *Speaker Şentop Receives Fawzi Al-Nuwari, Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives of Libya*, 15 December 2021, https://global.tbmm.gov.tr/index.php/EN/yl/haber_detay/3076.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Hüseyin Hayatsever, "Türkiye'den Trablus, Misrata ve Bingazi'ye ziyaret" [Visit from Turkey to Tripoli, Misrata and Benghazi], in *Cumhuriyet*, 8 February 2022, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/dunya/1906035>.

²³ Fehim Taştekin, "Turkey Rethinks Libya Policy", in *Al-Monitor*, 14 February 2022, <https://www.al-monitor.com/node/46953>.

²⁴ Ferdi Bayat, "Libya Devlet Yüksek Konseyi Başkanı Mişri: Dibebe, Erdoğan'la Görüşmek Üzere

while reiterating Turkey's good relations with Dbeibeh, Bashagha and Mishri at the same time.²⁵ Apparently, Turkey's turn to a more differentiated position is due to the fact that the deal endorsing Turkey's 19-mile continental shelf, and any other deal to be signed with a single side, is prone to being cancelled as alliances shift and political instability persists. Besides, Turkey's business elites are also pushing the government to pursue a more multilateral foreign policy in Libya. The head of the Turkey-Libya Business Council of Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey, who was also on the delegation to Benghazi in December 2021, stated that there are plans to re-open the Turkish consulate in Benghazi, carry out mega construction projects for stadiums, ports, universities and airports, and to establish a Turkish trade bazaar in Benghazi.²⁶ Considering the interests that drove Turkey to the Libyan field, Turkey's recently developed moderation is a sign that new room for cooperation with EU countries may materialise. A similar pattern can be observed for France, which is reportedly pursuing more dynamic forms of communication with Tripoli and Western Libya in an attempt to have a say over Libya's reconstruction.²⁷

A more concerted effort at cooperation between European states and Turkey requires an accumulation of political, institutional and experiential resources. Each of the involved parties has developed a level of engagement in line with what they sought to achieve by engaging the Libyan crisis in the first place. Italy developed a significant capacity to control irregular migration, whereas Turkey forged closer relationships with actors on the ground due to its military involvement. Even though the ISIL threat makes occasional come-backs, French involvement is also likely to have supported the fight against jihadist terrorism in the country. With the Berlin process, the resolution of the Libyan crisis has been reduced to two basic premises, i.e., developing and sustaining enough political will to ensure stability and an institutional capacity to actualise that

Türkiye'ye Gitmeyi Önerdi" [Head of the Libyan High Council of State Mishri: Dibeibe suggested to me to go to Turkey and meet with Erdogan], in *Anadolu Agency*, 23 February 2022, <http://v.aa.com.tr/2511734>.

²⁵ "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'dan Libya Açıklaması" [Statement by President Erdogan on Libya], in *Savunma*, 16 February 2022, <https://www.savunmatr.com/gundem/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-dan-libya-aciklamasi-h16810.html>.

²⁶ Aydoğan Kalabalık, "DEİK Türkiye-Libya İş Konseyi Başkanı Karanfil: Türkiye'nin Libya'ya İhracatı 2021'de Yüzde 64 Arttı" [Turkey-Libya Business Council chairman Karanfil: Turkish exports to Libya increased by 64 per cent in 2021], in *Anadolu Agency*, 1 February 2022, <http://v.aa.com.tr/2490687>.

²⁷ Fuat Emir Şefkatli, "Postponed Libyan Presidential Elections and Macron's Pragmatism", in *ORSAM Opinions*, 30 December 2021, <https://orsam.org.tr/en/postponed-libyan-presidential-elections-and-macrons-pragmatism>.

will. Turkey and European countries can proceed with a division of labour and contribute to either end of this equation by bringing their respective strengths to the table.

Political will is exceptionally important for the pursuit of effective security sector reforms, as well as disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration efforts in Libya. The examples of security sector reform in other Middle Eastern conflict settings show that reform requires the formation of political will among local politicians, as well as supporting armed groups and the communities over which they rule, and is thus a highly bottom-up, rather than a top-down process. External actors with a prolonged engagement in the field, militarily or otherwise, are observed to have a greater influence over the formation of political will due to their penetration into such multi-layered conflict settings. Whether Turkey's military move paved the way for a ceasefire in 2020 by rebalancing the warring parties and ultimately to a political dialogue or not, the fastmoving diplomacy with Turkey initiated by Libyan political elites' signals Turkey's reception as an influential player due to its military presence in Libya. European countries can support and benefit from Turkey's positioning, in turn furthering the emergence of sufficient political will, which is necessary for the enactment of reforms and progress on the political-diplomatic track.

Without a doubt, fostering political will to enact reforms is one thing and having the institutional capacity to realise these reforms is an entirely different matter. A concerted European action comes with exceptional institutional capacity in this respect. The European Union has an effective set of institutionalised incentives to promote rule of law, to build a well-functioning economic and finance sector, to address transborder crime, to enforce an arms embargo and to control irregular migration in North Africa within the scope of its Southern Neighbourhood policy, all of which Turkey and other non-European countries largely lack.²⁸ Institutions such as the EU Border Assistance Mission in Libya (EUBAM), EUNAVFOR MED Irini, and the European Neighbourhood Instrument and trust funds serve as incomparable finance, training and capacity-building

²⁸ European Commission, *Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood. A New Agenda for the Mediterranean* (JOIN/2021/2), 9 February 2021, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52021JC0002>.

instruments.²⁹ Operation Irini has proved quite effective in overseeing the arms embargo on Libya, where it reportedly inspected more than 6,000 ships and 800 flights and offered 63 recommendations to law enforcement agencies of European states out of which 51 were implemented.³⁰ The EU's New Agenda for the Mediterranean, which aims to support socio-economic recovery, sustainable development, green transition and digitalisation, also offers extensive opportunities in these areas.³¹ Such EU-level mechanisms benefit all external actors, including Turkey by creating a more secure institutional and infrastructural foundation required for investment, trade and oil business, while gradually offsetting multifaceted security risks such as militia conflict, terrorism, illicit trade and financial crimes that stand in the way.

6.3 Major points of divergence

Despite the points of convergence, Turkey and major EU powers diverge on two interrelated issues. The first relates to Turkey's reluctance to completely end its military presence in Libya as per Berlin proceedings. Secondly, the Libyan crisis has become inevitably intertwined with the Eastern Mediterranean since the signing of the Turkey–Libya/GNA 2019 Memorandum of Understanding. In this respect, Turkey has been using its military position in Libya as a bargaining lever against Mediterranean countries that are part of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum.

The question is what Turkey expects to gain from a prolonged military engagement in Libya. From the Turkish state's perspective, Turkey's military intervention indirectly shaped the necessary background for a ceasefire agreement by balancing the warring parties and ultimately led to the formation of a unity government in Libya. Accordingly, no multilateral diplomatic effort, be it UN-based or European initiated, could convince the warring sides to accede to a ceasefire as long as one side recognised itself as militarily superior to the other. Dbeibeh's large-teamed visit to Ankara in early 2021 fostered

²⁹ European Union External Action Service (EEAS), *EU-Libya Relations*, 11 February 2022, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/19163>.

³⁰ Safa Alharathy, "Within Two Years, IRINI Investigated 6,355 Vessels, 821 Suspect Flights", in *The Libya Observer*, 16 April 2022, <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/node/22359>.

³¹ European Commission, *Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood*, cit.

the perception that Turkey is treated as “first among equals” by Libya, thereby giving more reason to Turkey to keep its ground forces there.³² Given the latest executive division in Libya and the accompanying risk of violence, Turkey is likely to feel even more compelled to keep its military forces in the country. The Ukrainian crisis seems to have also added energy to Turkey’s calculations over Libya. Reportedly, Turkish businessmen have proposed a barter model, originally used by Italy and Libya to exchange crude oil and petrochemical products, to buy low-priced gas from Libya while also boosting Turkey’s trade volume.³³ As long as the western members of the 5+5 committee and Haftar-backed militias keep targeting oil facilities in the country in an effort to weaken Dbeibeh, Turkey is likely to consider its military presence as a crucial counterforce on the field. Under these circumstances, it would be unrealistic to expect Turkey to withdraw its military forces in the immediate term. However, one can consider two scenarios where Turkey might be convinced to meet European powers halfway, helping to promote cooperation.

In the first scenario, Turkey might be convinced to stop providing military equipment to militia groups, withdraw Syrian mercenaries and transform the mission of its ground forces in Libya. President Erdoğan is reportedly flexible about removing Syrian mercenaries from Libya.³⁴ On the other hand, Turkey’s ground forces can be integrated to any international or EU-level framework to reform Libya’s security sector, where Turkey can contribute through peacekeeping, capacity-building, advising and training operations. Such an arrangement would neatly fit Turkey’s official discourse on keeping ground forces in Libya, which the Turkish state claims to be intended for building a national Libyan army.³⁵ This might serve all European powers and Turkey, especially to ensure hydrocarbon security against the militia attacks on oil facilities.

³² “Dbeibeh Government Maintains Prime Role of Turkey in Libya”, in *The Arab Weekly*, 14 April 2021, <https://the arabweekly.com/node/52294>.

³³ Merve Yiğitcan, “Türkiye-Libya ticaretinde ‘İtalyan işi barter’ önerisi” [Italian barter proposal in Turkey-Libya trade], in *Dünya*, 18 April 2022, <https://www.dunya.com/ekonomi/turkiye-libya-ticaretinde-italyan-isi-barter-onerisi-haberi-655346>.

³⁴ Ben Fishman and Anas El Gomati, “Making Libya’s Berlin Process Work”, in *PolicyWatch*, No. 3504 (21 April 2021), <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/node/16849>.

³⁵ “Kalin: İstikrar Gücü Olarak Libya’dayız” [Kalin: We are in Libya as a stabilisation force], in *DW Türkçe*, 13 November 2021, <https://www.dw.com/tr/a-59810735>.

A second scenario involves the resolution of the Eastern Mediterranean crisis through diplomatic means, a rather unlikely eventuality in the short term. The Eastern Mediterranean issue is extremely multi-layered, intersecting multiple conflict areas such as the Cyprus issue, the Israeli-Palestine conflict, the Syrian civil war, Greek-Turkey maritime tensions and even post-Arab Spring rivalries between Middle Eastern states. As long as no definitive rapprochement occurs between Turkey and all of the parties of these sub-regional conflicts, the resolution of the Eastern Mediterranean issue remains extremely challenging. Nevertheless, the global energy crisis triggered by the war in Ukraine has recently revived the potential utility of gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean, which might open a window of opportunity for the resolution of the stalemate. Reportedly, the US has withdrawn its support for East-Med pipeline and is working on an alternative project which aims to bring together Turkey, Greece, Cyprus and Israel.³⁶ With clouds hanging over the East-Med project, Tel Aviv and Ankara are already negotiating an alternative pipeline route from Israel to Turkey.³⁷ A central issue the Eastern Mediterranean question stumbles upon is Turkey–EU relations which have long strayed off-track. Faced with the East-Med bloc and sanctions, albeit limited, by the EU against Ankara in the wake of the Eastern Mediterranean tensions of 2019–2022, Turkey chose to align with another Mediterranean country, signing the 2019 maritime agreement with Libya/GNA and sending its ground forces to Libya. Nevertheless, the recent rapprochement between Macron and Erdoğan over mediation efforts in Ukraine looks promising. What opportunities this might bring for Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean issue remains to be seen.

6.4 Possible black swan events

These scenarios could only take place if unanticipated developments do not get in the way. In this respect, one high-stakes black swan event is the inability of the interim Libyan government to hold the elections by the end of 2022

³⁶ “ABD’den Doğu Akdeniz’de ‘Türkiyeli alternatif’ mesajı” [“Alternative from Turkey” message from the USA in the Eastern Mediterranean], in *DW Türkçe*, 7 April 2022, <https://www.dw.com/tr/a-61394753>.

³⁷ “İsrail ile Türkiye arasındaki doğal gaz boru hattı projesi Rus gazına karşı Avrupa için çözüm mü?” [Is the Israel-Turkey gas pipeline project a solution for Europe against Russian gas?], in *Euronews*, 3 April 2022, <https://tr.euronews.com/2022/03/29/israil-ile-turkiye-aras-ndaki-dogal-gaz-boru-hatt-projesi-rus-gaz-na-kars-avrupa-icin-cozu>.

and the prolongation of the current executive discord. This risks a derailment of the Berlin process and broader UN-led diplomatic efforts in the country, particularly the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process as well as that of security sector reform, which might ultimately push external actors back to their pre-Berlin alliance positions in Libya.

Another high-stakes black swan event relates to the Turkish presidential elections currently speculated to be held in 2023, where new potential incumbents might change tactics on the Libyan as well as Eastern Mediterranean crises. The Republican People's Party and Good Party of the National Alliance bloc are against Turkey's military intervention in Libya. Additionally, all Turkish opposition parties criticise the AKP's foreign policy moves in the Eastern Mediterranean as "one dimensional and narrow-minded" and they suggest a more holistic foreign policy which prioritises diplomatic dialogue and cooperation with all involved parties upon coming to power.³⁸ Accordingly, one might expect to see a fast-track diplomacy in case of a leadership change in Turkey. Nevertheless, despite their discursive commitment to diplomacy, whether the opposition parties would immediately and completely rule out military engagement in Libya before earning any incentives and concessions to do so from diplomacy should be approached with caution.

Another unexpected event that may interfere with the current scenarios would be Russia's increased military involvement in Libya. Russia is observed to be strengthening its military ties with Sahel countries amid increasing security concerns over jihadist terrorism and tensions with France. As a matter of fact, Mali's call for an immediate withdrawal of French troops has been followed by the arrival of Russian mercenaries to fight jihadists in the country.³⁹ The UN General Assembly votes condemning Russia's military aggression against Ukraine showed that African countries which receive military support from Russia either voted against or abstained.⁴⁰ After the Ukrainian crisis, a more

³⁸ İsmail Ahmet Yeniçeri, Melis Karaca and Metin Kaan Kurtuluş, "Muhalefet, Türkiye'nin Doğu Akdeniz Politikasını Nasıl Değerlendiriyor, Neleri Farklı Yapardı?" [How Does the Opposition Evaluate Turkey's Eastern Mediterranean Policy, What Would It Do Differently?], in *T24*, 22 September 2020, <https://t24.com.tr/haber/muhalefet-turkiye-nin-dogu-akdeniz-politikasini-nasil-degerlendiriyor-neleri-farkli-yapardi,904885>.

³⁹ "Russian Troops Deploy to Mali's Timbuktu After French Exit", in *Al Jazeera*, 7 January 2022, <https://aje.io/5pesph>.

⁴⁰ "UN Resolution Against Ukraine Invasion Full Text", in *Al Jazeera*, 3 March 2022, <https://aje.io/>

isolated and aggressive Russia might well opt for increasing its military involvement in North Africa and the Sahel to maintain its influence there. Amidst efforts to minimise external military engagement in Libya, a greater Russian involvement might greatly overturn the process.

A final noteworthy yet unanticipated occurrence relates to the recent Global Fragility Act issued by the US in early April. In this act, the US listed Libya as one of the five countries facing an increased risk of violence and thereby open to receive US peacebuilding support.⁴¹ This signals a more proactive US foreign policy on Libya through the extension of institution-building, economic reconstruction, natural resource management and civil society support. It should be no coincidence that the inclusion of Libya among recipient countries came at a time when the international community was looking for alternatives to Russian hydrocarbon resources, which Libya might be able to provide. The US seems overly concerned about the insecurity of hydrocarbon resources due to militia violence triggered by the rivalry between Bashagha and Dbeibeh. US Ambassador and Special Representative to Libya Richard Norland announced that Washington is working with the UN, EU and Egypt to set up a mechanism for managing the hydrocarbon revenues until a political settlement is secured.⁴² The Libyan oil minister reacted to the plan on the grounds that it threatens Libya's sovereignty.⁴³ Nevertheless, the projected scope of the recent US action in Libya and its potential impact on other external players remains unclear.

Overall, stability in Libya looks extremely fragile today and uncertainties abound. International cooperation is essential for a peaceful roadmap and the German-led Berlin process was an initial noteworthy step. The initiative not only succeeded to bring all internal and external players to the table, but also eased the rigid political polarisation in Libya. This seems especially the case for external players, who seem to have dropped their rigidity to a considerable extent and opened themselves to engaging with a diverse set of actors. This

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⁴¹ White House, *Addressing the Collective Challenges of Our Time: Implementing the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability*, 1 April 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/04/01/addressing-the-collective-challenges-of-our-time-implementing-the-u-s-strategy-to-prevent-conflict-and-promote-stability>.

⁴² "Why Is the US Trying to Manage Libyan Oil Revenues?", in *TRT World*, 14 April 2022, <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/why-is-the-us-trying-to-manage-libyan-oil-revenues-56354>.

⁴³ Ibid.

has also reflected favourably on Turkey's relations with European powers over Libya, thereby opening a wider window of opportunity for cooperation. Turkey's military presence in Libya, if reframed as a peacekeeping, capacity-building, advising and training force within a broader international or EU-level framework, can contribute to demilitarisation, demobilisation and reintegration efforts in the country. On the other hand, the EU's unmatched institutional capacity to address the structural issues plaguing Libya, including governance, economic institutions and migration, may be able to satisfy all actors' desire to garner economic and energy benefits in the long run. The Ukrainian crisis has radically changed global politics with reflections on hydrocarbon-rich Libya as well. Whether global actors, including the US, will intensify their efforts for a more proactive and committed peacebuilding process in Libya and its potential trajectories remains to be seen.

7. EU–Turkey Cooperation Outlooks: Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

by Alessia Chiriatti and Andrea Dessì*

Current trends of destabilisation in global politics are having carry-on effects on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), where the Russian invasion of Ukraine comes on the heels of various disruptions within the region. Reeling from a decade of severely worsening socio-economic and political indicators, MENA states and societies now face the compounding challenges of a resurgence of the Covid-19 pandemic¹ and associated disruptions, the energy and green transition and the sharp increase in commodity prices and food insecurity as a result of the Ukraine conflict, elements that are sure to further aggravate regional disparities and instabilities. Whilst the Ukraine war is having a polarising effect on relations between certain MENA states and the US and Europe, it might also provide new opportunities for Turkey and the EU to rediscover and establish forms of ad hoc and compartmentalised cooperation against a backdrop of ongoing political disagreements between the sides. In this regard, both Europe and Turkey have an intrinsic interest in developing new coordination modalities in areas of mutual interest and concern, building on existing institutional, political and security links to better manage what has become a highly politicised relationship in such a way as to navigate the uncertainties and complexity presently gripping their shared neighbourhood.

The present study – which began before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine but nevertheless sought to consider its effects on the MENA region and EU and Turkey interests therein – set out the objective of investigating trends of cooperation or divergence between the EU and Turkey. It has done so by examining five key foreign policy dossiers in the MENA – Afghanistan, the Eastern Mediterranean, Syria, Libya and Iraq – which retain significant

* The authors would like to thank Daniela Huber and Senem Aydın-Düzgit for their valuable insights and cooperation in carrying forth this project and concluding analysis.

¹ Reuters, *Covid-19 Tracker: Asia and the Middle East*, <https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/regions/asia-and-the-middle-east/>.

importance for Ankara, Brussels and key European capitals and where both sides have been actively involved in various forms in recent years. By focussing on these contexts, the research has tackled important themes, ranging from migration (Syria, Libya and Afghanistan), energy security and infrastructure (Libya, the Eastern Mediterranean and Iraq), the enduring challenges of radicalisation and violent extremism as well as more general issues tied to inclusive multilateralism, trade connectivity, economic development and human security across the MENA.

Besides staking out diverging and/or converging interests, priorities and policies, the research has factored the fluidity of political developments into the analysis, addressing the impact of important electoral appointments and/or recent governmental changes on trajectories of cooperation or divergence between the EU and Turkey. With Germany under a new coalition government as of late 2021 and France having witnessed important elections in April 2022, political shifts and uncertainties required careful assessment, also addressing the viewpoints of opposition parties within these contexts as well as in Italy, where elections are expected in the first half of 2023. In a similar fashion, as Turkey's presidential election approaches in 2023, the analysis has mapped the viewpoints and priorities of major opposition parties – the Republican People's Party (CHP), Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA), Democrat Party (DP), Future Party (FP), İyi (Good) Party and Felicity Party (SP) – with an eye to highlighting possible shifts in Turkish foreign policy vis-à-vis the EU, the US, Russia and MENA counties. Finally, the project also incorporated some elements of foresight analysis, asking individual researchers to consider possible black swan or wildcard events that may radically alter current developments in each context and thereby have an impact on trajectories of cooperation or divergence between the EU and Turkey.

7.1 Trajectories of cooperation or divergence

Turkey, the EU and important European states such as France, Italy and Germany, have recently increased their engagements across the MENA region. Importantly, these actors share the general assessment that a series of interlinked crises impacting the Middle East state system since at least 2010–11, leading to proxy conflicts, massive population displacements and the advent of

new forms of radicalism and violent extremism, directly affect their interests. At the same time European states and Turkey have also diverged on the best tools and approaches to mitigate these challenges. This has particularly been the case when it comes to the handling of the Syrian crisis, relations with Kurdish actors in Syria and Iraq, as well as in the energy arena and geopolitical tensions characterising the Eastern Mediterranean, which remain broadly linked to Turkey's approach to Libya.² These challenges are moreover joined by broader issues, including Turkey's recent obstructionism with regards to Sweden's and Finland's accession to NATO,³ outstanding disagreements with the US and the Atlantic Alliance with regards to Turkey's acquisition of Russian missile defence systems and the continuation of acrimonious relations between Turkey and EU member states Greece and the Republic of Cyprus.⁴ That said, the two sides do share a similar hierarchy of priorities in other contexts, particularly when it comes to the management of migration and Turkey's hosting of Syrian refugees in the broader context of the 2016 EU–Turkey migration statement (even if Erdogan is now seemingly planning an expansion of the buffer zone in northern Syria to relocate a large number of Syrian refugees), approaches to Afghanistan and the imperative of developing new energy resources to diminish dependence on Russian energy.

With regards to post-NATO withdrawal Afghanistan, where a deep humanitarian crisis continues to ravish the country and the Taliban government is clearly breaking with previous assurances on women and minority rights as well as more general civic freedoms, Turkey and EU states are aligned on the refusal to formally recognise the Taliban government and to prioritise humanitarian assistance and girl's access to schooling through international non-governmental organisations and the UN. Moreover, both Turkey and the EU were quick to focus on the issue of migration in the onset of the post-

² See for instance, Andrea Dessì, "Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean: Navigating Complexity, Mitigating Conflict(s) and Fishing for Compromise", in Michaël Tanchum (ed.), *Eastern Mediterranean in Uncharted Waters: Perspectives on Emerging Geopolitical Realities*, Ankara, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, December 2020, p. 100-115, <https://www.kas.de/en/country-reports/detail/-/content/eastern-mediterranean-in-uncharted-waters-perspectives-on-emerging-geopolitical-realities-1>.

³ "Erdogan Sets Conditions for Sweden, Finland NATO Bids", in *Deutsche Welle*, 21 May 2022, <https://p.dw.com/p/4Bg80>.

⁴ "Erdogan Halts Turkey-Greece Talks as Rift Widens", in *Al Jazeera*, 1 June 2022, <https://aje.io/jek5te>; Sarantis Michalopoulos, "Athens Shocked after Erdogan Threatens in Greek", in *Euractiv*, 10 June 2022, <https://www.euractiv.com/?p=1770885>.

withdrawal crisis, and Turkey has benefitted from EU funding and assistance to improve its border security in the east with two financing decisions amounting to 560 millions of euro for the period 2021–2023.⁵ Potential synergies are also present in a shared interest to limit Russian and Chinese influence over Central Asia and Afghanistan, not least through an effort to engage Afghanistan's direct neighbours, elements that could provide further grounds for EU–Turkey cooperation, both bilaterally and within the broader NATO framework. Security and anti-terrorism, as well as the management of key infrastructure, such as Kabul International Airport, are further elements of broad convergence and could be utilised to promote closer dialogue and coordination with regards to Afghanistan in the short and medium future.

Moving to Iraq, another important area of mutual involvement and interest, tensions exist with regards to Turkey's recent military intervention in Iraqi Kurdistan – operation Claw-Lock, which began on 18 April 2022⁶ – and is aimed at weakening the PKK presence in the country. Challenges are not only present with Europe, but also involve central authorities in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), independently from the recent visits and dialogue between Ankara and Erbil. At the same time, given the increasing involvement of EU states in Iraq in the wake of the US's gradual redeployment – Italy has assumed the command of an expanded NATO Mission in Iraq since May 2022 – and the shared interest in seeking to expand energy exports and infrastructure from Iraq to Europe via Turkey, new areas of possible cooperation and coordination do exist.⁷ Ankara and Brussels are moreover aligned on broader issues of electricity connectivity between Iraq and Turkey,⁸ efforts to enhance water and energy security in the country in line with the objectives

⁵ European Commission, *EU Continues Supporting Education of Refugees and Addressing Migration in Turkey with Additional €560 Million*, 21 December 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_6931.

⁶ Shawn Yuan, "Turkey's Military Operation Causes Controversy, Division in Iraq", in *Al Jazeera*, 28 April 2022, <https://aje.io/weadq5>.

⁷ See for instance, Maha El Dahan and Riham Alkousaa, "Iraqi Kurdistan Has Energy Capacity to Help Europe, Says Iraqi Kurdish PM", in *Reuters*, 28 March 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iraqi-kurdistan-has-energy-capacity-help-europe-says-iraqi-kurdish-pm-2022-03-28>; Ahmed Rasheed and Orhan Coskun, "Iran Struck Iraq Target over Gas Talks Involving Israel - Officials", in *Reuters*, 28 March 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/exclusive-iran-struck-iraq-target-over-gas-talks-involving-israel-officials-2022-03-28>; Fehim Tastekin, "Will Renewed Interest in Iraqi Kurdish Gas Fuel Turkey-Iran Rivalry?", in *Al-Monitor*, 8 April 2022, <https://www.al-monitor.com/node/48060>.

⁸ Ibrahim Saleh, "Iraq Completes Measures for Electric Linkage with Turkiye", in *Anadolu Agency*, 3 April 2022, <http://v.aa.com.tr/2554065>.

of the green transition and more general support for the Baghdad-led efforts to promote intra-regional dialogue among regional antagonists. Finally, the two actors also hold similar positions on the need to reactivate the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), known as the Iran nuclear deal, and share in the growing concern on the implications that a failure to do so may carry for regional stability, particularly in Iraq and the Persian Gulf.

Turning to the more controversial dossiers of Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean, which in the recent past led to significant tensions in EU–Turkey relations, recent developments have contributed to a relative diminishing of acrimonies between the sides. With regards to Libya, the German-led Berlin process, despite its fragilities, helped to alleviate tensions between external actors involved in the country and with strong influences across North African, leading to the emergence of a new Government of National Unity (GNU) backed by Germany, France, Italy and other EU states as well as Turkey. Moreover, the 2021 Italian-French treaty – the *Trattato del Quirinale* – promises to further align Rome and Paris, the two traditional motors of Europe’s Mediterranean policy and states that had in the past disagreed on the best means to manage the Libyan crisis. On top of these rapprochements, the recent resumption of direct dialogue between Turkey and Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt and Saudi Arabia are further elements that can provide opportunities for improved EU–Turkey coordination in Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean.

These positive dynamics are however overshadowed by the tensions within Libya surrounding the postponement of elections originally scheduled for December 2021 and the renewed emergence of rival prime ministers in Libya, elements that are likely to worry Brussels as much as Ankara. Indeed, from the perspective of Turkey and European states, political reconciliation, security sector reforms and progress on the institutional reforms needed for the holding of elections are indispensable stepping stones to open room for shared economic and reconstruction interests in the country. The Ukraine crisis and Europe’s need to find alternative energy resources will likely increase European focus on Libya, where oil output has risen recently, independently from disruptive efforts of certain actors, broadly thought to also be aligned

with Russia, to blockade oil and export terminals in the country.⁹ While the maritime component of the November 2019 Turkey–Libya agreement remains a significant source of controversy in EU–Turkey relations and among states that joined the East Med Gas Forum, this issue will likely be left on the back burner for the time being, not least in light of its direct linkage to broader challenges in the Eastern Mediterranean. In this regard, cooperation avenues are present in both sides supporting the UN-led and Germany-backed negotiation tracks and in the shared viewpoint that multilateral frameworks are best placed to resolve the dispute without further exacerbating divisions in Libya. Another element of potential discord, the withdrawal of foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya, could return to cause challenges in EU–Turkey relations, but in light of the new setting brought about by the Ukraine war, and mounting concern in Europe about Russia’s presence in Libya and the Sahel more broadly, there may be more room for a compromise in this domain than was the case previously. Ultimately, both sides prioritise stability and calm over other issues when it comes to Libya, Europe due to its energy and migration interests, as well as the concern for a revival of violent extremist actors in the country, and Turkey due to its reconstruction and economic investment interests in the country.

In the Eastern Mediterranean, the recent resumption of direct dialogue between Turkey, Israel and other regional actors (Egypt, UAE, Saudi Arabia and, albeit momentarily, Greece) has contributed to trends of de-escalation since 2021. While harsh rhetoric has since returned to dominate Turkey–Greece relations, the continuation of dialogue between Ankara, Tel Aviv, Cairo and Abu Dhabi has contributed to an improved atmosphere in this sub-region, a dynamic that was also favoured by the US’s formal withdrawal of backing for the controversial East Med Gas Pipeline project in January 2022.¹⁰ This, combined with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, is likely to further the impetus for improved Turkey–Israel and EU–Turkey relations, particularly in the energy domain as talk of returning to the original, more cost effective, infrastructure plan of connecting East Mediterranean energy resources to Europe via Turkey

⁹ See for instance, Heba Saleh, “Libya Oil Output Holds Up Despite Port Shutdowns and Protests”, in *Financial Times*, 17 June 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/3621e9b7-72eb-4333-a681-7832947decdbd>.

¹⁰ “U.S. Voices Misgivings on EastMed Gas Pipeline -Greek Officials”, in *Reuters*, 11 January 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/us-voices-misgivings-eastmed-gas-pipeline-greek-officials-2022-01-11>; Ahmet Gencturk, “US Withdraws Support from Eastmed Gas Pipeline Project”, in *Anadolu Agency*, 11 January 2022, <http://v.aa.com.tr/2470881>.

has now returned to dominate the agenda.¹¹ Such efforts are likely to also be accelerated by reports of renewed talks between Israel and Lebanon, brokered by the US, on their respective maritime boundaries, an element that continues to cause challenges in the area but which recent media reports seem to indicate may be close to a conclusion (independently from the continued policy of non-recognition and engagement between the two states).¹² In this domain, talk of convening a multilateral conference on the Eastern Mediterranean could provide one avenue to overcome existing divisions and return to more stable and predictable relations among Eastern Mediterranean basin states.

7.2 Policy recommendations

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Overall, a key takeaway from the individual analyses contained in this volume is that EU–Turkey cooperation holds out the promise of mutual benefits for both sides, a dynamic that has been further strengthened by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This requires, first and foremost, that the two parties enhance cooperation to shore up the normative foundations of their relationship, including a modernisation of the 1963 association agreement, negotiations on the EU–Turkey customs union and associated issues linked to visa liberalisation and enhanced political, economic and trade cooperation. While a resumption of the Turkey’s EU accession process is difficult as much trust has been lost in this relationship, the EU should labour to develop new mechanisms of engagement and dialogue with Ankara in an effort to recover lost ground and retain cooperation avenues, even if ad hoc and compartmentalised against a broader backdrop of political disagreements. In this respect, Turkey’s recently updated National Action Plan for the EU Accession (2021–2023)¹³ can serve as a basis for resumed dialogue between Brussels and Ankara on the institutional and normative dimension of their relationship. This can build on the EU–Turkey

¹¹ See for instance, Orhan Coskun and Ari Rabinovitch, “Israel-Turkey Gas Pipeline Discussed as European Alternative to Russian Energy”, in *Reuters*, 29 March 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/israel-turkey-gas-pipeline-an-option-russia-wary-europe-sources-2022-03-29>; David O’Byrne, “Could Turkey-Israel Rapprochement Lead to Gas Agreement?”, in *Al-Monitor*, 1 June 2022, <https://www.al-monitor.com/node/49294>.

¹² Kareem Chehayeb, “Lebanon to Invite US to Mediate Israel Maritime Border Talks”, in *Al Jazeera*, 6 June 2022, <https://aje.io/pvaw94>.

¹³ Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Turkey’s National Action Plan for the EU Accession*, January 2021–December 2023, July 2021, https://www.ab.gov.tr/52660_en.html.

migration statement of 2016 and also seek new modalities of cooperation in the migration, energy and climate domains that may help overcome outstanding political and legal challenges between Brussels, EU capitals and Ankara.

That being said, the major obstacle preventing more comprehensive forms of cooperation and coordination between the EU and Ankara is the unresolved issue of Cyprus and Greece-Turkey relations, a dynamic that has recently taken (yet) another turn for the worst and will require careful contingency planning and mitigating policies by the EU and its member states to avoid that tensions seep into other dimensions of the EU–Turkey relationship. Indeed, to restore trust, it is essential to revitalise high-level contacts and dialogue, beginning from issues of mutual concern and where avenues of coordination already do exist, such as migration, in the climate change and the energy transition domains, vis-à-vis the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and in trade and connectivity between Europe and Turkey and Turkey and the MENA region.

Secondly, this study has shown that EU and Turkish foreign policies are compatible particularly vis-à-vis Iraq and Afghanistan, where energy, economic and humanitarian assistance, migration control and efforts to prevent violent extremism retain the potential to align the interests of both Turkey and the EU, albeit issues related to the definition of terrorism and relations with Kurdish groups in Syria and the PKK in Iraq continue to periodically cause challenges. Cooperation on water security and electricity connectivity in Iraq could provide further openings for the EU to foster more stable cooperation frameworks with Turkey in these areas, particularly as the climate emergency is causing important disruptions for all actors involved in this space. Food insecurity in the MENA, recently exacerbated by the war in Ukraine but already reeling due to the carry-on effects of the Covid-19 pandemic,¹⁴ could lead to new instabilities in various MENA states, and efforts by Turkey, as well as Europe, to negotiate new export routes for Ukrainian grain may also provide further openings for renewed dialogue and the compartmentalisation of other disputes between these actors. Food diplomacy needs political support to keep global supply

¹⁴ In 2019, before the Covid-19 pandemic, UN agencies estimated that over 55 million of the population in MENA region were undernourished. For more information: FAO et al., *Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in the Near East and North Africa 2019. Rethinking Food Systems for Healthy Diets and Improved Nutrition*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca8684en>.

chains open, to mitigate price speculation and to strengthen multilateral efforts for non-discriminatory policies in the global food system. To support such efforts, the EU and Turkey should avoid quick-fixes and instead look to invest in local production, education, training and job creation, especially for the youth, across the MENA, as a long-term investment in their respective neighbourhood.

Finally, domains of coordination should also be enhanced in the realm of EU–Iran and Turkey–Iran relations, particularly given the growing pessimism surrounding efforts to revive the JCPOA. Enhanced dialogue and contingency planning to prepare for possible disruptions or security challenges in Iraq, the KRG, Persian Gulf, Syria, Lebanon or Palestine should be activated immediately between Brussels and Ankara, as well as in the broader domain of NATO. Moreover, should the EU muster the political courage and will to advance a concerted effort to break to deadlock in Israel/Palestine according to longstanding UN resolutions and international parameters, the EU–Turkey relationship, as well as the broader stability of the Near East, would benefit considerably, as would Europe’s moral credibility across the MENA region and the possibility of Europe (and Turkey) reaping benefits from new energy exploitations and infrastructure in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as Iraq and the Persian Gulf.

Ultimately, as the potential for cooperation clearly does exist, so too is there a risk that political shifts and developments within Europe and/or Turkey lead to further divergences. In this respect, while French President Emmanuel Macron did secure re-election in April 2022, the recent advances of the far-right in France’s legislative elections in June 2022 may lead to renewed political tensions between Paris and Ankara. This, combined with the outstanding uncertainties surrounding the outcome of the upcoming elections in Turkey and Italy in 2023, imply that decision-makers in Brussels, European capitals and Ankara should redouble their efforts today to develop and maintain high-level dialogue formats on various domains of interest to both sides, in an effort to (re)build trust and prepare for future contingencies that may either favour or disrupt these recent, albeit still hesitant, potentials for renewed EU–Turkey cooperation in the MENA region.

Abbreviations

3RP	Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan
AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)
CHP	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party)
DEVA	Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi (Democracy and Progress Party)
DP	Democrat Party
EEZ	Exclusive economic zone
EMGF	East Mediterranean Gas Forum
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
EUBAM	EU Border Assistance Mission in Libya
EUNAVFOR	European Union Naval Force
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FP	Future Party
FRIT	Facility for Refugees in Turkey
GCA	Greek Cypriot Administration
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees
GNA	Government of National Accord
GNU	Government of National Unity
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISIS-K	Islamic State – Khorasan Province
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
LNA	Libyan National Army
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MHP	Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Action Party)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NMI	NATO Mission in Iraq

OBİT	Ortadoğu Barış ve İşbirliği Teşkilatı (Middle East Peace and Cooperation Organisation)
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
PYD	Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (Democratic Union Party)
QIZ	Qualified Industrial Zone
ROC	Republic of Cyprus
SP	Saadet Partisi (Felicity Party)
TRNC	Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US	United States
WHO	World Health Organization
YPG	Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (People's Protection Units)

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Tackling Uncertainty: Turkish-EU Foreign Policy Cooperation in the Middle East and North Africa

With the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan, the continuation of overlapping security and socio-economic challenges across much of the Middle East and North Africa and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, foreign policy cooperation between the EU and Turkey is assuming even greater relevance than in the past. Nonetheless, despite the existence of several areas of mutual concern (from migration to energy supplies and the need for inclusive reconciliation initiatives in various conflict and post-conflict settings), bilateral relations have often been strained and at times even conflictual. Departing from the assumption that space for cooperation clearly does exist (and is desirable for both actors), the project investigates the respective foreign policy approaches of Europe and Turkey towards five regional case studies (Afghanistan, the Eastern Mediterranean, Iraq, Libya and Syria). It then maps areas of cooperation or divergence in each of these contexts, advancing policy recommendations to promote more sustainable cooperation and understanding between two actors in their shared neighbourhood.



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