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The discursive construction of Turkey's role for European energy security: a critical geopolitical perspective

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CONTENTS

1. Introduction 3
2. Geography matters – a theoretical introduction 4
3. Energy security in Turkey and the European Union 6
3.1. Turkey's strategy 7
3.2. Geopolitical Codes and Narratives in the Turkish Discourse 8
3.3. EU's strategy 11
3.4. Through the EU's lenses: Turkey as Part of the Southern Gas Corridor 12
4. Concluding Remarks 15
5. References 16

1. Introduction[1]

Turkey's beneficial geographical location between resource rich countries and energy thirsty Europe makes the country in theory perfectly placed to play an important role for the delivery of fossil fuels as gas and oil. Since the late 1990s, Turkey has been referred to as an 'energy bridge', 'transit country' or even 'energy hub' to Europe by Turkish and European officials. The European Commission identified Turkey as key transit state in its 'Southern Gas Corridor Strategy', a strategy used to describe planned infrastructure projects that aim at improving the security and diversity of the EU's energy supply by bypassing Ukraine and Russia and bringing natural gas from the Caspian region to Europe. At the same time Turkey can significantly benefit from the size of the EU gas market and its technological and regulatory advancement. The 2016 Joint Declaration by the Turkey-EU High Level Energy Dialogue emphasised, "Turkey is a natural energy bridge and an energy hub between energy sources in the Middle Eastern and Caspian Regions and European Union (EU) energy markets. Turkey's development as an energy hub will be to the benefit of both Turkey and the EU" (European Commission 2016b).

Energy security is one of the most pressing priorities of today's societies and as such a dynamic policy field subject to intense public and political debate, which makes it politically a highly relevant topic. As a multi-lateral and multi-dimensional policy field, it refers to market characteristics as much as to geopolitical issues. "It is not possible to separate natural gas issues from sensitive political and geopolitical matters" (Winrow 2009: 2), since any decision on a pipeline route, once made, might determine the development of an alternative route for a long time to come (Mitchell et al. 2001: 90). While oil is traded globally, natural gas is still to a high extent dependent on regional infrastructure, such as pipelines and storage facilities. The geopolitical tradition has influenced world politics not later than since the end of the nineteenth century. Going back to imperialist thinking geopolitics analyses the geographical conditions of a state, which can be access to resources, water etc., linking geography, state territoriality and world power politics (Sparke 2007: 339). 'Classical geopolitics' focuses on the geo-position of a country claiming that geography determines power politics. In contrast and as a countermovement the so-called 'critical geopolitics' approaches geographical knowledge as an essential part of the modern discourses of power (see Agnew 2003; Dalby 1990; Ó Tuathail 1996; Ó Tuathail et al. 2003a). Criticising the classical static view on geography due

[1] Parts of this paper has been published in: Schröder, Mirja/ Wessels, Wolfgang: The Energy Geopolitics of Turkey – From Classical to Critical Reading, in: Schröder, Mirja/ Bettzüge, Marc Oliver/ Wessels, Wolfgang (eds.): Turkey as an Energy Hub? Contributions on Turkey's Role in EU Energy Supply. Baden-Baden, pp.27-47.

to given physical attributes, critical geopolitics treats geography as a discourse, suggesting that geographical assumptions are culturally constructed and politically sustained.

The paper follows the critical geopolitical approach. It examines how Turkey and the EU construct geopolitical imaginations including the spatial positioning with regard to Turkey's role for European energy security. After a brief introduction into the theoretical thinking of (critical) geopolitics, the paper first presents the Turkish self-perception before turning to the EU's perspective.

2. Geography matters – a theoretical introduction

It seems that geopolitics has almost become a buzzword being used in an inflationary way by the media and politicians. Yet it is not always clear what the concept of geopolitics means. Basically, according to the classic understanding geopolitics claims that the geographical position of a state matters to its foreign policy or even determines the strategies pursued. The placement of a country thus exerts policy impact even if policy makers are not aware of the state's positioning. Geopolitics has experienced something of a revival in more recent years: the classical geopolitical tradition was influenced by political geographers and impe-rialist thinkers such as Friedrich Ratzel, Rudolf Kjellén, Alfred Mahan, Halford J. Mackinder, Nicholas John Spykman, and Karl Haushofer. The most prominent concept and theory of the classical approach is Halford Mackinder's 'Geographical Pivot of History' from 1904, which became a standard reference and key element in the theoretical strand of geopolitics. Mackinder highlighted the significance of a grand strategy, also referred to as geo-strategy (Dodds et al. 2013), and linked the study of geography implicitly with international politics. For Mackinder (1904: 434) the key area of world politics was the vast area of Euro-Asia, the so-called strategic pivot area of world politics, which was characterised by strategically important quantities of resources. It thus formed the 'Heartland' for world politics and international relations. Taking up Mackinder's heartland concept, Nicholas Spykman (1944: 43) concentrated on the periphery, the 'Rimland', namely Western Europe and Southeast Asia: "who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world".

Due to its associated proximity to National Socialism, the terminology and the academic discipline of geopolitics disappeared in the following years at least in continental Europe. Only in the later years of the Cold War did the term reappear to describe the rivalry between West and East, with a more globalised perspective as part of the theoretical school, Realism of International Relations. With the end of the Cold War, geopolitics was re-evaluated from the perspective of a globalised world setting where the nation state counts less. 'Neoclassical geopolitics' (see Megoran 2010; Kaplan 2009) nowadays is based on the traditional geopolitics

of Mackinder et al. but adapts its concepts and models to new global challenges and therewith to the changed social, economic, political and cultural environment.

It is this static worldview that the school of critical geopolitics criticises. Based the post-structuralist tradition of Michel Foucault, it rejects the deterministic impact of geography and thus suggests an alternative view on how geopolitics might serve as a conceptual framework, by assuming that the way in which elites imagine and express geographical concepts shapes the construction of reality. The focus is thus upon the decision-making level, understanding geopolitics as a 'practice' of political leaders rather than an 'international reality' (Ó Tuathail/ Dalby 1998: 2). Since the 1980s, critical geopolitics has emerged as a countermovement and has become the dominant school of geopolitics in contemporary geography. Critical geopolitics investigates how geographical claims and assumptions function in political debates and political practice (Ó Tuathail 2003b). Adopting a constructivist perspective, critical geopolitics examines the construction of geopolitical imaginations and identities, including the spatial positioning of regions, states and shifting boundaries (Müller 2008). It treats geography as a discourse, arguing that geographical assumptions are culturally constructed and politically sustained. In the classic understanding of critical geopolitics it is not the individual that structures and manipulates discourse but vice versa – discourse speaks through the individual. Hence, that every state has a geopolitical tradition that has developed in accordance with its specific historical, geographical, socio-economic and cultural development.

Critical geopolitics opposes the rational-actor assumption, essential to the classical school, that leaders naturally pursue their countries' interests and which is in accordance with geographical realities. In post-modernist fashion, according to the critical geopolitical assumption, the pursuit of a states' interest is subjective. While the classical approach deals with the analysis of objective causes and processes that derive from the global or regional structures themselves, the critical approach understands geopolitics as a practice of the individuals and thus analyses the social or decision-making level. Critical geopolitics considers geographical knowledge to be an essential part of modern power discourses (Dalby 1990). In contrast to the traditional geopolitics, geopolitics is here not about the effect of geography on foreign policy, but to do with analysing the deployment of geographical imaginations and arguments in foreign policy discourses. The guiding assumption is thus that individuals produce narratives, so-called "geopolitical codes" (Taylor 1993: 36), which then become manipulated, usually by elites, as a strategic resource for pursuing certain interests (Müller 2008). Narratives describe how certain policy problems are constructed and accordingly shape policies. They are used in political statements and refer to certain identity forms and historical/geographical notions (Ó Tuathail 1999).

3. Energy security in Turkey and the European Union

Turkey and the European Union share similar energy security concerns. Both are looking for security of energy supply, namely the availability of resources at affordable prices.[2] More than 70 percent of the worldwide oil and gas reserves are located in close proximity to Turkey. In 2014, the Middle East alone hosted 42.7% of the world's proven reserves of natural gas and 47.7% of the world's proven oil reserves (BPstats 2015). Equally important is Turkey's central location in the transport of energy resources (Shah 2009), particularly its control of the Bosporus and Dardanelles, connecting the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. To the West, Turkey has common borders with Greece and Bulgaria, both EU member states. The European Union is the world's second largest, most integrated energy consumer behind the United States. Europe aims to diversify its energy supply. The only gas pipeline alternatives are from Central Asia and the Middle East, routes that all have to pass through Turkey.

In order to bring Caspian gas to Europe, it requires enhancement of some existing infrastrucure and development of new pipelines. The 'Southern Gas Corridor' (SGC), initially conceived by the European Commission to transport gas from the Caspian Sea, Iran and Iraq to Europe, thus bypassing Russia, became the pivotal element of EU-Turkey energy relations. In 2008, the Commission called the 'Nabucco' pipeline project the flag project in the EU's diversification efforts. The original 3,893 km long pipeline was to run from the East of Turkey via Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary to Baumgarten in Austria. Potential suppliers for the original Nabucco project were considered to be Iraq, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Egypt. 2013 brought about the end of this pipeline project. The reasons were manifold: The EU was lacking hard power components, particularly financing. Furthermore, misunderstandings and misperceptions, confusing statements and conflicting messages on both sides have compounded these problems. It was replaced by the Trans Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP), the Azerbaijani option – currently under construction – that will start operating in 2018. For TANAP, the existing South Caucasus Pipeline will be expanded with a new parallel pipeline across Azerbaijan and Georgia. TANAP will transport Shah Deniz gas (Azerbaijan) across Turkey and connect to the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) that will take gas through Greece and Albania into Italy by 2020.

Further non-Russian energy projects that have already been realised, which contribute to the diversification of energy supply, comprise the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Oil Pipeline, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) Natural Gas Pipeline and Turkey-Greece Interconnector Projects.

[2] International Energy Agency (IEA). http://www.iea.org/topics/energysecurity/ [19.03.2017].

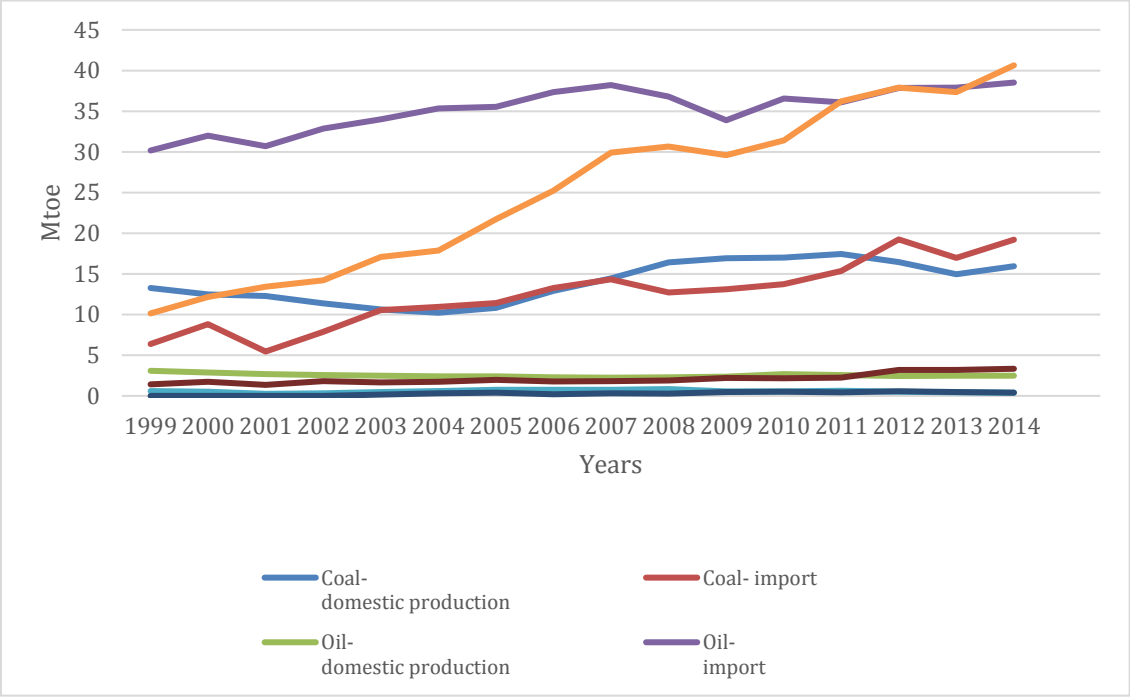
However, even though Turkey is located in close proximity to the world's major oil and gas reserves, Turkey itself has very little in the way of hydrocarbon reserves with 25 bcm total proven reserves of natural gas (6.6 bcm remaining) and one billion tonnes of oil (remaining 45.2 million tonnes) (OME 2014). Imported oil and gas accounted for almost half of Turkey's total account deficit in 2015. Whilst Turkey's geographical features encourage oil and gas transport projects, Mert Bilgin (2015: 68) rightly points out that Turkey's energy strategy arises from policy priorities as much as from market characteristics.

3.1. Turkey's strategy

"As an emerging energy hub and a major transit country, Turkey plays an important role with respect to global energy security", as the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA 2011) explains the country's vision in its synopsis of its foreign energy policy approach. Both, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources (MENR) share the same vision to "make the country the leader in its region in the field of energy and natural resources". This strategy is driven by two objectives: first, enhancing its own energy security, and second, becoming a key transit country or rather an "energy trade hub"[3] (MFA 2011) using its leverage position between the energy rich south/east and the energy poor west. According to the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources (MENR), the domestic energy demand has been growing by 5.7 percent yearly on average in the last ten years and is expected to grow further, which supports initiatives to diversify supply countries and routes and thereby fosters regional and global relations, especially with regard to pipeline projects. Turkey, therefore, has been trying to foster relations with Russia, Iran, the EU and the U.S. concurrently in order to enable "the successful operation of natural gas and oil pipelines that run in various directions through the Turkish territory" (Davutoğlu 2008: 92).

[3] An energy hub means an active trading centre where multiple suppliers and customers meet. It can be defined either as a single point (physical hub), where several pipelines converge and physical trade is enabled into all directions, or as a whole area (virtual hub). Apart from geographical and technical features price determination is the key term for being a hub. The legal and financial frameworks of the market must allow participants to manage volume risk at competitive costs and price risk through a futures market. Without this feature, it would only remain a transit country. see e.g. Cronshaw, Ian et al.. Development of Competitive Gas Trading in Continental Europe. How to Achieve Workable Competition in European Gas Markets? In: International Energy Agency, Paris, May 2008, p. 46.

Figure 1 - Turkey's domestic production and imports (Mtoe[4])



Source: Data from Enerji Isleri Genel Mudurlugu, n.d. graphed by Dicle Korkmaz Temel (Colantoni et al. 2017).

3.2. Geopolitical Codes and Narratives in the Turkish Discourse

Throughout history, Turkey has been successful in leveraging its geographic location. As the centre of two of the most powerful civilizations ever, the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, Turkey has been perceived as the bridge between East and West, a bustling centre of trade as well as a strategic economic and political nexus between regions of the world (Shah 2009). In the literature (Hauge/Eralp et al. 2016), several narratives have been identified through analysing Turkish elites' discourse or public opinion studies. In this context three common-sense geopolitical narratives about Turkey's identity in regional but also international politics have led Turkish geopolitical discourse in the past 50 years.

First, placing Turkey in the 'Western/ European sphere' is the 'Westernisation narrative', influential since the beginning of the Ottoman era's Tazimat period and particularly dominant not only among the Kemalist elites in Turkey but also among the Western allies (Eralp 2009).

Second, a lasting common-sense geopolitical code forms the 'bridge narrative' that de-scribes Turkey as the mediator or connection between the Western and Islamic worlds. It led the post-

[4] Million tonnes of oil equivalent

Cold War discourse when Turkish policy makers were seeking a new direction and geopolitical position in international relations. The concept of 'Eurasia' arose when portraying Turkey as a bridge between Europe and Asia, not only in terms of geography but also as a link between two civilizations[5]. Or with former President Abdullah Gül's words: "Turkey is a modern Eurasian country that bridges the East and the West and has successfully managed to synthesize the culture and values of both equally. Our roots in Central Asia and interaction with the Western world that dates back to centuries, grants us the exceptional situation of fully belonging to both continents at the same time" (Abdullah Gül (2008) cited and translated in Yanık 2011). Over time the bridge narrative thus has developed its character from connecting two continents to belonging to both. In energy policy it is still one of the predominant narratives, interchangeably used with images such as energy corridor / transit/ hub (Tagliapietra 2015, Winrow 2013: 145) by policy-makers and the media. Erdoğan Aykaç (2017) found out that Turkish political elites believed that functioning as a transit country was not sufficient and demanded, therefore, more influence in energy flows. The bridge metaphor was seen as implying a connecting mechanism. He revealed that Turkish political elites were already using the bridge metaphor during the Cold War, but after the fall of the Soviet Union its usage increased.

Conversely, a relatively new geographic concept from AK Party leaders' geopolitical discourse, points to an 'active regional leadership' and places Turkey at the centre of an emerging region. Largely defined in relation to AK Party elites' conservative, Islamist political background, the geopolitical codes were placed around the 'Neo-Ottomanism' narrative that refers to former Ottoman geo-cultural space values. Arguing that the region is characterised by its "integrity founded around the Islamic religion and the common historical heritage of the Ottomans" (Davutoğlu 2001), it entered the Turkish debate as a counter-reaction to the former Westernisation approach (Ersen 2014). With his book 'Strategic Depth'[6] former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu (2001) markedly shaped the AK Party's foreign policy approach and discourse. Davutoğlu's 'Strategic Depth' argues that a state's position in world politics is predicated from its geostrategic location and historical depth. It can be regarded as a reassessment of traditional Western and Eastern geopolitical theories from the viewpoint of Turkey (Ersen 2014), claiming that geography is a constant variable for a state in formulating foreign policies and power interests. Based on Turkey's Muslim identity and its Ottoman heritage, religion is used to explain and justify Turkey's geopolitical importance. Hence, the Middle East represents the key region as "the intersection point of the world's main

[5] for more on the Eurasian concept see Ersen 2013.
[6] 'Strategik Derinlik, Turkiye'nin Uluslararasi Konumu'

continent" (Davutoğlu 2001: 132), like a new 'Heartland' inspired by Mackinder, who defined the area of Euro-Asia as some kind of supercontinent formed by Europe, Asia and Africa.

While former governments tend to overlook the cultural links fostered by a shared common history, the AK Party emphasises Turkey's connections to the Balkans, the Middle East, and Central Asia. They recall the historical, linguistic and cultural proximity with the populations of those regions, when Turkey was in the geostrategic centre of different regions of the former Ottoman lands, which is why 'Neo-Ottomanism' has also been called the "geopolitics of emotions" (see Hassner 2015; Moïsi 2010). The Eurasia concept as a geopolitical code, for instance, which was originally used as a pragmatic approach to build new relations with the Turks in Central Asia and Caucasus in the early 1990s, shifted from the bridge narrative towards the 'Neo-Ottomanism' narrative. It was then used to define the geopolitical importance of Turkey as a central country in a larger region that includes not only Central Asia and the Caucasus but also the Middle East and at some point even Africa.

It is thus the hybridisation of geography (Yanık 2011: 80) that is constructed by various discursive practices to portray Turkey as a unique place, belonging to different regions and even continents. With the Middle East, Turkey shares strong cultural links through common Islamic beliefs. With Central Asia, Turkey shares a multitude of ethnic and linguistic ties, as well as a common history and cultural background that predate political boundaries (Shah 2009). Consequently, Ahmet Davutoğlu argues that the current political borders do not fit the naturally given geopolitical lines:

> "Turkey, which is the historical heir of the geopolitical, geocultural and geoeconomic integrity of the region, needs to develop a strategic approach that can overcome this geo-political, geocultural and geoeconomic disintegration while embracing the region as a whole, and implement this approach in a gradual manner within a tactical flexibility" (Davutoğlu 2001: 451).

The unique positioning, and thus the country's geostrategic location, is the dominating geopolitical code in AKP leaders' rhetoric with regard to Turkey's role in the global energy scene. The former Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Taner Yildiz explained that Turkey has formulated its energy policies "based on a political conceptual framework, where its unique geopolitical position places Ankara at the centre" (2010: 37). The geopolitical codes and references made to its geostrategic location are omnipresent in the AKP's political energy discourse. Yildiz made clear that "Turkey can be more than a bridge; it has the potential to become a regional centre between Asia and Europe. The core of Turkey's energy policy is circular and the diameter of this circle is equal to the world's diameter" (2010: 36). In its strategic plan for 2015-2019, the Ministry for Energy and Natural Resources acknowledges

that “Turkey, due to its position, is suitable for being an energy transition centre (hub); however relevant infrastructure, market formation and regional effectiveness should be provided“. Recently, at the 8th Turkey Investment Conference in New York in September 2016 Energy Minister Berat Albayrak reaffirmed that “Turkey should focus on its strategic region [...]”; although Turkey does not have much oil and gas resources of its own, "[w]e are in the middle of the reserves and the market" (Kutlu 2016).

3.3. EU’s strategy

The dominance of a relatively small number of suppliers makes the EU’s energy supply increasingly insecure. More than two thirds (69.1 %) of the EU’s imports of natural gas in 2014 came from Russia or Norway. In 2010, the same two countries still accounted for 59.6 % of natural gas imports. The growing dependency trend was reinforced by a fast decline of its indigenous gas production, notably in the Netherlands and Denmark. From 2004 to 2014, the EU’s dependency on non-member countries for supplies of natural gas grew 13.8 percentage points faster than the growth in dependency for crude oil (7.5 %) and solid fuels (7.4 %) (European Commission 2016c).

Figure 2 – EU-28 Energy Import Dependency by Fuel (in %)

	1995	2000	2005	2010	2013	2014
Total	43.1	46.7	52.2	52.6	53.1	53.5
Solid Fuels	21.5	30.6	39.4	39.5	44.1	45.6
of which Hard Coal	29.7	42.6	55.7	57.9	64.5	67.9
Petroleum and Products	74.1	75.7	82.1	84.5	87.4	87.4
of which Crude and NGL	73.0	74.4	81.3	84.6	88.0	87.9
Natural Gas	43.4	48.9	57.1	62.2	65.2	67.4

Source: European Commission 2016c.

The security of the EU’s primary energy supplies may be threatened if a high proportion of imports are concentrated among relatively few partners, specifically in the gas sector. The gas disputes between Russia and Ukraine in 2006 and 2009, which caused a temporary 30 percent decline in gas transit to the European Union, brought the issues of energy security back onto the EU’s agenda. Particularly since the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, uncertainty has increased among European Union leaders. It presents a particular challenge for Southeast Europe, such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Greece that depend on the transit route across Ukraine for almost all of the Russian gas that they receive. Even though the Union reformed its gas emergency policies in the aftermath of the 2009 crisis, several shortcomings remain. Reverse

flows are not available at all interconnections between market areas, and access across borders to storage and LNG is hampered. Vast areas of the EU remain physically disconnected to each other by pipelines.

The EU stresses that reducing its dependence on Russia and diversifying its gas supplies and routes will be one of its key priorities (European Commission 2016a, 2015, 2014; European Council 2014). Energy security, trust and solidarity are named as the first dimension of the Energy Union strategy launched in February 2015. This includes the diversification of energy imports. Access to sufficiently diversified gas supplies and stronger infrastructure connectivity are presented as two main pillars of Europe's future gas strategy (European Commission 2016a).

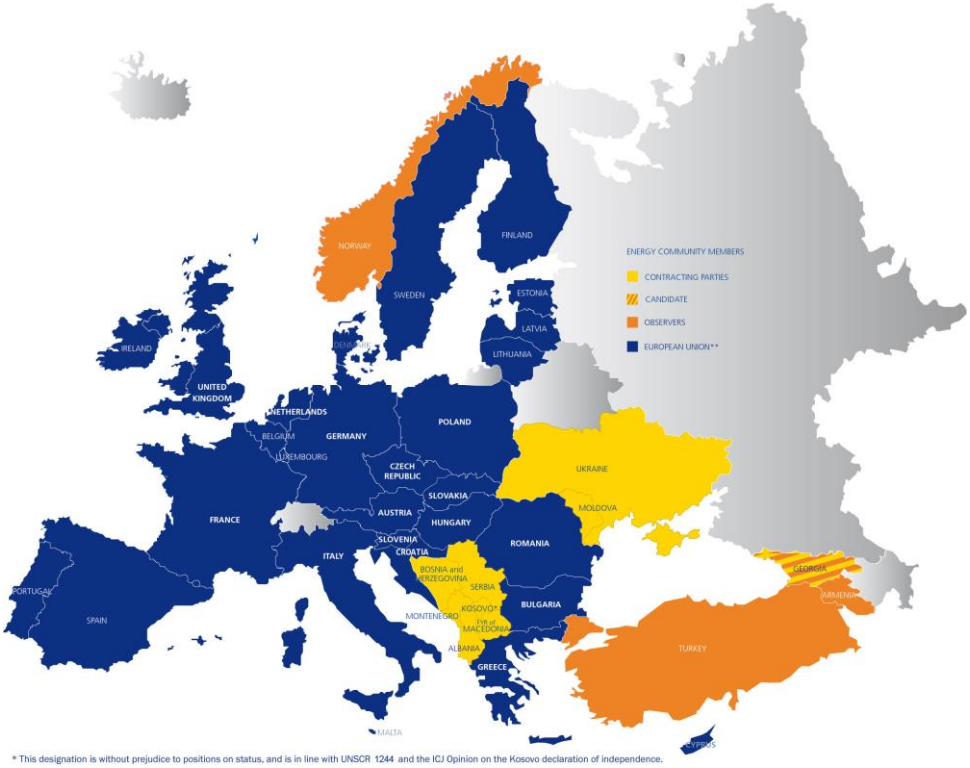
3.4. Through the EU's lenses: Turkey as Part of the Southern Gas Corridor

Departing from the assumption that the geographical scope of the EU's proposals to structure the energy landscape is not the result of geopolitical facts but rather a discursive policy process driven by the European Commission and the European Council, it places Turkey as the key transit country in its Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) strategy. All three Green Paper on the external dimension of EU's energy policy (European Commission 2000, 2006, 2008) as well as Energy Security Strategies (European Commission 2010, 2014) as well as the Energy Union Strategy (European Commission 2015) mention Turkey as the key partner within the SGC strategy.

Even more important from a critical perspective is the SGC concept itself. According to John Gaddis geopolitical visions are an "organised set of political-geographical assumptions that underlie foreign policy making, and which evaluate places and spatial expressions of geopolitical efforts to transform a global space into fixed perspectival scenes" (2005: 466). In this context the Southern Gas Corridor concept expresses an EU-centric perspective of a European energy space that describes Turkey at the 'periphery' as part of a gas corridor surrounding the EU 'core'. However, by framing Turkey repeatedly as a key partner, the EU underlines Turkey's crucial importance and special relationship among the SGC partners. The SGC is part of a wider EU external energy strategy. Through the establishment of four energy corridors, energy partnerships with third countries, the establishment of the Energy

Community[7] as well as measures within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), it is argued that the EU has created a certain energy space with the EU at its centre to enhance the EU's energy security (Bosse 2011). In 2007, the Commission formulated its vision as follows: "The EU should aim to build up a wide network of countries around the EU, acting on the basis of shared rules and principles derived from the EU energy policy" (European Commission 2007: 19).

Figure 3 – Members of the Energy Community



Source: https://www.energy-community.org/

In 2006, the Commission presented the initiative to create a pan-European energy community intended to surround the Union either through a new treaty, or through bilateral agreements. Besides Ukraine, from the outset Turkey was explicitly named as an essential strategic partner, which should be encouraged to join. The Energy Community has often been characterised as an EU attempt to restructure the energy sector in compliance with EU legislation. With their signatures, the contracting parties commit themselves to implementing the relevant EU energy 'acquis communautaire', to develop an adequate regulatory framework and liberalise

[7] The Energy Community is an international organisation dealing with energy policy, established by an international treaty in October 2005. The Treaty entered into force in July 2006 bringing together the European Union, on one hand, and countries from the South East Europe and Black Sea region. see https://www.energy-community.org [20.12.2016]

their energy markets under the treaty. By doing so, the EU "is using diplomacy and rule export to incorporate bordering regions into a standardized set of operating rules and regulations." (Schubert et al. 2016: 35). However, Turkey refused membership to the Energy Community, and thereby aligning with the energy 'acquis' unilaterally. The Turkish government made clear that such an option is adequate for countries not eligible for EU membership, but not for an accession candidate such as Turkey. To date, Turkey has only an observer status.

Apart from the failed attempts of Brussels to persuade the Turkish government to join the Energy Community, the most relevant bilateral energy cooperation initiatives include the 'Positive EU-Turkey Agenda' and the 'EU-Turkey High Level Energy Dialogue and Strategic Energy Cooperation' (Colantoni 2017). In 2012, the 'Positive EU-Turkey Agenda' aimed to complement and enhance accession talks by fostering sectoral cooperation. Energy was an integral part of this process, as confirmed by EU Commissioners Günther Oettinger and Stefan Füle together with Turkish Ministers Egemen Bağış and Taner Yıldız in their joint statement on 'Enhanced EU-Turkey energy cooperation.' However, in the Turkish public debate the Positive Agenda was perceived as a further European attempt to dissociate energy cooperation from Turkey's accession to the EU, as previous attempts to accelerate EU-Turkish cooperation on energy had proved.

Finally, the launch of the 'EU-Turkey High Level Energy Dialogue and Strategic Energy Cooperation' represents the latest attempt to revive institutional cooperation in the energy domain. Agreed in March 2015 by EU Vice President Maros Sefcovic the former Turkish Minister for Energy and Natural Resources, Taner Yıldız, the Dialogue expects again to complement and support Turkey's accession process. Turkey is among the five strategic partners, besides Algeria, Canada, Norway and the US, with whom the Commission has established such a cooperation framework. In the joint declaration on March 16, 2016, Turkey's important role as 'natural energy bridge' and 'energy hub' between energy sources in the Middle Eastern and Caspian Regions and the EU has been reaffirmed, emphasising that „the development of Turkey as a regional natural gas hub is of mutual interest" (European Commission 2016b).

Before the political climate of EU-Turkey relations cooled down, EU officials identified energy security as a potential driver for the revitalisation of EU-Turkey relations (EEAS 2016). From a European perspective, Turkey forms an integral part of the SGC strategy (European Commission 2014) and thereby of the diversification approach of the European Union. Even though, as part of the SGC, Turkey remains at the periphery, serving as a transit country or corridor for the EU's energy security once the infrastructure is in place to deliver gas, it plays

a crucial role in EU's geopolitical vison, according to which gas corridors are established to surround the EU 'core' and to strengthen the European security of supply by bypassing Russia.

4. Concluding Remarks

So far, the words and prospects have been transformed into very little in the way of action and concrete pipeline construction. Even though huge gas resources exist in the Middle East and Caspian Region, production has remained relatively low compared with its potential, even though production costs are significantly lower than elsewhere. Market rationalities as well as regional and international politics will have an impact on whether the country develops as desired by the Turkish government or not.

The critical perspective within political geography was introduced in this paper to understand the logic of the subjective construction of political discourse that intends to shape a certain political space through narratives. It is not the geography that determines a state's position and thus its foreign policy, but it is the construction of certain images and language, which shapes the geopolitical space of interaction. Even though narratives do not always meet political and economic realities, they form a tool for better understanding of a country's geopolitical (self-) perception. The comparison of the Turkish and EU's views show the subjective construction of geopolitical imaginations and identities, including the spatial positioning of regions. Besides the mutual relevance of the EU and Turkey energy sectors which has been reaffirmed at the institutional level in several occasions (e.g. European Commission 2015; High-Level Energy Dialogue 2016), the geopolitical narratives proposed by the two sides often differ. The EU is more interested in Turkey as an 'energy bridge', thus focusing on its role of transit country as part of its SGC strategy.

Turkey's main narrative, on the contrary, considers a wider level of ambition for the country, which aspires to become a regional energy hub (Colantoni et al. 2017). Not by chance and upon Turkish request, the Joint Press Statement of the 2016 High Level Energy Dialogue between Commissioner Cañete and Turkish Minister of Energy Albayrak summarizes the two positions, stating that "both sides underlined the importance of Turkey as a key country for EU's energy security and as a regional energy hub" (European Commission 2016b). In the Turkish rhetoric and construction of its energy role, the hub image, understood as a major crossroad, can hence be interpreted as the consistent development of the bridge narrative, shifting the passive bridge image connecting East and West into an active hub as the central regional point, where pipelines, buyers, and sellers meet. At the Forum Istanbul 2010, the former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu argued that a bridge entails to be inactive and passive, but that Turkey wants to play an active role in decision-making. Even if governments

cannot mandate the creation of hubs, as they emerge organically where buyers and sellers find the best market conditions to do business, the energy hub image is nevertheless a logical rhetoric instrument created by the government's use of geopolitical discourse.

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