Privileged, problematic or problem solving partnership: the image of the European Union in contemporary Turkey

Jan Niemiec
(Jagiellonian University in Kraków)

Abstract

The aim of proposed paper is to analyze the role of EU-Turkey relations in Turkish public debate from 2014 onwards. Since the official application submitted by Republic of Turkey in 1987, accession negotiations proceeded extremely slowly until the whole process has come to an impasse in 2018. Although currently Turkey and the European Union share many common problems (e.g. migration crisis, threat of terrorism), their cooperation is very limited and thus often ineffective. The author argues that current debate in Turkey has been shaped by President Erdoğan's anti-Western rhetoric and is dominated by domestic factors (i.e. inward oriented).

The main part of this research was devoted to the analysis of political discourse. In this context, opinions on the European Union of President Erdoğan and the ruling Justice and Development Party as well as representatives of the parliamentary opposition were explored in detail. The source analysis focused on identifying basic assumptions and objectives of Turkish foreign policy to describe Turkey's attitudes towards the EU. Accordingly, there are three possible scenarios for future partnership between Turkey and the EU: optimistic, pessimistic and realistic.

Keywords: Republic of Turkey, Turkish foreign policy, European Union–Turkey relations, European Neighbourhood Policy
Introduction

For almost the entire 20th century, international image of the Republic of Turkey was shaped by its relationship with Western Europe and the United States. Founded in 1923 after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish state renounced its imperial past for a thorough modernization and secularization of all spheres of public life which would result in Ankara’s inclusion among highly developed liberal democracies. The principle of prioritizing relations with the West was formulated by the founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, whose views has set the political framework of the Republic\(^1\). Being the originator of radical political transformation, Mustafa Kemal believed that eliminating all practices created during the Ottoman rule would provide Turkey with sustainable development which had been expected by society. Thus, the Turks decided to tighten political and economic ties with their Western allies, gradually distancing themselves from neighboring regions. Recognized by almost all consecutive governments as the official doctrine of Turkish domestic and foreign policy, the Kemalist ideology has become the foundation for a series of deep structural reforms, as a result of which the entire political and administrative structure was to be comprehensively modernized in accordance with Western standards\(^2\). In order to consolidate the Kemalist model in the social consciousness, a powerful army acted as the guardian of the republican political values. In line with practice developed after Atatürk’s death, Turkish Armed Forces had an unwritten right to intervene in cases of violating these norms by politicians\(^3\).

In the previous century, there were also two anti-European narratives in Turkey which, however, remained outside the mainstream of politics. One of them was the nationalist model which focused on the Pan-Turkism idea. The basic assumption of this ideology was to emphasize the ethnic unity of Turkic peoples (including Turks, Azeris, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Tatars, and Yakuts). According to proponents of Turkish nationalism, cooperation with United States of America and Western Europe threatened the security level of Turkic peoples, a large part of which was then part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

(USSR). By proclaiming the cultural uniqueness of Turkic peoples, ideologists associated with Turkish nationalist thought called for non-engagement in global disputes. Consequently, Turkic peoples could then attempt to create their own platform for regional cooperation⁴.

The last type of narrative was an Islamist-conservative model, referring to values related to the Muslim religion. Representatives of this concept stressed the important place of Turkey in the Islamic world. Some of them even appealed for focusing the international activity of the Turks exclusively on this region⁵. Significant support for the conservative model resulted from dissatisfaction of a large part of society with the rapid pace of changes introduced by the rulers who were guided by kemalist philosophy. Particularly population of rural origin did not agree to the authorities' efforts to exclude Islam from public life. For decades, on the outskirts of Turkish politics there was a large group of intellectuals cultivating the Ottoman tradition in which political system secular and religious powers come together and complement each other⁶.

Despite the existence of competing models, in the 20th century the vast majority of Turkish citizens supported the vision proposed by the kemalist ideology in which integration with European structures was an essential element. Ankara was one of the first states to join Council of Europe (1949) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (1952). The next step would have been the accession to European Economic Community (EEC), but due to reasons described below the official application was submitted by the Turkish government only in 1987⁷. However, numerous problems emerging during the negotiations have not discouraged Turkish authorities from attempting to realize the idea of Turkey’s membership in European structures. Completion of the accession process was also one of the main foreign policy goals of the Justice and Development Party (tur. Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP) which won the parliamentary elections in November 2002. Now, after almost twenty years of AKP in power, the prospect of Turkey's accession to the EU is very distant. This paper is an attempt to find an answer to the question which factors influenced the change of Turkish policy towards the European Union.

Theoretical framework

As a theoretical basis for my research, I adopted Role Theory in International Relations which offers a catalog of tools useful in examining the diplomatic activity of states. As a result of its broad research perspective and methodological openness, the applied theory allows to identify a number of factors constituting the foreign policy. All tasks and duties realized by the state in bilateral relations are considered in this theoretical approach as its international roles.

The Role Theory in International Relations was developed in the second half of the twentieth century as a consequence of broader research on social roles. The founder of this theoretical approach was Kalevi Holsti, Canadian political scientist of Finnish origin. In 1970 Holsti published the findings of his works in which he had studied the links between the structure of the international system and the foreign policies of selected states. Thus, Kalevi Holsti significantly facilitated the scientific exploration of political practice by referring its individual determinants to specific elements forming theoretical concepts. Other researchers who contributed to the development of Role Theory in International Relations are: Carl Backman, Stephen Walker, James Rosenau, Lisbeth Aggestam, Michael Barnett, and Ziemowit Jacek Pietraś.

Drawing from achievements of other academic disciplines (eg. anthropology, political science, psychology, and sociology), Role Theory in International Relations emphasizes the importance of identity in interstate relations, which refers in this respect to assumptions of constructivism. Moreover, the Role Theory allows for the usage of aforementioned research tools and perspectives in an analysis of state behavior on the international arena. In addiction, a wide methodological scope is helpful in an attempt to describe and explain complex processes occurring in regional or global space. However, there is no universally accepted definition of role in social sciences. Therefore, each of international relations theories touches this subject in different way. For example, structural realism analyzes the role of the state through the prism of power distributed within the political system. In turn, liberal theories

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draw attention to the influence of internal factors, while behavioral approach identifies the role of the state with attitudes of decision-makers. Finally, postmodernism and critical theory negate the existence of roles at all. In my research I employed the definition developed by fellow Polish researcher Justyna Zając who defines the international roles of the state as a "system of actions and influences on the international arena, determined primarily by the state’s identity and its international position"\textsuperscript{10}.

The state realizes its international roles by means of foreign policy. By analyzing declarations and actions of the authorities in the international environment, some specific roles can be identified. After examining speeches and official announcements of political leaders from seventy-one states, Kalevi Holsti described seventeen major types of international roles, including types such as: bastion of revolution (liberator), collaborator, mediator-integrator, independent, regional protector, etc. Since then the concept proposed by Holsti has been systematically developing and refining by other researchers (eg. Margareta and Charles Hermann, Stephen Walker, Lisbeth Aggestam)\textsuperscript{11}.

Naturally, a given state can play several roles at the same time, which depends on the perception of its own identity and state’s attitude towards other participants of the international system. However, such a situation raises the risk of conflict between roles, which may result in serious turbulences in state’s foreign policy. The solution to this problem is not easy and requires great conceptual and organizational skills from state authorities\textsuperscript{12}. The most frequent reasons for these conflicts are some discrepancies between declared, expected, and performed roles which, although they all belong to one continuum, concerns other aspects of diplomatic practice. Declared roles include all announcements of the rulers about the future activities of the state in the international arena. In turn, expected roles are related to internal and external conditions in which a given participant of the system is situated. On the other hand, performed roles are specific actions taken by state authorities in the regional and global environment. A state embroiled in a series of complex international


\textsuperscript{12} J. Zając, Role Unii Europejskiej w Regionie Afryki Północnej i Bliskiego Wschodu, p. 35-38.
roles must constantly control whether the entirety of activities that constitute the sphere of foreign policy fulfills the principle of cohesion\textsuperscript{13}.

**Research design and methodology**

The main objective of this paper is to analyze the policy of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the government of the Justice and Development Party (tur. AKP) towards the European Union and its institutions. Particular attention has been devoted to the period from 2014 onwards, when fundamental change in Turkish political system has begun. That year, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, long-time Prime Minister and a leader of the ruling AKP, was elected President of Turkey in the first ever direct national voting. Subsequently, the new president started the process of concentrating power in his own hands, gradually changing the state’s political system from the parliamentary model to presidential one\textsuperscript{14}. This coincided with the intensification of critical attitudes and confrontational narratives towards the EU expressed publicly by representatives of Turkish political elites.

It is an undeniable fact that since the Justice and Development Party won the parliamentary elections in 2002, Turkey has increased its influence on the international arena. One of principal goals of the party, that has been ruling the state for almost two decades, is to achieve a status of regional power by Turkey. Regional power (also known as local power) is a state that possesses all necessary political tools to play a dominant role in a given geographical region, but is still too weak to be considered as a global actor\textsuperscript{15}. Gaining the position of regional power was one of the key assumptions of AKP’s plan for the next decade, announced by Erdoğan in 2010. Now, after nine years have passed, does Turkey still have a chance to implement this ambitious visions?

A drastic shift in AKP’s policy towards the idea of European integration is problematic from the EU’s point of view because Turkey, which has been considered as a reliable partner for years, is now becoming an unfriendly rival to many European initiatives. Differences of views and interests are apparent on issues such as: the Syrian civil war,


strengthening NATO's unity, relations with the Russian Federation, or policies towards Western Balkans\textsuperscript{16}. At this point it is important to note that first symptoms of Turkey's withdrawal from concentrating its foreign policy on relations with the EU emerged in the first decade of the 21st century. According to Ahmet Davutoğlu’s doctrine of “strategic depth”, diplomatic activities of the AKP was to be multidimensional, hence contacts between Turkey and the EU should not be more important to Turks than their ties with other regions (North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia). Although this vision failed during the Arab Spring, President Erdoğan and the AKP have not decided to return to closer relations with the European Union. On the contrary, Turkish rhetoric towards the EU is constantly sharpening\textsuperscript{17}.

In my research I decided to formulate three main hypotheses:

- \( H_1 \): Turkish political debate on the EU has been shaped by President Erdoğan's anti-Western rhetoric and is dominated by domestic factors
- \( H_2 \): confrontational foreign policy functions as a tool in determining the maximum level of implementation of the AKP’s regional strategy
- \( H_3 \): Turkish authorities are aware that a complete break with the European Union is not advisable

There is no doubt that changing dynamics in the EU-Turkey relations is a vital problem, both for international relations studies and current political practise. Turkey is regarded as a state whose actions could affect the future of three continents (Europe, Asia, and Africa)\textsuperscript{18}. As increasingly assertive Turkish foreign policy may even threaten the current regional order, Turkey's growing role on the international arena requires that European researchers should follow and interpret its actions and explain the assumptions of Turkish regional strategy. Therefore, the presented research problem is worth conducting a thorough analysis.

A preliminary review of literature, made in order to determine the current state of knowledge on the relations between Turkey and the European Union, revealed some discrepancies between Turkish and foreign researchers. Some scholars from Europe and the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17} E. Efegil, \textit{AK Parti Hükümetinin Orta Doğu Politikası ve ABD Yönetimi ile Batılı Uzmanların Eleştirileri}, “Akademik Bakış” 18, no. 9 (2016), p. 56-57.
\end{itemize}
US tend to emphasize President Erdoğan's authoritarian aspirations, often underestimating the Turkish perspective on the accession process. Moreover, many researcher are still analyzing the AKP foreign policy through the lens of classical “strategic depth”, although long before Prime Minister Davutoğlu’s resignation in 2016 this strategy has been significantly modified. In addition, the reorganization of Turkey's regional policy has gained even more momentum after the aforementioned change from parliamentary to presidential system. Consequently, I decided to base my research on Turkish sources regarding Turkey’s relations with the European Union. Thus, an in-depth analysis of President Erdoğan’s and AKP's views and attitudes in this field will be possible. Employing all available sources (including transcripts of parliamentary debates and statements of Turkish foreign policy-makers), I will attempt to compile a comprehensive summary of the Turkish authorities' current policies towards the EU along with scenarios for future developments. It is worth emphasizing that adoption of Turkish perspective has not been a frequently used approach in the discipline of international relations. Therefore, the results of this study may broaden the scientific knowledge about geopolitical strategy of Turkey which could provide a contribution to further researches on the regional policy of this state.

As a graduate of Turkology and International Relations at the Jagiellonian University, I already have some experience in studying Turkey's relations with other states. Knowledge of the language and specific Turkish realities is certainly an asset in this type of research, because it allows for a use of primary sources and facilitates establishing contacts with decision-makers. At current stage, I plan to continue reviewing the literature on the subject, with particular reference to the latest publications of Turkish authors. Simultaneously, official documents issued by the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey are being analyzed. I also have access to reports and policy briefs published by both government agencies and NGOs. Obviously, all these sources concern relations between Turkey and the EU. Another important research activity will be conducted by studying transcripts from the Turkish Parliament to determine the role of Ankara's relations with the European Union states in current political debate. Some of the materials I am interested in are available on official websites, while in order to explore the others, I will travel to Turkey. During my stay there, I

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would like to establish contacts with people related to the topic of research (eg. politicians, International Relations researchers, experts on the EU-Turkey relations). It would certainly provide many important conclusions for my study.

According to above-mentioned explanations, my study is based on a qualitative research methodology. It allows for a more open interpretation of data, attaches greater attention to contexts, and is better suited to the study of a particular process. Thus, adopted research strategy is a case study which provides an in-depth and thorough analysis of the phenomenon being the subject of this research\(^{20}\). Data will be collected by analyzing written sources, qualitative observation during research visits in Turkey, and interviews with decision makers and experts in a field of Turkish-EU relations.

Due to the key role of written materials in this research, source criticism was chosen as the basic method. A wide catalog of sources concerning the relations between Turkey and the European Union will be studied, including official government and agency documents, reports, registers, transcripts, press releases, as well as academic publications (monographs and articles). An important phase in analyzing these materials will be verification of their credibility and accuracy, but while working on Turkish sources for several years, I have the ability to recognize publications written under political pressure (triangulation of data sources). In the case of presidential and governmental documentation as well as audiovisual materials (e.g. speeches of public representatives), I plan to employ an analysis of decision-making process. By examining events and developments from the political center point of view, I will focus on the EU discourse of Turkish authorities. The purpose of this method will be to identify the importance of mutual relations in the AKP’S new regional conception. Using the Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), theoretical considerations will be confronted with Turkish diplomatic activities on the international arena. As a result, it should be possible to isolate a set of the most important variables influencing Turkish foreign policy and then to examine some correlations between them. In addition, the process of modifying Turkey's policy towards the EU will be examined by historical method, process tracking method, and comparative analysis. Subsequently, a collected catalog of factors will be used in the prognostic part. In order to create scenarios, I will employ the extrapolation method which allows for determine the approximate direction of phenomena and processes.

Historical background

As it has already been mentioned in the introductory part of this research paper, since the very foundation of the Republic, the priority of Turkish governments was westernization and integration with Europe. Relations between Turkey and the European Union have a relatively long history that dates back to the late fifties. On 31 July 1959, the then Prime Minister of Turkey Adnan Menderes applied to the European Economic Community (EEC) for an associate membership. The Turkish application was accepted on 11 September of the same year\textsuperscript{21}. Efforts to strengthen mutual relations were reflected in the signing of “Agreement Creating An Association between Turkey and the European Economic Community” (commonly known as the Ankara Agreement) in 12 September 1963. The aim of the treaty, which came into force in 1964, was to create optimal conditions for Turkey's membership in the EEC. Hence, the most important stage in this process was to ensure the deepened economic integration of Turkey with the EEC member states. Ankara Agreement established also an institutional structure consisting of bodies such as: Association Council, Association Committee, Turkey-EU Joint Parliamentary Commission (JPC), Joint Advisory Committee The Customs Cooperation Committee (CCC), Customs Union Joint Committee. An Additional Protocol to the Agreement, which was signed in 1970, concerned the gradual elimination of custom tariffs and quantitative restrictions between Turkey and the EEC\textsuperscript{22}.

However, due to some serious economic problems Turkey faced at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, the Ankara Agreement has never been fully completed. The three-stage adaptation process was supposed to result in Turkey being subject to common custom tariff, but in reality it turned out that Turkish economy was not prepared for such deep changes at that time\textsuperscript{23}. Thus, since the mid-1970s there has been a noticeable reduction in contacts between Turkey and the EEC. The reason for this was also an unstable political situation in Turkey (e.g. three military coups between 1960 and 1980)\textsuperscript{24}.

Relations between Turkey and the European Economic Community were resumed in 1983, when Turkish Armed Forces allowed for the restoration of civilian government. With the normalization of its domestic policy, Turkey has returned to its intention to establish positive economic ties with the EEC. In order to demonstrate Turkish commitment to idea of European integration, the government of Turgut Özal applied for full membership on 14 April 1987. Prime Minister Özal was aware that the real and permanent stabilization of Turkish political system is possible only after joining the EEC. Otherwise, the actual power in the state would be exercised for decades by the army that could either rule from behind the scenes or form a strong military government. Since the official document was submitted some time ahead of the date specified in the Ankara Agreement accession calendar, the EEC Commission's response was not released immediately. It was announced on 18 December 1989 that the Turkish application had been rejected due to a necessity to complete the integration process within the Community itself, which was supposed to be accomplished in 1992. Moreover, the Commission raised some concerns on the level of economic, political, and social development in some areas of the state. Therefore, it was proposed to continue the accession process under provisions of the Ankara Agreement without setting a specific date for the full membership.

Despite some disappointment with the Commission’s opinion, the EEC proposal was approved by Turkish government. In the following years Ankara focused on effective implementation of the Additional Protocol provisions which were to create a customs union. This goal was achieved by the Turks on 5 March 1995, when the Association Council announced that from 1 January 1996 the customs union would be established between Turkey and the European Union (the EEC was incorporated by newly formed EU in 1993). It was certainly one of the most important stages in the entire integration process because establishment of the union was the ultimate goal of the Additional Protocol. Since then, the Turkish-European relations have entered a new dimension, which was confirmed next year by the Commission’s decision to accelerate cooperation with Turkey in every field.

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However, during the European Council Summit in Luxembourg in December 1997, Turkey was not mentioned as an official EU candidate. According to the European Council, Ankara’s current priority should have been a creation of appropriate integration and coordination mechanisms, especially in the area of political system and economy. What is important, the EU has clearly defined the conditions to be met so that Turkey could become a full member of the Community. Nevertheless, this time Turkish government did not accept the European Council’s explanations positively, considering even ending the dialogue with the EU without reaching an agreement. The Turks particularly criticized allegations regarding a state of respect for human rights in their country. In order to improve mutual relations, the European Commission released document entitled “European Strategy for Turkey” which contained some guidelines for future integration. Subsequently, the Turkish efforts to adjust its policy to the Copenhagen criteria were favourably evaluated in the "Progress Report" which was published in 1998 by the European Commission 28.

The turning point in history of the EU-Turkey relations was the Helsinki European Council which took place on 10 and 11 December 1999. At the summit in Finland’s capital, the Turkish candidacy was officially approved by representatives of the EU states. Thus, the Republic of Turkey formally joined the countries that gained candidate status in Luxembourg. Turkey was also included in the EU financial support program, the aim of which was to support reforms in the pre-accession period 29. The detailed programme of further integration was to be formulated in the Accession Partnership for Turkey, a plan developed jointly by Brussels and Ankara. The document was declared on 8 March 2001 and soon after Turkish government approved National Program for adoption of the EU acquis. In the following months, multidimensional cooperation between Turkey and the European Union became more and more intense. At this stage, the main objective was to bring about the official opening of accession negotiations. With a purpose of adapting the political system to standards set by the Copenhagen criteria, the Turkish authorities have conducted a number of structural reforms, including amendments to the constitution 30.

Turkey-EU relations during the AKP rule

The Justice and Development Party (tur. Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP) was founded in 2001 by politicians associated with the Islamist-conservative movement, and headed by the former mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Taking advantage of Turkish political scene’s disorganization, which had been caused by consequences of the so-called postmodern coup d'état, the AKP won a decisive victory in the 2002 parliamentary election. In its political program, the Justice and Development Party announced intensification of efforts to integrate Turkey with the European structures, as well as emphasized a necessity to improve relations with Middle Eastern neighbors. The latter postulate was in contradiction with the principles of kemalism, which, in consequence, resulted in a prompt reaction of the Turkish Armed Forces. The General Staff, which at the beginning of the 21st century had been still maintaining a strong influence over Turkish political system, obliged the AKP government to accelerate the accession process to the European Union. In connection with the military pressure, in the first years after the 2002 elections, Turkish diplomacy concentrated on strengthening cooperation with Western allies. However, the AKP politicians attempted to act in a multifaceted manner and they simultaneously sought to establish positive contacts with other regions, including the Middle East, a key area in the "strategic depth" doctrine. The politician, who was responsible for setting directions for Turkish foreign policy in that period, was professor Ahmet Davutoğlu, nominated in 2003 as chief adviser to Prime Minister Erdoğan's cabinet.

Turkey's willingness to continue the integration process even after change of government was received positively by the EU. From the AKP's point of view, proceeding in accordance with the political criteria set by Brussels could have been beneficial in the process of consolidating the power in the country, as one of the EU principal requirements was to impose civilian control over the military. As a result, in the initial phase of its rule, the AKP increased efforts to finally commence the accession negotiations, and to underline good

intentions of the new government, Prime Minister Erdoğan paid official diplomatic visits to several EU member states.

By adopting a pro-European attitude, the AKP deprived of arguments its domestic opposition, including representatives of the Turkish Armed Forces and the Kemalist elites which recognized the Erdoğan government and its political environment as fundamentalist and Islamists. The vast majority of democratic reforms, that had been initiated by previous governments, were continued by the AKP. Consequently, the aforementioned opposition forces did not have a real possibility to effectively question the legality of the ruling party's actions. In particular, the limitation of the role of army in Turkish political system, which occurred at the beginning of the AKP rule, would have significant consequences in Turkey’s recent history. Another important change in Turkey, which took place by virtue of the cooperation between the AKP government and EU institutions, was a gradual improvement in the level of respect for human rights, with special regard to the situation of the Kurdish minority, previously treated as second-class citizens. This, along with increasingly active foreign policy which was constantly involved in solving regional conflicts, allowed the AKP to create the image of Turkey as a credible state on the international arena, an ideal bridge connecting East and West. Much less noticeable during this period was the fact that all these activities also served to consolidate power and weaken the AKP’s opponents in Turkey and abroad.

The level of fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria by Turkey was positively evaluated by the EU in "2004 Regular Progress Report for Turkey" which was then confirmed at the European Council Summit in Brussels on 17 December 2004. Moreover, it was agreed that accession negotiations between the EU and Turkey would be initiated on 3 October 2005. Despite emerging doubts regarding Turkey's problematic relations with Greece and Cyprus, the negotiation process began in the planned termine. The catalogue of rules, procedures and individual chapters was included in the document entitled "Negotiation Framework", which was approved by both parties. The official commence of the accession

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process was considered in Turkey as a huge success of the AKP government, but soon afterwards the first major discrepancies between Turkey and the EU arose during the negotiation of several chapters. Hence, the social enthusiasm for potential membership of Turkey in the EU gradually weakened.

In this context, it is worth mentioning the result of a study in which preferences of Turkish voters on possible Turkey’s accession to the EU were examined. The survey was conducted by a research group led by dr. Mustafa Ozan Şahin during the parliamentary elections in 2007 and indicated the growing indifference towards the European Union among Turkish citizens. Out of 2,000 respondents, 30% supported efforts to bring negotiations to a positive conclusion, 29% was against Turkey's membership in the EU, and for the remaining 41% the issue of European integration was irrelevant. Analyzing this data in terms of political preferences, the biggest supporters of the EU (69%) were voters of Democratic Society Party (tur. Demokratik Toplum Partisi - DTP). Next in the survey (32%) were AKP supporters. For the remaining parties, less than 1/3 of respondents declared their support for the vision of Turkish membership in the EU. The vast majority of participants in the survey perceived the European Union as a Christian institution focused primarily on economic integration. Therefore, religiously and culturally distinct Turkey, with its cheap labor, could threaten interests of the Community. Thus, according to the voters, the slow pace of accession negotiations was caused not by insufficient AKP reforms, but by an unexpressed reluctance towards Turkey of the EU member states. Interestingly, every fifth respondent pointed to the necessity to create an alternative regional organization, that could include either the Muslim or the Turkic community. This is an obvious reference to two anti-European narratives, which are described in the introductory part.

The weakening of pro-European sentiments in Turkish society coincided with a decline in dynamics in the accession negotiations. The year 2007 brought the AKP a double victory, because the party not only won over 46% of votes in the parliamentary elections, but also its candidate Abdullah Gül was elected the new president. Particularly important was the presidential election, since the AKP managed to overcome resistance of the military which

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had threatened to use force in the event that Gül would become head of state\textsuperscript{40}. The president's office was the last high-ranking civilian institution that had not yet been controlled by the AKP. After the election of Abdullah Gül, the next stage in the process of consolidating power was achieved. With broad public support and growing position of its own political environment in the state structures, the AKP has begun limiting a status of groups associated with the Kemalist elites. Under the guise of the democratization, the government has been gradually and successively (i.a. through amendments to the constitution) increasing its control over the army, the judiciary, the media, and universities. Initially, the European Commission appreciated these efforts, recognizing them as necessary steps for efficient remodeling the state system\textsuperscript{41}. However, it soon became apparent that the AKP has been concentrated on imposing its own political will, repeatedly violating the EU standards set in the "Negotiation Framework Document".

The most obvious example of departing from European instructions was a general non-respect of the defendants' rights during trials against people suspected of attempting to overthrow the AKP government (Ergenekon and Balyoz cases). According to numerous reports of EU institutions and non-governmental organizations, at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, level of observance of human rights and civil liberties in Turkey also decreased. In addition, there was no expected breakthrough in the Kurdish issue\textsuperscript{42}. All these events indicates that the EU negotiation process had been used by the AKP as a tool to simultaneously maximize the power and weaken the opposition. When Prime Minister Erdoğan and his government decided that cooperation with the EU is no longer necessary in implementation of their policy, Turkey's interest in accession negotiations was reduced significantly which, in turn, caused that serious problems arose between both sides.

A sphere, in which disagreements between Ankara and Brussels appeared most explicitly, was foreign policy. In 2009, Ahmet Davutoğlu was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs, and gained a vast influence in determining the activities of Turkish diplomacy. In accordance with his “strategic depth” doctrine, Minister Davutoğlu was primarily focused on Turkey's relations with Muslim countries, limiting his commitment to the EU accession

\textsuperscript{40} A. Aküns, Türkiye Siyasal Hayatında 1980 Sonrası Darbeler ve E-Muhtra, p. 52-53.


issues. Moreover, Turkish regional involvement (especially in the Middle East and North Africa) was contrary to EU policy, as Ankara’s expansive policy threatened the contemporary order in that part of the world. The AKP’s intentions were fully revealed after the outbreak of the Arab Spring when Turkey actively engaged in socio-political processes in Arab countries, trying to regain its former influence among the Muslims. Turkish actions became the reason of many diplomatic disputes between Turkey and the EU members that have openly criticized Turkish support for radical opposition forces in Syria, Libya, and Egypt. Subsequently, the failure of Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East and North Africa was explained by the Erdoğan government as hostile act of the EU whose member states allegedly feared the growing power of Turkey. This confrontational rhetoric caused further cooling in mutual relations.

Radical reduction of the level of security and stabilization in the region affected also the AKP’s domestic policy. In the following months, the government has been attempting to monopolize all the power in the state more than ever before, removing the last bastions of the Kemalist opposition. At that time, the Turkish authorities were increasingly less tolerant of criticism from the EU institutions which called for a return to the implementation of pro-democratic reforms set out in the negotiation program. However, the AKP considered these appeals to be an unauthorized interference in Turkey’s internal affairs which caused the tension between Ankara and Brussels to grow steadily. Within a few years, the European Union’s image has changed in the rhetoric of the ruling party from a friendly and reliable partner into one of the main threats to Turkish interests on the international arena.

Significant part of Turkish society opposed this dramatic shift in AKP attitude, as manifested by a series of protests that began in spring 2013 in Istanbul and quickly spread to other major cities in Turkey. The protesters demanded a correction of the rulers’ policy and the continuation of the democratization process. Unfortunately, the authorities used force against demonstrators, which, in turn, was condemned by the EU, that moreover expressed concerns about the state of democracy in Turkey. The AKP, however, ignored this stance and

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chose the tactic of social polarization, opposing liberal and pro-Western metropolitan residents with the conservative and religious rural community. As a result, the protests have gradually ceased due to shrinking public support for the postulates of demonstrators. The growing unilateralism in the AKP government's actions caused that tensions and divisions arose among the ruling class itself. The uncompromising AKP policy was criticized by Fethullah Gülen, the leader of conservative “Hizmet” movement, and one of Erdoğan's closest allies til that time. Previously, they both had sought to remove the Kemalists from power, but after achieving this success, their visions of Turkey's future were significantly different. At the turn of 2013 and 2014, the Gülenists revealed several corruption scandals aimed at striking the AKP leadership. However, Erdoğan has again defended the ruling party against allegations of undermining democracy in Turkey, which resulted in his victory in the first ever general presidential election, held in August 2014. After being elected president, Recep Erdoğan did not observe the constitutional principle of impartiality, still acting as the actual party leader and head of the executive branch. This led to another series of opinions and recommendations from the EU which criticized the rulers for breaking democratic standards. This was another opportunity for Erdoğan to present his anti-Western rhetoric, when he accused some EU member states of supporting terrorist groups in the region.

Approximately since that time, the critical narrative towards the European Union (and in general the whole West) has become a permanent element of the policy of President Erdoğan and the AKP. Almost every serious problem that modern Turkey faced in recent years has been explained by the authorities as being provoked by hostile EU activities. This was the case of the loss of parliamentary majority after the elections in June 2015, the failed coup d'état in July 2016, or the great economic crisis that has begun in Turkey at the turn of 2017 and 2018. In addition, the EU and the West are presented by the ruling class as rivals in Turkey's regional initiatives, the best example of which is the civil war in Syria. Years of building the AKP's image as the only defenders of traditional Turkish values have contributed

to the stable support of the larger part of society which accepts all decides of the government. Thus, it is much easier to employ or even manipulate social moods in order to implement specific actions in the sphere of domestic or foreign policy. From European perspective, the AKP’s accusations of destabilizing Turkey by the EU may seem preposterous, but this tactics is perfectly suited to current internal situation in the state, mobilizing the electorate against an external threat. On the other hand, an indirect influence on the radical change of Turkey's approach to European integration has had the EU itself. After all, it should not be forgotten the accession process has been hampered for many years by several member states that openly questioned the sense of Turkish membership in the EU, pointing to cultural, religious, and economic differences. This fact is being raised in the Turkish public debate as an argument for definitive withdrawal from cooperation with the EU. The Turkish approach is also affected by the recent developments in Europe, where far-right, populist and anti-Muslim movements and organizations has been emerging. Thus, fewer and fewer Turks perceive the vision of membership as a real opportunity for Turkey.

Therefore, even the only relative success in EU-Turkey relations in recent years, i.e. the Refugee Agreement signed in March 2016, did not have any positive impact on the AKP rhetoric. According to the document, Ankara agreed to accept refugees with irregular status from the EU member states. In return, Brussels has promised Turkey financial support, visa-free policy and acceleration of the accession process. Three years after signing the agreement both sides accuse each other of violating its provisions. In the opinion of Turks, European legal systems (especially the Greek one) are dysfunctional and thus the entire deportation process is significantly prolonged. On the other hand, observers from Brussels point to the fact that Turkey is improperly using EU funds intended to provide decent living conditions for migrants and asylum seekers in refugee camps. In addition, Ankara still demands abolition of visas and simplification of accession negotiations. The EU cannot approve this because Turkey has ceased to comply with the Copenhagen criteria long ago. Due to the lack of a breakthrough in the mutual relations, President Erdoğan has been emphasizing that Turkey is already strong enough to act effectively on the international arena.

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without the EU support. Consequently, the current contacts between Turkey and the European Union are limited to the implementation of some particular economic interests\(^5^3\).

**Conclusions and perspectives**

In this paper, the results of preliminary research on relations between Turkey and the EU were described. The basic source for this analysis was a literature review, with particular emphasis on academic publications written by Turkish international relations researchers, which might slightly clarify the recent development in bilateral contacts between Ankara and Brussels. In the following months, study on this topic will be continued in order to provide a more comprehensive description of the AKP's policy towards the European Union. At that stage, other types of sources, which I mentioned in the preceding parts of this paper, will be used to a greater extent. Nevertheless, the current phase of research allows for formulation of some conclusions.

It cannot be denied that the AKP and President Erdoğan’s drastic shift in approach towards the idea of European integration was influenced primarily by internal factors. There is no doubt that Turkish authorities posses an unique ability to instantly respond to changes in social moods. Over the decades of ruling Turkey, the reaction mechanism has been refined to such a point that AKP can even generate individual social processes and then use them as a tool to achieve particular political goals. In this way, the Justice and Development Party managed to consolidate power, overcome the opposition, introduce the presidential system, and finally changed the EU's image in the public awareness. In the rhetoric of President Erdoğan, all these steps were aimed at improving Turkey's international position so that the state would become a regional power. This goal guided the AKP from almost the very beginning of its rule and was consistently implemented over the years\(^5^4\). At some point, the regional interests of Turkey and the EU had to collide and from that time the Turks has begun to express their anti-Western attitude more explicitly. Although the vision of powerful Turkey presented in Ahmet Davutoğlu’s “strategic depth” doctrine has never been realized


and the whole concept failed during the Arab Spring, President Erdoğan and his ministers did not abandon their confrontational narrative towards Europe and the USA. Since Turkish foreign policy is fully subordinated to national policies, the authorities must strengthen Turkey's image as a strong and independent state on the international arena. Thus, it is perpetuated among citizens that only the AKP is able to provide Turkey with the expected development and prosperity in all sectors. In this context, the anti-European rhetoric of President Erdoğan and the AKP is addressed mainly to the electorate in Turkey and to a much lesser extent to its international partners. Moreover, recent failures of regional AKP initiatives have resulted in significant limitation of Turkey's diplomatic activity in the region. In addition, the Turkish authorities are aware that a total cut-off from the European Union would have disastrous consequences especially for the Turkish economy, which is heavily dependent on trade with EU member states. Therefore, the Turkish discourse in the international sphere is noticeably less confrontational and radical compared to its domestic policy. Thus, having adopted the typology developed by Kalevi Holst, it can be argued that Turkish declared and performed roles in relation to the European Union have changed from collaborator to independent, or even bastion of revolution (during the Arab Spring).

Based on the previous findings, it is possible to attempt to create three alternative scenarios for future development of the Turkish-EU relationship. The first, optimistic scenario assumes gradual return to positive relations between both parties. This would be connected with the project of the so-called "Privileged Partnership", proposed already in 2004 by German politicians, which implied a deeper cooperation (i.e. in defense, security, and foreign policies) without actual Turkey’s membership in the EU. Being aware that in the current geopolitical conditions a vision of joining the European Union is very distant, the Turks may decide to try to restore a more effective relations with the EU member states, especially in the event of a prolonged economic crisis in Turkey. It should be remembered that during previous turbulences, Turkish economy has been recovered thanks to closer cooperation with Europe. Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that in the foreseeable future President Erdoğan would also choose to ease his rhetoric towards the EU and allow for a

further tightening of trade ties connecting Turkey with Europe. A hypothetical reset in mutual relations may result in the resumption of accession negotiations, which, in longer perspective, may even lead to Turkey's full membership in the EU. Due to the recent developments, presented scenario is the least probable.

In turn, the second scenario is a pessimistic one. It projects a systematic deterioration of mutual relations, which would exclude any possibility of cooperation between Turkey and the EU. Increasing polarization on the international arena may result in the emergence of two opposing political blocks in which Turkey and the EU would become fierce rivals. Thus, any prospects for reconstruction of positive contacts would be lost. Relations between Turkey and the EU would be limited to the absolute minimum resulting from objective geographical proximity. The only form of dialogue would be continuous accusations and provocations, while collisions of interests would occasionally cause the tension to grow in the whole region. Trade ties would be kept as low as possible to guarantee both sides relative profits. All other contacts would be suspended indefinitely. In search for implementation of its foreign policy goals, Turkey would be seeking for alternative partners (eg. Russia, China, Iran)\(^58\), so that the issue of Turkey's possible accession to the EU would be terminated once and for all. This scenario is unfortunately more likely to happen than the first one, especially if the EU will become more assertive to Turkish aggressive rhetoric and confrontational actions in the region.

However, the most probable of these three scenarios is the one according to which the level of Turkish-EU relations would remain at the current stage for a long time. Due to problems described above, it is difficult to predict a prompt return to productive relations between Turkey and the EU. This state of affairs was affected by erroneous actions and decisions of Ankara and Brussels, which both parties are aware of. Nevertheless, despite of some significant differences in opinions and interests, the scale of challenges and threats in the contemporary international politics is so vast that Turkey and the EU cannot afford to completely break their contacts. Therefore, it is anticipated that in the mutual relations a strategy of solving common problems would be adopted, which has already been effectively tested during the migration crisis\(^59\). Obviously, presented scenario does not assume that the


contacts between Ankara and Brussels would be as positive as they were over a decade ago, but it seems that at this stage, it is sufficient for both partners to create a problem-solving mechanism, without the necessity to renew the accessions. Moreover, there are several problems in the solution of which cooperation between Turkey and the EU would be beneficial for both parties (eg. stabilization of the Middle East and North Africa, fight against terrorism, sustainable energy policy). The first step towards positive dialogue on these issues will be rejection of confrontational rhetoric to ensure mutual trust between Ankara and Brussels. Because respect for each other is the basis for achieving common goals, even in politics.

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