THE TURKISH-EU COOPERATION ON THE REFUGEE CRISIS:
THE TURKISH PERCEPTIONS IN THE PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES

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ABSTRACT

Turkey faces the many challenges of managing the intake of an unprecedented number of refugees, and feels the ramifications of the Syrian crisis the most. As a candidate country for the European Union, its struggles on the path of democratization, coupled with significant foreign and domestic policy challenges make it a litmus test case for the EU’s foreign policy success. The continuing waves of migration since the onset of the Syrian civil war has demonstrated that a great number of individuals fleeing their war-torn countries consider Turkey a transit route to reach European territories, even at the risk of their lives. As the human tragedy of refugees unfolded, the need for a viable cooperation between Turkey and the EU has proven to be vital in overcoming a common challenge, resulting in the reutilization of the Readmission Agreement and a congruent Joint Action Plan. Hence, this paper undertakes an investigation of how this partnership is framed in the Turkish political scene in the nexus of the oscillating path of Turkey’s accession process and one of the most challenging humanitarian crises of our times. In this context, parliamentary representation presents itself as an encompassing site wherein a plethora of political viewpoints find expression in deliberating key policies. The analysis suggests that there is a general tendency of skepticism towards the EU in the Turkish political discourse, and a concomitant expectation for a more committed involvement in the refugee issue, which is increasingly framed in a security narrative.

Key Words: Turkey, European Union, refugee crisis, Readmission Agreement, securitization, visa liberalization.
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Introduction

Turkey’s oscillating relationship with the European Union has entered a new phase with the onset of the Syrian civil war and the ensuing refugee crisis. Historically, the country has been a key security partner for the European Union, especially in dealing with instability in the Middle East region. The patterns of cooperation between Turkey and the EU have deepened the accession negotiations underway since 2005. Turkey has had a highly ambivalent relationship with the EU (Huber & Tocci, 2013; Müftüler-Baç, 2016). One of the key sources of ambivalence has been the freedom of mobility for Turkish nationals (Baysan, 2013). It is within this background of accession negotiations on the one hand and the Syrian crisis on the other that the EU and Turkey found themselves confronted with a major refugee crisis in 2015.

The Syrian civil war is one of the most challenging crises in international politics, affecting the Middle East region, with more than 250,000 people killed, 1 million people injured, 4.8 million people forced to flee their country, and 6.5 million internally displaced. It has instigated insecurity, not only within but also beyond this region, and led to a subsequent humanitarian crisis in the form of unprecedented refugee flows, considered the most substantial in magnitude since the World War II.

Turkey is one of the countries that felt the ramifications of the Syrian crisis the most, and faced an enormous influx of Syrians flocking its borders. Turkey opened its doors to more than 2.7 million registered refugees, a number that is likely to be higher considering those that are undocumented. Initially recognized as ‘guests’, with the enactment of the 2013 Law on Foreigners and International Protection (law no. 6458) in line with the EU acquis, Syrian refugees in Turkey were granted the status of ‘temporary protection’ by the Turkish government. As of 2015, Turkey ranks the first in hosting the highest number of refugees in the world, and the third industrialized country receiving the top number of asylum claims, after Germany and the USA. The unfolding developments of the refugee crisis demonstrated that a significant number of refugees arriving in Turkey seem to view it as a transit country, en route to the European borders. According to a recent UNHCR report in 2015, only this year more than 300,000 refugees and migrants have crossed the Mediterranean Sea to enter EU borders, with 2500 people drowned or went missing. The rising toll in human lives...
and the pressures on Turkey and the EU to provide these people with refuge demonstrated the convergence of interests between Turkey and the EU in dealing with the refugee crisis. This paper investigates the Turkish-EU cooperation on the refugee crisis from the Turkish point of view, as it is manifested in the framing of the crisis and the cooperation in parliamentary debates.

The first steps for Turkish-EU cooperation was the reutilization of the 2013 EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement, signed by the EU Commissioner for Home Affairs and the Turkish Minister of Interior for setting a roadmap to the visa liberalization. This agreement stipulates the return of irregular migrants to their country of origin or transit, for all EU, Turkish, and third country nationals as well as stateless people through Turkey. In exchange, the agreement foresees lifting visa requirements for Turkish citizens’ travel in the Schengen zone. For the visa liberalization, Turkey is expected to fulfill several requirements including the establishment of migration and asylum systems in line with international standards, effective struggle against smuggling and human trafficking, secure travel documents, and respect for fundamental rights of citizens and migrants alike. On 29 November 2015, the EU and Turkish leaders, met to adopt the Turkey-EU Joint Action Plan to tackle the refugee crisis in collaboration. The meeting resulted in a joint statement foreseeing the operationalization of the Readmission Agreement by June 2016, and the lifting of the visa requirements for Turkish citizens by October 2016 once Turkey meets all the requirements of the roadmap. As reflected by an EU official from the European External Actions Service, “The crisis became an opportunity for Turkey and EU to come closer. It makes the accession process much more real, which had been put aside.”

As such, the refugee deal was considered as an opportunity to revitalize the Turkish accession process. The EU allocated 2.155 billion euros in July 2016 to Turkey for both humanitarian and non-humanitarian assistance of hosting Syrian refugees, given that Turkey has already spent 8 billion euros for this endeavor. Thus, the Turkish response to the refugee crisis was largely affected from its already troubled relationship with the EU, linked to a wider array of issues such as the accession negotiations and visa liberalization. Looking back at this intense moment of policy exchange between the two parties, the paper seeks to shed light onto how this critical conjuncture in Turkey-EU relations was deliberated in the Turkish political discourse.
To this end, this article analyzes the parliamentary debates in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, as well as the debates in the Joint Parliamentary Committee\(^{15}\) (the JPC) composed of the members of the European Parliament and the Turkish National Assembly. While the Parliament with its relevant commissions enables us to observe the framing of the EU-Turkey cooperation in the Turkish political landscape, the Joint Parliamentary Committee is a platform where viewpoints are communicated to European counterparts. We aim to unearth the framing of the Turkey-EU cooperation on the migration flow by investigating these actors’ perceptions and expectations. To do so, the article employs frame analysis of these political deliberations by tracing and mapping out salient discursive trends in the Turkish political landscape with regards to the refugee crisis.

The Parliament reflects the argumentation, justifications, concerns and assurances deliberated by different parties along the political spectrum, including government officials, and therefore occupies a central role. Hence, the parliament is not only a problem-solving body, but also a performative arena for its members to stand for and justify certain viewpoints and to mobilize other members. The central role of parliamentary deliberations is tied to their role as institutionalized sites of political discourse: “Parliaments are institutions which are dedicated to talk; members of parliaments debate legislative proposals and scrutinise the work of governments through questioning: they may also be the sites where governments explain and justify their policies. Parliamentary talk is a sub-genre of political language, and represents its most formal and institutionalized varieties.” (Bayley, 2004: 1) Moreover, parliamentary debates have an impact beyond institutional formalities as they shape concrete policy outcomes: “[T]he nature of speech acts inside legislatures is a function of institutional rules and mechanisms, and bears an influence on political outcomes that transcend those rules and mechanisms.” (Steiner et. al., 2004: 1)

It is this critical role of the parliaments as venues of framing that this paper bases its own analysis of the Turkish parliamentary deliberations to assess the perceptions on the refugee crisis. The data for the analysis is composed of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee meetings focusing on the issue of migration, Turkish Grand National Assembly meetings regarding the 2013 Law on Foreigners and International Protection, the ratification of the 2013 EU-Turkey Readmission
Agreement, and lastly the discussions of parliamentary commissions on the respective legislation. These debates are chosen due to the fact that they provide insights into how the refugee crisis is framed, articulated, and deliberated in an institutionalized parliamentary (or inter-parliamentary) setting. We analyze a total of 21 primary documents amounting to 1,167 pages with the program ATLAS.ti. The next section explicates the methodology of the frame analysis on parliamentary debates and the main findings.

**Frame Analysis and Turkish Perspectives on the EU-Turkey Partnership in the Refugee Crisis**

Frame analysis is a form of discourse analysis that examines the organization of meaning and how a given phenomenon is defined and problematized to constitute an explanatory unit. (Goffman, 1986:11) By definition framing is “…the process whereby communicators act -- consciously or not -- to construct a particular point of view that encourages the facts of a given situation to be viewed in a particular manner, with some facts made more or less noticeable (even ignored) than others.” (Kuypers, 2009: 182) Thus, by helping individuals to filter and make sense of the vast information available in our everyday lives, frames offer us signals that guide our interpretation of issues and events. (Snow et. al., 1986) One notable manifestation of the filtering function is the way in which it tends to categorize the diagnosis (the problem) and the prognosis (the solution) of a given neutral issue. (Verloo & Lombardo, 2007: 32-34)

With the help of the qualitative research program ATLAS.ti, frame analysis has been conducted through a process of coding, where one searches for “…regularities and patterns as well as for topics your data covers, and then you write down words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns. These word and phrases are coding categories.” (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992: 166) Through a continual process of going back and comparing incidents coded under one particular category and those coded under different coding categories, one can come up with well-defined categories composed of clear properties and discursive cues that present themselves systematically in the respective parliamentary deliberations. Moreover, the coding process on ATLAS.ti also provides the opportunity of observing the distribution of each
coding category as they present themselves in the texts analyzed, which is demonstrated in Table 1. The salient discursive themes, arguments, and concepts in the Turkish parliamentary debates in the partnership for tackling the refugee crisis are premised on, namely mistrust and expectations placed on the EU, visa requirements, problems associated with hosting more refugees, securitization of migration, the conception of Turkish hospitality, and lastly Turkey’s membership-bid.

Table 1. Distribution of Prevalent Frames in Parliamentary Debates

1. Mistrust and expectations placed on the EU in managing the refugee crisis
Frames often function through the identification of a problem associated with a given issue-area, followed by offering possible solutions to overcome it. In this respect, the analysis showed the official Turkish representation of the Syrian humanitarian crisis pointed out two key problems related to the EU’s position. The framing of EU’s position is reflected as the interplay of EU’s failure to tackle the humanitarian problem at hand and outsourcing the problem to other actors, primarily to Turkey. This theme is visible in the Turkish political discourse, as the EU is seen to be exacerbating the crisis by failing to manage it. The most pronounced argument in this nexus is that the international community in general and Europe in particular has turned a blind eye to the humanitarian crisis, and thus failed to tackle the problem at hand. An early manifestation of this argument was expressed at the Joint Parliamentary Committee meeting by Ali Şahin from the Justice and Development Party (hereafter JDP), when he: “… insisted that there are double standards in the international community’s response to Syria and highlighted the hypocrisy of the EU, UN and Western civilization for turning a blind eye to the bloodshed of Muslims in Syria” (EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee 71st Meeting, 15 February 2013, p.16). This theme also emerges in discussions on the Readmission Agreement, as the EU is deemed to be eschewing its responsibilities with refugees: “….Europe only wants to get rid of them; there is nothing else for Turkey…. [Europe] throws them into detention camps when they are caught, in order to convince them to be sent back. They don’t even lay a foot on the ground. It only wants to get rid of them…. (Tuğrul Türkeş in TBMM Dişişleri Komisyonu Tutanak Dergisi, 5 February 2014, p. 6)

The EU failed to tackle the crisis at its borders, and is seen to be outsourcing its problems to Turkey, as expressed by Celal Dinçer from the main opposition Republican People’s Party (hereafter, RPP) during the parliamentary debates: “European countries are trying to use Turkey as a subcontractor to do what they could not have done themselves.” (TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, 108. Birleşim, 25 June 2014, p. 77) Osman Oktay Ekşi, MP from RPP took a similar in the Parliamentary Commission of Foreign Affairs: “Here, the European Union is attempting to bill the problem of migration, which they could not prevent, to Turkey. The European Union tries to put the responsibility on Turkey. This is the gist of the matter.” (TBMM Dişişleri Komisyonu Tutanak Dergisi, 5 February 2014, p.4) Interestingly, Turkish parliamentarians’ emphasis on the EU externalizing the refugee crisis also finds expression as an
attempt to externalize the possible violation of the fundamental rights of the refugees that will be deported:

Now, how would the EU attempt to send back an irregular migrant from Afghanistan, whom it has been accommodating for years? *Most of these individuals are likely to face even death penalty when sent back to their country of origin. If Germany could do this, if an EU member country could do this, why would they send him to us?* When he comes to us, considering that we do have a readmission agreement, could we send an individual facing such a risk back to his country of origin?

(Tunca Toskay in TBMM Dışişleri Komisyonu Tutanak Dergisi, 5 February 2014, p.11, *emphasis added*)

There is a general leitmotif of skepticism in the Turkish parliamentary debates towards the role EU has played in addressing the Syrian crisis, and its intentions for underpinning the refugee deal with Turkey.

Against this backdrop of problematizing EU’s hitherto response to the refugee crisis, there is a call to the international community to take on greater responsibility in bringing about a solution. The ex-Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu has reflected on this notion during the Joint Parliamentary Committee meetings: “…Syrians have not received adequate humanitarian support and that a death toll of 70,000 Syrians has been insufficient to push the international community to intervene in this region.” (EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee, 71st Meeting, 2013, p. 14, *emphasis added*)

The second recurrent theme is concerned with greater *burden sharing* between Turkey and the EU, as expressed by Director General at the Directorate General of Migration Management, Atilla Toros, who “underlined the importance of burden-sharing in Turkish migration policy” during the Joint Parliamentary Committee meetings. (EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee 75th Meeting, 2014, p.10) An associated code of *joint approach to common challenges* is observable to a lesser extent, denoting increased cooperation between Turkey and the EU on what is considered as a shared problem: “The necessity to struggle against illegal migration from Turkey to Europe requires us to develop close cooperation with the EU. We believe that such cooperation with the EU will have a deterrent effect on the negative
impact that the illegal migration traffic has brought to our region. In this context, we assess the readmission deal to be an effective strategy.” (Faruk Işık in TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, 108. Birleşim, 25 June 2014, p. 80) Hence, skepticism towards EU’s priorities and intentions is accompanied by a call for greater involvement on part of the latter as Turkish officials express their willingness for concerted action.

2. The looming issue of visa requirements for Turkey

The third main theme in the parliamentary debates is related to the readmission deal and the promise of visa liberalization for Turkish citizens. This overlap of two policy areas finds expression in the political deliberations, whereby the visa issue presents itself as one of the most salient issues in the discussions on migration. Thus, a discursive trend becomes visible throughout the analysis within the framework of the readmission agreement, suggesting that Turkey has been and continues to be treated unfairly by the EU, with regards to the visa requirements imposed on its citizens. The interplay of these two codes can be traced in the comments by Egemen Bağış, the Minister of EU Affairs, who noted “…the positive excitement over the start of visa dialogue, but at the same time criticized the lengthy process into which Turkey’s government invested a lot of efforts. Rhetorically speaking, the EU should be built without walls, which is why Turkey could not be stalled any further.” (EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee 73rd Meeting, 2013, p. 4, emphasis added) In the Turkish Grand National Assembly, the linkage between Readmission Agreement and visa liberalization has also been questioned by Ahmet Toptaş: “In fact, there is no meaning for us to compare this [readmission] with visa liberalization. We are a country that has attained the right to travel to Europe without visa. Our people were travelling without a visa before, they had eased visa requirements and they made visa mandatory. Now, in order to revoke this visa requirement…they are treating us like a colony to turn Turkey into a refugee camp.” (İçişleri Komisyonu Tutanak Dergisi, 30 January 2014, p.11, emphasis added) Thus, the fact that the refugee crisis, the Readmission Agreement, and visa liberalization have become increasingly intertwined has been viewed with suspicion in the political discourse.

Moreover, the discontent regarding the EU’s visa regime to Turkey resonates through a corollary argument viewing the readmission deal as a blow to Turkey’s international
standing. The Turkish political perception revolves around the argument that the EU expects too much from Turkey, with an analogy of the capitulations conferred to European counterparts in the Ottoman period: “[W]e all know what it means to accept an agreement that unilaterally seeks the interests of the European Union. This is similar to the capitulations during the last period of the Ottoman Empire. Turkish people will not accept this.” (Gürkut Acar in TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, 108. Birleşim, 25 June 2014, p. 85) In the Internal Affairs Commission meeting the emphasis was on how the proposed deal “does not treat Turkey as a candidate country or as a neighboring country; it rather treats Turkey as a third world country.” (Mehmet S. Kesimoğlu in TBMM İçişleri Komisyon Tutanak Dergisi, 30 January 2014, p.8)

In line with the discourse on unfairly imposed visa requirements on nationals of Turkey, a frequently reiterated policy instrument is the full realization of the promised visa liberalization, with particular reference to links between the Turkish society and the EU on a wider scope:

This process [visa liberalization] is not initiated anew...it was launched earlier and is an issue desired by many, especially those with links abroad. Our businessmen endured problems regarding the market because they had an obstacle such as the visa... Once again, from a social angle and with respect to family matters, we have a great number of individuals residing abroad...their friends, children, or other relatives do not get a chance to reunite with them when they want to travel, leading to some social problems. In this context...we hope that the visa liberalization will help to overcome such hardship...

(Gülay Samancı in İçişleri Komisyonu Tutanak Dergisi, 30 January 2014, p.12)

This viewpoint underlines social and economic ties between the EU and Turkey to end visa requirements for Turkish citizens.

3. Problems associated with accepting more refugees in the Turkish society

This discursive theme is firstly manifested in the strikingly recurrent framing of Turkey turning into a dumping site with the readmission agreement, illustrated by the following excerpt: “Here, with the visa-free travel carrot, [Turkey] has been turned into
a country that meets the costs of the EU’s colonial practices, all of its human disposals, and thus, put under immense burden.” (Turkish Grand National Assembly Report of the EU Adoption Commission Views on the Law on Foreigners and International Protection, 04 February 2014, p. 5) A related concept emerging from the data has been sociological problems associated with hosting refugee groups, in particular problems faced by refugee women and children: “Women and children are the most vulnerable groups among all migrants and refugees. They are openly sold, forced to sexual labor, made to work in insecure jobs as hostages with their passports confiscated, and married in exchange of money…” (Sakine Öz in TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Cilt 46, 81. Birleşim, 21 March 2013, p.984) Similar imminent social problems for Turkey have been raised during the parliamentary debates on the Readmission Agreement: “[T]here are also those social impacts that this deal will create in Turkey…: illegal marriages will increase, there will be more child brides, the number of rape cases will raise, health problems will spread, violence against women and children will escalate, and so will the number of unregistered employees.” (Celal Dinçer in TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, 108. Birleşim, 25 June 2014, p.78)

In response to these pending problems the need to invest in infrastructure to host refugee communities is suggested as a solution. Yet interestingly, the term ‘infrastructure’ does not solely connote those long-term needs of refugee communities, but also signifies monitoring borders for ‘illegal’ activities, in line with the demands coming from the EU. An example of this framing is presented in the following comment: “Due to its geographical position, Turkey confronts great difficulties in fighting against illegal immigration and smuggling of people (receiving around 10,000 immigrants every year). New legislation is to be adopted to deal with and solve these problems in line with the EU’s expectations. Centers for hosting illegal immigrants will be established and health care conditions and education services for these people will be enhanced in time.” (Ex-minister of the Interior Beşir Atalay in EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee 64th Meeting, 2010, p.4, emphasis added)

4. Securitization of migration in Turkey

The tendency to securitize migration in the Turkish political discourse, which is relatively a new phenomenon compared to its European and North American
counterparts (Ceyhan and Tsoukala 2002; Huysmans 2000; Leonard 2009), emerged as a fifth theme. According to Bigo, the prevalent tendency of framing migration primarily as a security issue in EU policy-making outspreads its reach beyond the Schengen zone, extending to candidate countries as well as EU’s ‘circle of friends’. The outreach of EU’s influence usually takes the form of economic aid in exchange of permission to conduct police and immigration controls within the borders of the country in question. (Bigo, 2008: 18) In this regard, similar conceptions of the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers are becoming salient in the Turkish context, whereby the latter are framed to harbor threats to the society:

...[t]here are many unrecorded refugees that have entered Turkey...There are those that are begging for money or conducting similar actions in Istanbul, some make raids on houses, a situation that might lead to mayhem in certain cities. Therefore, it is mandatory to take precautions about incoming refugees in specific camps, about where they should enter or not...[W]elcoming these refugees is a historical duty, but it is equally important to prevent them from wreaking havoc. (Yusuf Halaçoğlu in TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, 20 March 2013, Cilt 46, 80. Birleşim, p.670, emphasis added)

Parallel to the evident narrative on security, the concept of terrorism is articulated as an interrelated problem area to the refugee crisis: “There is great unrest in the cities along the border. A lot of unknown people have entered our country and are living in it...We don’t know whether they are Syrian or not...We need to take precautions regarding them, we need to keep them under record. We need to determine whether they are in contact with terrorist organizations or not.” (Ali Serindağ in TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, 20 March 2013, Cilt 46, 80. Birleşim, p. 663)

Congruently, in tandem to the growing security narrative in the Turkish context, the most resonant policy instrument to address these perceived problems has been the theme of border control, which is interlinked with the concept on policing migration. The former Deputy Director General of Migration, Asylum and Visa Engin Yürür’s reported comments stressing this security-oriented policy approach to the refugee crisis:
He noted that Turkish authorities are operating effectively against illegal immigration; and, provided examples of Turkish efforts where, under Article 79 of the Turkish Penal Code the smuggling of migrants falls under ‘heavy criminal offenses’. He underlined...the achievements of Turkey’s National Coast Guard. As the issue is of a cross boundary nature, Mr Yürür noted that Turkey had engaged into international cooperation: it signed a readmission protocol with Greece in 2002, and is also in close contact with countries such as France, UK, Hungary and the Commission on the issue.

(EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee 75th Meeting, 2014, p.10)

Securitization of migration penetrated the Turkish official outlook with the unprecedented number of refugees arriving from the war zone in Syria. While Turkey struggles to manage hosting an inflow of refugees to this extent, the official discourse has mimicked its European counterparts in seeking to fulfill EU expectations on controlling migration flows.

5. Upholding the principles of ‘Turkish hospitality’

Notwithstanding the problematization of imminent challenges the refugee crisis holds for Turkey, there is a concurrent discourse of welcoming refugees as a dominant policy approach. Firstly, the policy of opening the doors to individuals in need of protection initially considered as ‘guests’ is underlined in the political discourse:

Turkey opened its borders to refugees, as it had done in the past for those from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Myanmar, Bulgaria, and others. First camps for Syrian refugees were established in Turkey in April 2011. The number of refugees in the camps as well as outside of them was rising steadily...[R]efugees are called in Turkey ‘guests’. Moreover, multiple services are provided by Turkey in the camps, such as health services at polyclinic standard.

(Head of Disaster & Emergency Management Presidency Fuat Oktay in EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee 72nd Meeting, 2013, p. 16)
An interconnected theme here is the *tradition of hospitality*, with neo-Ottoman undertones. This proclaimed historical characteristic of the Turkish society is lucidly expressed by the ex-Minister of Internal Affairs Muammer Güler during the parliamentary debates on the Draft Law on Foreigners and International Protection: “We have a thousand year old rooted tradition of being a society of compassion, of opening our doors to incoming migration in the geography that we exist, taking under protection those that are in need, and as such, being respected by the international community.” (TBMM Tutanak Dergisi, Cilt: 46, 80. Birleşim, 20 March 2013, p. 673)

6. Turkey’s membership bid in the nexus of the refugee crisis

Finally, the last theme is marked by the framing of *Turkey’s membership as an opportunity for the EU*, suggesting that Turkey’s possible membership will be an asset for the EU, both as an economic force and a strategic player in bringing about stability in the wider region. Turkey’s accession process is depicted as an overlapping matter in the partnership for managing the humanitarian crisis:

During these visits, some members of the ECR, some members of the European Parliament asked me this question: ‘The European economy is on the decline, it is shrinking. Why is Turkey so insistent on joining the EU? While our economy is declining and shrinking, the Turkish economy became a robust challenging economy.’ Whichever parliamentarian you speak to in Europe, in one-to-one meetings...they definitely share this observation. I replied to them humorously: ‘Your economy might be on the decline. Above all, we share a common geography with the EU, we have a common history, even if there has been tension and conflict at times. When you lose your ground, you need strong arms, strong hands to pick you up. This is why we want to join the EU.’ You accept this or not, when we consider the economic indicators, we see how clear it is.


Therefore, not only have Turkish officials perceived Turkey’s membership bid part and parcel of the refugee deal, and a means to reinvigorate the accession process much
like their European counterparts, but this a prospect is framed as an opportunity for the EU in acquiring a strong member that can stabilize the region.
Conclusion

The Syrian civil war has brought about a human tragedy unforeseen affecting millions of lives and creating a security void in the region. It seems unlikely that the waves of refugees that have fled their country in search for a safe future will be able to return home anytime soon. While international protection applications to Turkey has sky-rocketed during this period, concomitantly thousands of refugees have continued to risk their lives in order to arrive at the European border either by land or by sea. In this conjuncture, the partnership between Turkey and the EU has proved to be indispensable, not only in providing humanitarian aid, but also in acquiring long-term solutions. These developments came about during a time where Turkey’s accession process has been at an impasse, giving hope that negotiations can be rekindled. The official Turkish discourse in this nexus provides significant insights into the perceptions of the policy makers, thereby offering a valuable vantage point for future policies.

Our analysis on the Turkish parliamentary deliberations revealed two recurrent discursive tendencies, mistrust towards the EU along with a salient security narrative on the issue of migration. In the Turkish political scene, cooperation with the EU on the issue of migration is seen from a cynical angle, in light of previous experiences with the EU in what has been considered as an ‘unjust’ treatment of Turkey. There is an evident concern for Turkey ending up worse off as a result of the deal. Given the conditions of the readmission agreement in exchange of what is seen as the ‘carrot’ of visa liberalization, worries have been raised on the prospect of Turkey turning into a ‘dump site’ of refugees, afflicted with subsequent socio-political problems jeopardizing Turkish society. The security narrative finds resonance in the framing of the possible outcome of hosting an incremental number of refugees, also manifested in the intersecting frames of migration and the issue area of terrorism.

In contrast to a perception of failure on part of the EU in its tardy response to the escalating crisis in Syria, the official Turkish representation puts emphasis on the responsibilities already undertaken by Turkey in hosting the refugees premised on what is considered as a ‘tradition of hospitality’. There is a call made to the international community in general and the EU officials in particular for taking on greater
responsibility in solving the humanitarian crisis, whereby burden sharing and joint action with the EU against what is deemed as a shared problem are articulated as the main course of action. The security narrative is once again palpable in the framing of the solution as such joint endeavors are understood to involve primarily border controls, policing, and more rigorous monitoring of ‘illegal migration’. The securitization of migration in the Turkish context is a relatively new phenomenon compared to other western countries, but the Turkish discourse mimics its European counterparts as a policy approach to the refugee crisis in its cooperation with the EU.

In sum, our analysis illustrated that while the Turkish political discourse is imbued in suspicion towards the EU, there is also an impetus for closer partnership, evident in the overlapping frame of Turkey’s membership bid that is regarded as an asset for the EU. Therefore, despite the fact that the Turkish rhetoric is critical of the lukewarm position of the EU, concerted action is sought as the main solution strategy. Secondly, the official open door policy to incoming refugees and taking pride in the hospitality for people in need of protection is being overshadowed with the growing prevalence of the security narrative. As a result, for sustainable cooperation between Turkey and the EU in tackling the crisis and helping refugees in need, an environment of trust needs to be fostered, premised on a humanitarian approach on how to integrate refugee communities in host societies rather than one imbued in an elevated sense of insecurity. To this end, a closer cooperation between Turkey and the EU is not only desirable in addressing the refugee crisis, but also in re-building trust between two parties and re-navigating Turkey’s foreign policy orientation.
References


### Appendix:

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<td>EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee</td>
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1. This paper received support from a TUBITAK bilateral research grant and the Jean Monnet Network, PACO.
However, as of January 2017 neither goal has been realized, with Turkey failing to meet its obligations, particularly those pertaining to human rights. For instance, see The Guardian "EU-Turkey visa deal on brink as Erdoğan refuses to change terror laws," 6 May 2016.

12 Interview conducted with European Commission official in Brussels on February 16, 2016.


15 The committee was established as a platform to discuss issues pertaining to Turkey’s accession process, in line with the Association Agreement in 1963, as well as parliamentary decisions of the European Parliament and the Turkish Grand National Assembly. For more information, see European Parliament Delegations http://www.europarl.europa.eu/delegations/en/d-tr/home.html.

16 A detailed list of all the documents can be found in the Appendix.

17 All the data acquired from this primary source has been analyzed in the original language and when necessary translated to English by the author in the reporting of the findings.

18 Established in 2009, the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency of Turkey is responsible of taking necessary measures for emergency management and civil protection in the country.