

October 2018

FEUTURE Online Paper No. 25

EU Public Opinion on Turkish EU Membership: Trends and Drivers

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This project has received funding
from the European Union's Horizon 2020
Research and Innovation Programme
under Grant Agreement No 692976.

Abstract

This is a paper about European public opinion towards Turkey’s prospective EU membership. It outlines a trend of declining support, makes an analytical attempt at spelling out the drivers that underpin both the numbers and the trend, makes an assessment about the direction that it is likely to push Turkey-EU relations into in the 2023 timeframe of the FEUTURE research framework, and concludes with a few initial recommendations. The conjecture of the paper is that European public opinion towards Turkish EU membership is likely to edge Turkey-EU relations in a more conflictual orientation. The paper spells out how and why. Mindful of the unpredictability of current international relations, the paper unfolds a few possible exceptions to this conjecture, and concludes with three initial recommendations e.g. on trust-building, expectation management around the necessity (if not want) of further cooperation etc.

Özet

Bu, Avrupa kamuoyu ve Türkiye’nin AB üyeliği hakkında bir makaledir. Yavaş bir destek eğilimi özetliyor, hem rakamları hem de trendi destekleyen sürücülere hitaben analitik bir girişimde bulunarak, Türkiye-AB ilişkilerini 2023 yılındazaman dilimine itmesi yönüyle ilgili bir değerlendirme yapıyor. Araştırma çerçevesi ve birkaç başlangıç tavsiyesi ile sonuçlandırır. Yazının varsayımı, Türkiye’nin AB üyeliğine yönelik Avrupa kamuoyunun Türkiye-AB ilişkilerinin daha ihtilaflı bir yönelimde yer almasıdır. Makale, nasıl ve neden olduğunu açıklıyor. Mevcut uluslararası ilişkilerin öngörülemezliğine dikkat çeken makale, bu varsayım ile ilgili birkaç istisnai durumu ortaya koymakta ve üç ilk tavsiyeyle sonuçlanmaktadır. güven oluşturma, daha fazla işbirliği vb. gereklilikleri (istenmiyorsa) etrafında beklenti yönetimi.



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1. Introduction

Public opinion is a Janus-faced phenomenon. On the one hand, opinion polls reflect public sentiments about a given issue. On the other hand, polls act as drivers of political rhetoric and action, especially at times when populism is in the ascendancy. Public opinion in the EU towards Turkey’s prospective EU membership thus drives European (and Turkish) decision makers in a way that has a bearing on EU-Turkey relations. Public opinion can enjoy various degrees of salience for decision makers vis-à-vis e.g. pragmatic concerns with migrants, security and economic concerns. But it has a bearing.

This paper is primarily about the first of these two faces, the question of what drives public opinion. This is a necessary preliminary to understanding the second face, also to be addressed, on how public opinion is likely to drive political decision makers and impact Turkey-EU relations into the 2023 timeframe of the FEUTURE research project.

In particular, the paper will attempt to do four things. First, it will spell out the main trends in European public opinion on Turkey’s prospective EU membership. Methodological caveats and devilish detail aside (see below for the caveats, details, and references), the main trend is one of declining support:

EU public opinion on Turkish EU membership	1996	2010	2016
In favour	36%	31%	7%
Not in favour	44%	59%	76%

1

Breaking this picture down just a little bit reveals trends such as the fact that older more north-western EU member state populations are more sceptical compared to those of newer more south-eastern members, and that government approaches to the question tend to be considerably more positive than those of the populations.

Secondly, the paper will make an interpretative attempt at identifying the drivers that underpin European public opinion towards Turkish EU membership, gaining a better insight into what drives the public opinion that, in turn, drives European (and other) decision makers’ stances on Turkey’s EU membership.¹ The paper identifies nine separate drivers of European public opinion of Turkish EU membership. Aside from gaining observers a deeper understanding of the driving variables of public opinion in this context, the paper also provides the opportunity to better understand what aspects of public opinion drive actions of decision makers both in general and in more local contexts.

¹ As noted, the strength and impact of public opinion on the words and deeds of decision makers rests on the assumption that populism is in the ascendancy and thus more likely to see public opinion have an impact on decision making in the future than has been the case since 1999. This trend is of course susceptible to possible change. See also the final methodological caveat at the end of this Introduction for an outline of two opposite directions this could take.



Compared to developments of Turkish public opinion of the EU (Şenyuva, 2018), there are fewer and smaller diachronic fluctuations in the development of pan-European opinions. As will transpire, a breakdown of the numbers reveals quite a few differences across a number of other synchronic fault-lines, however. The nine driving variables here are interests in individual and national socio-economic utility, perceived cultural differences, presence of Turkish background minorities in a given country, a tendency towards bi-partisan scepticism towards Turkish EU membership, historical alliances and animosities, political leadership, current bilateral relations, stances on migrants and on terrorism, and perceptions of developments of human rights and democracy in Turkey.

The identification of the drivers of European public opinion will be done with a view to making an informed assessment of the direction that it is likely to drive EU-Turkey relations into in the 2023 framework of the FEUTURE project. This is the third contribution. Insofar as European public opinion of Turkish EU membership still enjoys some salience into 2023, the main conjecture of the paper is that it will drive Turkey-EU relations in a more conflictual direction, reflecting the trend of a declining support for Turkish EU-membership in Europe, but also, and more importantly, reflecting some of the main drivers assessed to remain salient and pertinent into 2023.

This assessment will include consideration of the possibilities in a time of unpredictability of drivers that might nudge Turkey-EU relations in a more cooperative direction as opposed to conflict. Such drivers could be deemed socio-economic utility or a clear initiative from the political leadership towards expectation management in relation to European populations. Also, wild card developments such as a revamped peace process between the Turkish AKP-government and the Kurdish PKK, or a return to a pro-democratic agenda in Turkey in support of independent institutions, a free press, and release from jail of opposition politicians could come to buck the trend of reclining support in Europe.

Finally, and in conclusion, the paper will present a few initial recommendations on how to address public opinion as a driver of Turkey-EU relations, including recommendations on how to rebuild trust, reminding everyone of the pragmatic necessity of cooperation, or, ambitiously, ways for the EU to nudge Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his new Presidential system and rule following the 24 June 2018 elections back in the direction of liberal democracy.

The paper proceeds as follows. In Chapter 1, the paper will outline the nature and some detail of the already noted trend of reclining support in Europe for Turkish EU membership. In Chapter 2, the paper will unfold the mentioned nine drivers mentioned. In Chapter 3, the assessment is spelled out to the effect that European public opinion of Turkish EU membership is likely to push the relationship in a more conflictual direction, whilst considering some possible wild card developments and a possible reclining salience into 2023. The Conclusion includes a few initial recommendations on how to address this downward trend and its potentially conflictual consequences.

Before we turn to the paper, however, a few methodological caveats are required. Firstly, reliable data have grown increasingly hard to get in more recent years compared to the relative wealth of



data available around 1999 and early 2000’s. The data still available and public debates more generally suggest that this drop in highly reliable and both synchronically and diachronically comparable data correlates well with the drop in European popular support for Turkish EU membership. The direct methodological consequence is that implications and conclusions drawn on the basis of more recent numbers will enjoy a higher margin of error than before. This is a serious methodological challenge and must be kept in mind in what follows.

Secondly, this paper is not merely based on a limited set of numbers that do not carry the same level of reliability and comparability as before. It is also merely a survey study with a relatively wide scope and limited space for detail. And perhaps most importantly, it makes interpretations and draws conclusions that do not always rest exclusively on the numbers themselves, but on analysis of how political developments and other variables in Turkey and Europe have driven the numbers in one direction on the other (e.g. drawing on the Lindgaard, Uyğur & Banke 2018 FEUTURE paper on the role of identity in European representations of Turkey).

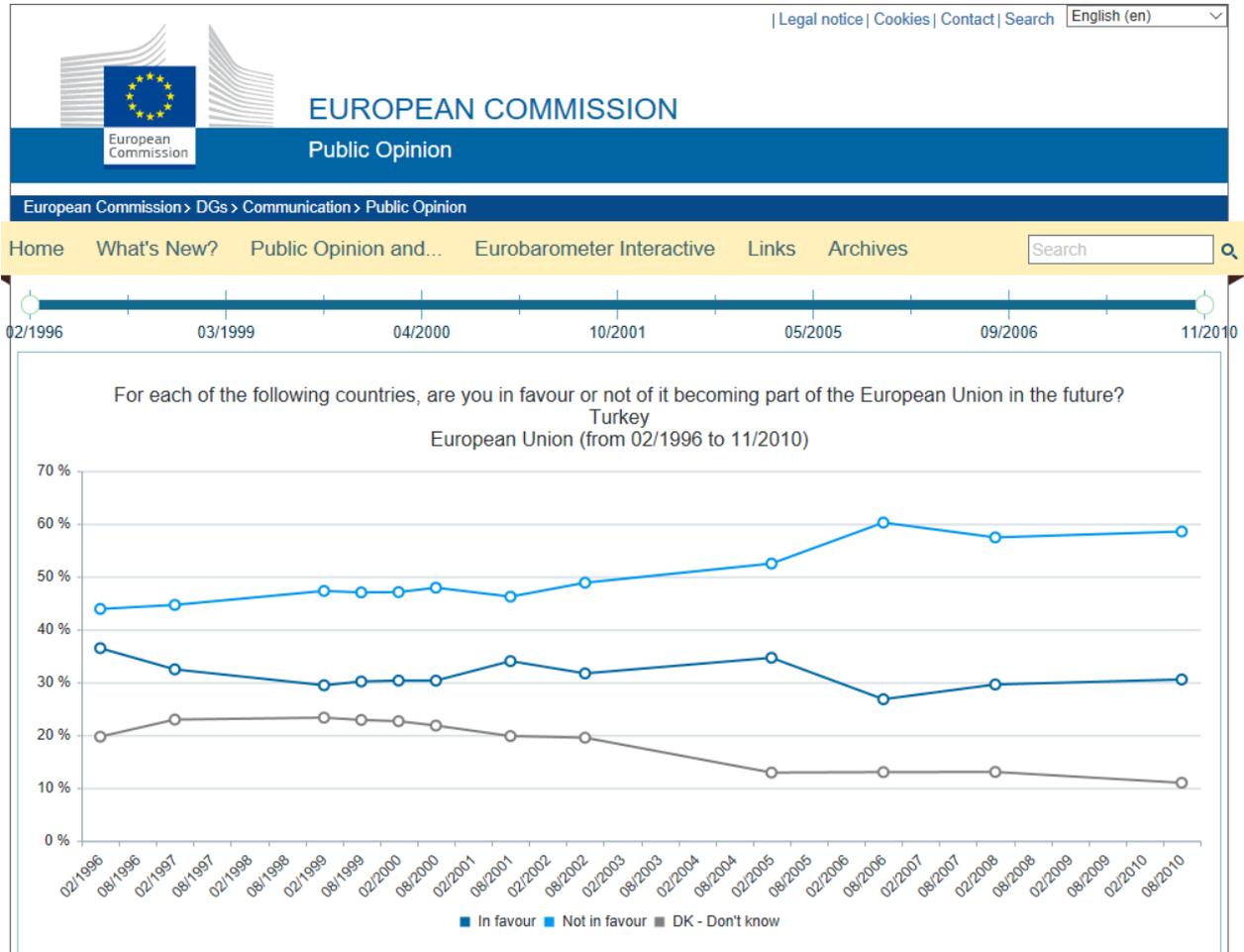
Finally, and even if it is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to bear the wider context in mind. The main question here is what degree of salience and impact European public opinion towards Turkish EU membership is likely to have with decision makers into 2023. Here, two countervailing forces seem to be at play. On the one hand, it is safe to say that the rising tide of populism in many parts of Europe—seemingly rubbing off on many mainstream politicians—will increase the salience and impact of popular opinion on political stances on Turkish EU membership. On the other hand, a rising tide of bilateralism, transactionalism, and realist pragmatism in Europe’s dealings with Turkey could act to decrease the salience of European public opinion of Turkey’s EU membership—or even be compartmentalized—in a way so that it will have a lesser impact on relations more generally.

With these caveats in mind, we now turn to the paper, beginning with the trend of reclining European support for Turkish EU membership.



2. Outline of a downward trend

The most reliable set of general indicators of the development of EU public opinion of Turkish EU membership is the Eurobarometer of the European Commission:



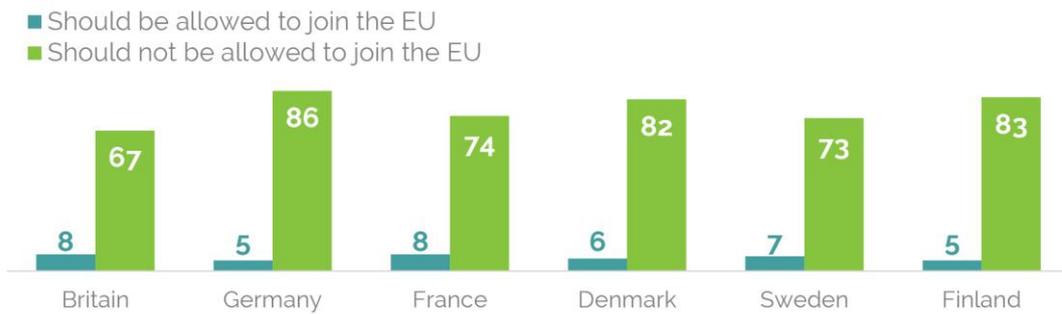
(Eurobarometer, 2010a)

This outlines the pan-EU development between 1999-2010, after which the European Commission stopped asking the question. In a survey made by British YouGov a month after the Brexit vote in the Summer of 2016, the following findings were recorded:



Support for Turkey joining the European Union

Do you think that Turkey should or should not be allowed to join the EU? %



YouGov | yougov.com

July 20-27, 2016

(YouGov, 2016)

The question asked is blunter than that of the Eurobarometer, and does not include the softening clause of being “in the future”. Also, the selection of countries does not include historically more positive countries such as Spain and Romania. But Sweden, another historically positive country is included, and the still somewhat comparable numbers for Sweden in the last Eurobarometer recording in 2010 were 52% in favor and 43% against. The Eurobarometer UK numbers for 2010 were also more modest with 31% in favor and 55% against (and 45% in favor and 37% against in 2005). Also, long-time critical Austria and Cyprus are not included either. The point is that neither more positive, nor more negative outliers are included in this YouGov sample. Thus, barring other possible methodological caveats these numbers are arguably fairly representative of the general EU public opinion in 2016. This leaves the Europe-wide support for Turkish EU membership at 7% and opposition at 76%.

The YouGov article accompanying the findings also makes a point of the finding that support of Turkey becoming a member of the EU there in 2016 were eclipsed by the support of the prospect of Russian EU membership (ibid):



Support for potential new members of the European Union

For each of the below countries, please say whether they should or should not be allowed to join the EU? (Net should minus should not, %)

	Britain	Germany	France	Denmark	Sweden	Finland	Norway*
Iceland	+46	+59	+42	+75	+75	+77	+49
Croatia	+11	+21	-5	+12	+34	+15	+25
Serbia	-12	-19	-31	-18	+6	-22	-2
Ukraine	-19	-29	-33	-32	-19	-29	-14
Albania	-28	-51	-46	-43	-31	-37	-21
Kazakhstan	-45	-50	-56	-61	-46	-57	-36
Morocco	-50	-66	-63	-68	-57	-66	-45
Israel	-51	-43	-62	-58	-45	-56	-41
Russia	-56	-49	-42	-72	-58	-57	-40
Turkey	-59	-81	-66	-76	-66	-78	-54

*not an EU member

If reliable, numbers such as these reflect a marked shift from 2010 in the opinion of the then supporters and doubters towards a more sceptical attitude in 2016. The potentially more politically influenced findings of a mid-2017 poll commissioned privately by the Centre-right conservative European People’s Party (EPP) display findings in line with the YouGov survey. According to the EPP Survey, an average of 77% of respondents do not want Turkey to join the bloc, with Germany at 86% and the Netherlands at 84% topping the list, and Spain displaying the lowest resistance at 60% (Politico, 2017).

There are of course numbers that represent challenges to this overall picture. The German Marshall Fund e.g. asked a set of Turkey-related questions in the 2013 version of their Transatlantic Trends Surveys (TTS, 2013). In the EU, the TTS surveyed publics of France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, U.K., Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Romania, and Sweden. It found that 20% said that Turkish EU accession would be good for the EU, 33% said it would be bad, and 37% said it would be neither good or bad (TTS, 2013: 46). Of immediate note is that this, again, is a somewhat different question, not asking if they are in favour or think it is a good thing, but whether or not it would be good for the EU, shifting the object queried from Turkey to the implications or utility for the EU. That aside, and assuming that the remaining 10% have responded with a ‘don’t know’, the ‘neither good or bad’ category at 37% stands out here. It is possible—though not something this paper is able to corroborate—that this reflects a transition in 2013 of those previously in favour and in doubt towards the subsequent more sceptical attitude. Also, the survey was conducted between 3-27 June 2013 in the midst of the in Europe widely covered 2013 Gezi protests—the



survey even had to be temporarily suspended in Turkey—and could thus reflect apprehension about the nature and outcome of the Gezi protests.

Now, assuming that the downward trend of the lions share of the numbers does represent the facts, what has driven this change? And perhaps more importantly, how can we expect them to develop in the near future? Also, how is this likely to affect Turkey-EU relations more generally? Since comparable numbers over time and detailed questions on key developments are scarce on the ground, answers to these questions will have to rely on assessment. National differences can provide a first cue here.

There are significant intra-European differences here. The most recent and most comparable dataset is the Eurobarometer 2010 findings. According to this, and compared to 2011 Eurobarometer findings on the popular support for the EU in each country as well as the 2017 Eurobarometer findings on support for EU enlargement, the 2010 EU country specifics stand out²:

				The 2010 Q: Are you in favour or not of Turkey becoming part of the European Union in the future?			
%	EU ³	Net on EU 2011 ⁴	Net on Enlargement 2017 ⁵	In favour	Not in favour	Don't know	
Austria	EU15	+12	-41	6	91	3	
Cyprus	EU25	+12	+5	11	82	6	
Germany	EU12	+38	-35	15	79	7	
Greece	EU12	+5	-2	21	76	3	
Finland	EU15	+28	-36	25	71	4	
Luxembourg	EU12	+59	-29	26	70	4	
Belgium	EU12	+54	-21	28	69	3	
Denmark	EU12	+39	-21	29	66	4	

² Croatia is included here even if it did not become an EU member until 1 July 2013.

³ Based on Eurostat 2014.

⁴ This column is based on the stance of public opinion on whether the EU membership of the individual country in question is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good or bad (Eurobarometer 2011)

⁵ Eurobarometer 2018



France	EU12	+27	-34	25	66	8	
Slovakia	EU25	+41	+6	33	63	4	
Netherlands	EU12	+56	-36	34	62	4	
Italy	EU12	+24	-5	28	61	12	
Czech Republic	EU25	+12	-19	34	60	6	
Estonia	EU25	+40	+2	33	56	11	
Ireland	EU12	+51	+9	26	56	18	
The UK	EU12	-6	+3	31	55	14	
Latvia	EU25	+4	0	35	54	11	
Portugal	EU12	+13	-3	30	50	20	
Bulgaria	EU27	+38	+21	37	49	15	
Slovenia	EU25	+18	+21	48	47	5	
Malta	EU25	+24	+40	31	47	22	
Spain	EU12	+37	+39	37	46	17	
Poland	EU25	+43	+25	42	44	14	
Sweden	EU15	+39	-6	52	43	4	
Hungary	EU25	+10	+34	52	40	8	
Lithuania	EU25	+33	+44	41	40	19	
Croatia	EU28	na	+24	64	25	11	
Romania	EU27	+46	+35	61	17	23	

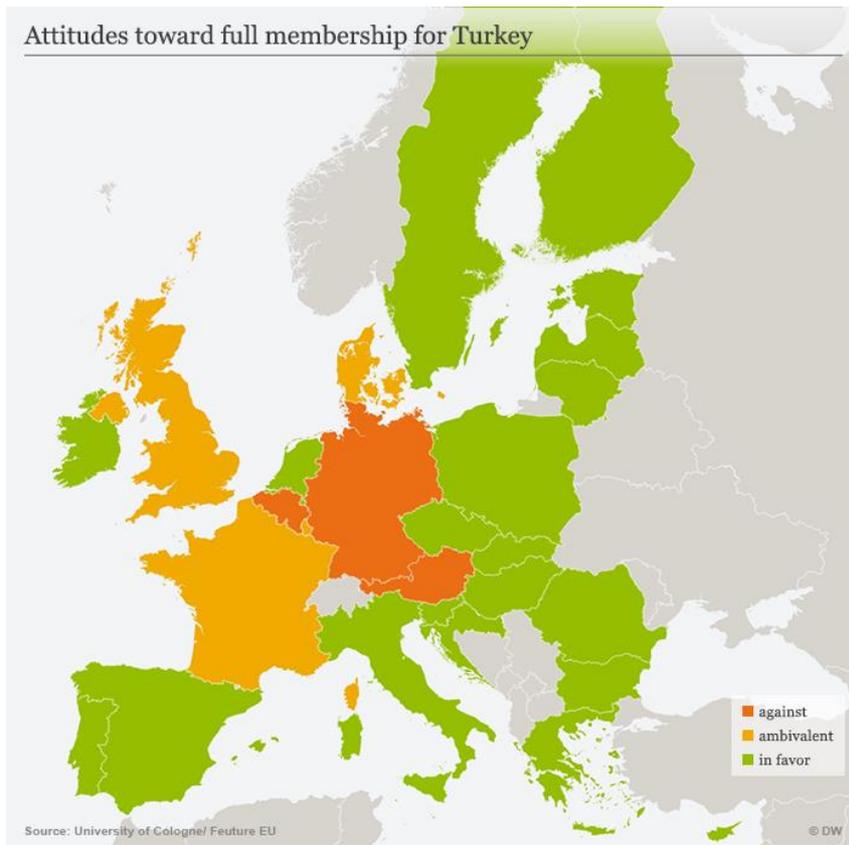
Table 1 Sources:

Eurobarometer 2010b

Eurobarometer 2011 Eurobarometer 2018



A few immediate and general correlation trends here include the fact that the populations in newer EU members are slightly more favourable than older ones⁶, that people in Southern and Eastern European countries are slightly less sceptical than Northern and Western countries, and that populations opposed to EU enlargement more generally are considerably more likely to be against Turkish EU membership than those more favourable to EU enlargement.⁷ These distinctions roughly correspond to the following DW map drawn up on the background of the FEUTURE surveys of government stances in EU28 countries:



Sources: DW, 2017 and FEUTURE28 Country Reports, 2017

What does not correspond, however, is the implication as left by this map that the EU countries mostly favour Turkish EU accession. Much more detail is needed to unfold the underlying reasons, but the upshot is that government approaches generally are (or have been) considerably more

⁶ Averaging the EU12, EU15, EU25, EU27, and EU28 groups, the following correlation emerges with the countries less favourable (over 50% not in favour and less than 50% in favour) averaging an EU16,5 and those more favourable (over 50% in favour and less than 50% not in favour) averaging an EU23, where the EU12 is the oldest group of EU members from 1993 and the EU28 is the most recent from 2013.

⁷ Correlating the general view on EU enlargement with the stance on Turkish membership, the countries with the least favourable popular opinion towards Turkish EU membership show a -10% net average support for Enlargement (which is an average of the countries that show a 50% or higher scepticism towards Turkish EU membership and those where 50% or fewer support Turkish EU membership), and those with the more popular support for Turkish EU membership show a +25,5% average support for EU enlargement more generally (which is an average of the countries that show 50% or lower scepticism and 50% or higher support for Turkish EU membership).



favourable than those of their populations. Worthy of note, for instance, is that the YouGov poll from 2016 outlined above found that of the Finnish population, 5% were in favour of and 83% not in favour of Turkish EU membership, and in Sweden 7% were in favour and 73% not in favour. Even countries like Spain and Italy often conceived to be more positive towards Turkish EU membership, majorities in 2010 were against Turkish EU membership (Spain: 46% against (up to 60% in 2017 according to EPP poll), and 37% for; Italy: 61% against and 28% for).⁸

Also, perhaps worthy of note is that at this level there is no significant correlation between the 2011 findings on net favourability of each country’s EU membership and the stance on Turkish EU membership. All of the stances on Turkish EU membership correlate to the short range between +29-32% of support for each country’s EU membership. Thus, it is a given country’s popular opinion of EU enlargement that on average makes for a significant correlation with its stance on Turkish EU membership, and not the opinion of the country’s own EU membership.⁹

So, immediate results show a tendency towards a less favourable popular attitude the older, the farther North-West, and more sceptical towards EU-enlargement in general the EU member is. Also, there seems to be a significant mismatch between the government lines and opinion polls, and no significant difference between countries that have a population more favourable of the EU and those that do not.

3. The main drivers of public opinion

The paper now turns to an attempt at identifying the drivers that underpin the general trend towards declining support for Turkey’s EU membership, some of the correlations just outlined, as well as more local country-specifics, with a view to an assessment of how the current and expected near-future constellation of these drivers will affect Turkey-EU relations in 2023. Such identification to a large degree rests on assessment that does not itself find empirical support in the numbers.

Attempts of this kind have of course been made before (e.g. Hatipoğlu, Müftüler-Baç & Karakoç 2014, Gerhards & Hans, 2011, Azrout, van Spanje & de Vreese, 2011, de Vreese, Boomgaarden & Semetko, 2008, and Barysch, 2007), including studies on country specifics (esp. Akşit, Şenyuva & Üstün (eds.): 2009, but also country surveys such as Canan-Sokullu, 2011). Most of these studies are made on a firmer basis than the present due to invocation of higher level of detail and better access to numbers locally and/or ten or so years ago than more generally and/or today. In what follows, this paper will draw and expand on these findings to identify also current and likely near future drivers.

⁸ On this count, the 2014 paper by Hatipoğlu, Müftüler-Baç, and Karakoç, arguing that “there is a significant role that governments in power play in shaping [the] public’s views on Turkish accession” (Hatipoğlu, Müftüler-Baç & Karakoç 2014: 7), thus deserves further discussion.

⁹ Worthy of note, perhaps, is also that the popular assessment of an EU country’s own EU membership does not correlate to the popular opinion of EU enlargement.



Candidate drivers both from those references and beyond count concerns with:

1. Socio-economic utility (both on individual and country-wide levels, and in the EU and Turkey)
2. Identity-related questions of cultural differences, especially as a function of European debates on integration of mainly Muslim immigrants
3. Presence of Turkish background minorities in a given country
4. Differences of political ideology (with a recent tendency towards bi-partisan criticism against developments of human rights and democracy in Turkey)
5. Historical alliances or animosities
6. Nature of political leadership, opportunism and the media landscape
7. Turns in bilateral relations
8. Migrants and terrorism¹⁰
9. Human rights and democratic principles

Ad.1 Arguably of lesser importance today, the question of the utility for the individual EU citizen and perceived cost-benefit for his or her country is of course key. Hatipoğlu, Müftüler-Baç & Karakoç also find a clear correlation to this effect (Hatipoğlu, Müftüler-Baç & Karakoç 2014). Just looking at the existing customs union from 1995, it has been shown to have a positive effect on the EU with an assessed net positive effect of 0,008% compared to a counterfactual scenario without it. Numbers like these, however small, are likely to have a positive impact on public opinion.¹¹

Table 0.1: Main effects of BPTF on EU and Turkey compared to counterfactual

	EU	Turkey
Real GDP (%)	0.008	0.722
Household Income (EUR billions at 2016 prices)	1.6	7.5
Bilateral Exports (EUR billions at 2016 prices)	8.7	6.0
Real Growth in Total Exports (%)	0.029	1.28
Real Growth in Total Imports (%)	0.029	2.60

Source: European Commission 2016.

And the much discussed upgrade to the present Customs Union is supposed to have a similar positive effect of 0,007% on the EU GDP:

¹⁰ This is not meant to establish a close association between migration and terrorism. Rather, it reflects two key areas of a clear need-induced European interest in cooperation with Turkey.

¹¹ The degree of impact is likely to be higher the more salient socio-economic concerns are and lower if e.g. identity-related concerns are more salient. With economic concerns back in the ascendancy here in the fall of 2018, the salience of this factor is likely to be relatively high.



Table 0.2: Main impacts of scenarios for enhancing the BPTF

	Bilateral Exports (EUR millions)	Welfare (EUR millions)	GDP (%)
EU			
ECF	27,062	5,388	0.007
DCFTA	7,978	1,150	-0.005
Turkey			
ECF	4,960	12,522	1.44
DCFTA	-4,342	-144	0.26

The rational cost-benefit calculus is hampered, however, by a seeming inverse correlation between the perceived benefit for Turkey and support for Turkish EU accession (Hatipoğlu, Müftüler-Baç & Karakoç 2014: 20), and with the upgrade estimated to benefit Turkey more (1,44% vis-à-vis 0,007%) this tendency could possibly affect EU public support for Turkish membership negatively.

On the other hand, mindful of the conflictual dynamics with Russia and the current US administration on free trade agreements such as the TTIP—let alone the introduction of customs and tariff barriers—the EU citizen come to perceive Turkey as a welcome trading partner with an implied interest in keeping the EU accessions alive as a guarantee for stability and rule of law to bolster investments. If numbers corresponding to the 2008 European financial crisis are anything to go by, then opinion of Turkish accession were kept stable with perhaps a slight increase in support at that time. There are of course a host of other possible explainers of this relative stability—e.g. an inward turn and loss of salience of Turkish EU membership in the European public sphere etc.—but socio-economic concerns, if often figuring in the background, are still potentially strong drivers of public opinion.¹²

Then there are more local concerns such as the implications of Turkish EU accession for agricultural sectors in Europe. Adam Szymański e.g. mention possible implications for the Polish agricultural sector as a concern (Szymański, 2009), but concerns about the effect on the influential EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) are of course also of importance, especially amongst European farmers.

Ad.2 Several authors mention a clear correlation between perceived cultural difference and support for Turkish EU accession. As Lindgaard, Uyğur and Banke also have found in a study on European identity-related perceptions of Turkey, Turkey’s EU accession has been invoked as a key aspect of the emergent integration debates especially of Muslim background immigrants in the mid-

¹² Of course, this can have as a consequence, as it has had for the turn of the Danish Government in mid-2017, that the EU perspective of Turkey loses support entirely, but that bilateral continuous trade is encouraged. Also, as Hatipoğlu, Müftüler-Baç & Karakoç 2014 find, there are more detailed correlations that does some potential explaining to the effect that more well-educated people, richer people, and women are more likely to support EU accession than the opposite. Beyond the scope of the present paper, it is an interesting question to what extent this has had an influence on the development of the declining public support for EU membership in the more recent years.



and late 1990’s, first as a possible asset¹³—a likely driver of the relatively positive opinions in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s—but then and increasingly so as a loosely associated extension of perceived challenges and threat perceived to stem from Muslim immigrants and descendants in Europe (Lindgaard, Uyğur & Banke, 2018).

Preempting candidate driver 6 on the importance of political leadership, both Nicolas Sarkozy and Angela Merkel came to embody and enforce the perceived cultural differences in the Mid-2000’s, during the very years where the gap between the majority not in favour of Turkish EU accession and the minority in favour increased.

As the paper shall return to below, this difference has come to play a less salient role in latter years as the prospect of membership has receded into the background and other issues have come to the fore. But were these things to reverse again, and the prospect of membership to gain more salience, such concerns are likely to return as strong drivers of public opinion. The more reactionary and potentially xenophobic populism does seem to have a firm hold on public opinion across Europe, also into the more mainstream political parties.

Ad.3 The presence of Turkish background minorities is also a potential driver of public opinion. Hatipoğlu, Müftüler-Baç & Karakoç find that there is a correlation between the percentage of Turkish background citizens living in a country and a negative view of Turkish EU accession. A comparison between Bulgaria and Romania is of interest here. As outlined in Table 1 above, Romanian citizens (in 2010) displayed a considerably higher support for Turkish EU accession—61% in favour and 17% against—compared to Bulgaria—which displayed 37% support and 49% not in favour.

A key difference between Romania and Bulgaria is the presence of a sizable Turkish minority in Bulgaria, not in Romania. According to Iulia Serafimescu and Mihai Sebe, Romanian perceptions of Turkey are characterized mostly by utilitarian concerns with potential gains for Romania, including the potential for Black Sea cooperation and issues of security (Serafimescu & Sebe, 2009). On the contrary, Marin Lessenski reveals that the presence of a Turkish minority in Bulgaria seems to have a high impact on opinions across party lines, creating a three-way split between supporters, opponents and those undecided on Turkish EU membership (Lessenski, 2009).¹⁴

More recently, widespread support for Erdoğan e.g. at the 2017 constitutional referendum to grant him further powers amongst the Turkish diaspora in Europe has likely added to the pool of

¹³ A key associated aspect of this is the extent to which Turkey has been invoked as a “model” in European discourse as a non-violent Muslim majority ally in the fight against terrorism following 9/11 in 2001, as a model of a well-functioning market economy and Muslim majority democracy to the 2011 Arab Spring, and as a key Sunni Muslim ally in the anti-ISIL fight against also Sunni Muslim ISIL in Syria and Iraq (for more on this, see Lindgaard, Uyğur and Banke, 2018).

¹⁴ More detailed differences are of course present here as well. In Denmark, for instance, Turkish background immigrants enjoy relative benign perceptions compared to other immigrant background groups. Also, as the FEUTURE country report on Denmark notes, the presence of Turkish background immigrants in Denmark expanded Danish business opportunities with Turkey from the 1970’s onwards (see Banke and Lindgaard, 2017). On the other hand, as many of the publically prominent and politically active citizens of Turkish background are also Kurdish, that has likely influenced negatively on perceptions of Turkey as the conflict between Turkey and the Kurds has resumed since 2015.



European citizens not in favour of Turkish EU accession. This also adds to candidate 9 driver on perceptions of human rights and democracy in Turkey, to be addressed below.

Ad.4 As most of the literature already referenced also shows, there has been an overall tendency towards a correlation between right-wing majorities and a sceptical opinion of Turkish EU membership, especially amongst the more populist and nationalist of the voter segments. More recently, and as the FEUTURE report on European identity-related perceptions of Turkey also outlines (see Lindgaard, Uyğur & Banke, 2018), the historically more positive political left has joined the pool of sceptics as well. This has two primary reasons, one is several alliances between the political left and Kurdish organizations across Europe, and one is the perceived deterioration of human rights and democracy in Turkey more generally.

Returning to the latter below, the alliance between the European political left and Kurdish groups is historically deep. As the current Turkish AKP Government came into power in 2002, it did so with an outreach to (some say attempt at coopting) Kurdish (and left-liberal) groups. Along with domestic European reasons—e.g. the European left’s stance on the integration debates outlined above—this ostensible AKP support for the Kurdish cause is likely to have affected the left-leaning European public opinion in a more favourable direction.

With the recent turn towards conflict with the Kurds, European leftwing groups have turned to become the most vocal critics of Turkey. This is likely to be a key driver of the renewed drop in public support of Turkish EU membership, as these groups used to be supportive thereof.

Ad.5 Historical alliances and animosities of course also play a key role as a driver in this context. If anything, this adds to the explanation of the outlier countries such as Austria, Cyprus and Greece at the negative end of the spectrum of Table 1 above, and Sweden at the other end. With the historical double siege by the Ottoman Empire at the gates of Vienna, the Austrian scepticism draws on historical perceptions of threat, as spelled out in the FEUTURE country report on Austria (Gavenda, 2017). Of course, many other factors such as the already mentioned identity-loaded debates on integration of Muslim immigrants and descendants also drive the highly sceptical Austrian opinion. But history also matters.

The same is naturally the case for Cyprus and Greece, which hardly needs spelling out in the current context (see Kentas, 2017 and Magnoli & Dokos, 2017 for more on this). As Turkish nationalism has returned to the ascendant, mirroring nationalist tendencies in Greece, failed settlement of the Cyprus dispute, Turkish warship blockade of an Italian gas exploration vessel off the Cypriot coast, standoffs on water and in the air around disputed islets in the Aegean, Greece’s judicial decision to not extradite eight Turkish officers accused in Turkey of partaking in the 15 July 2016 coup attempt, and the arrest of two Greek border soldiers in Turkey accused of espionage remind everyone of historic animosities between Greece and Turkey to suppress earlier Greek tendencies towards a less pessimistic view of Turkish EU access.

Sweden on the other hand seems to merge an outlier stance on the immigration and integration issue with historically relatively strong relations with the Ottoman Empire trailing back to the first half of the 18th century, and a strong support for Turkish membership from prominent political



leaders such as Carl Bildt, to present a strong voice in support of Turkish EU membership (see e.g. Lindh, 2017 for more). However, as the YouGov numbers outlined above suggest, the Swedish public opinion—displaying 73% opposition and 7% support in 2016—and the more sceptical and nationalist Sweden Democrats making inroads on the more established parties in the elections, it is likely that public opinion will drive this historical alliance into more tested waters in the near future.

Ad.6 Political leadership is of course also a driver. The transition from more positive center-left European leadership on Turkey at the hands of Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder before the mid-2000’s to center-right leaders with a more sceptical message such as Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy in the second half of the 2000’s has of course added to the decline of support. This applies at the more local level as well.

That said, it is a valid question what has been the cause and what the effect behind this correlation. As the mismatch between government stances revealed by the FEUTURE overview represented in the DW map above and the seemingly less optimistic populations could seem to reveal, arguably the causal relation is the inverse. Perhaps more critical leaders owe their relative success in the latter part of the 2000’s and into the 2010’s to their accommodation of public opinion? As direction of causality can often be difficult to determine, and both directions likely obtain, it is still safe to conclude that political leadership has had and will retain a key impact on public opinion towards Turkish EU membership.

Ad.7 Turns in bilateral relations are also likely to have had an impact. As above, detailed numbers are not available, but recent warming of relations between Turkey and Poland to the side, developments in bilateral relations have played mostly a negative role in driving public opinion.

Let us take Germany as an example. As Lisa Sawyer Samp and Jeff Rathke outlines in their September 2017 article “Germany’s election won’t stop the slide in relations with Turkey” (Samp & Rathke, 2017), Germany and Turkey has been experiencing a number of political and diplomatic challenges from the spring of 2016 through the summer of 2017, including evictions and arrests of German reporters from and in Turkey, the so-called Böhmermann affair, the adoption of a bill in the German parliament recognizing the 1915 Armenian genocide, the Turkish blockade of German parliamentarians from visiting its soldiers at the Turkish Incirlik airbase, German officials blocking access to Turkish Government representatives from addressing large audiences in Germany, Erdoğan’s claims to the effect that Germany is deploying ‘Nazi methods’, Germany’s refusal to extradite Turkish asylum seekers that Turkey claim to be complicit in the July 2016 coup attempt, Turkey accusing 681 German companies operating in Turkey of having ties to terrorism, issuing mutual travel warnings, etc.

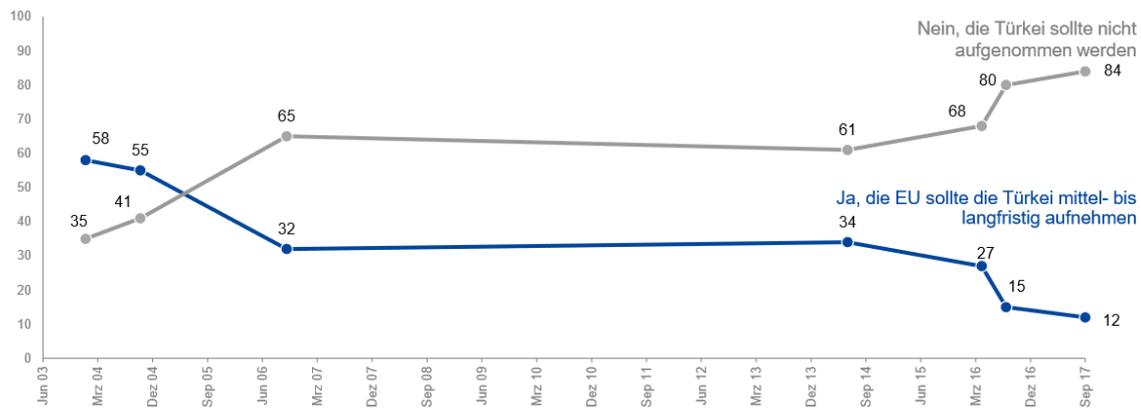
As displayed in the following ARD-DeutschlandTREND September 2017 poll, that very period has seen a relatively steep downward turn of support for Turkish EU membership from 34% in 2014 to 12% in 2017, and a corresponding rise in scepticism about Turkish EU membership from 61% against in 2014 to 84% against in 2017. This means a jump in the net support on whether Turkey



in the near or distant future should be accepted into the EU or whether Turkey in principle should not be accepted from -27% in 2014 to -72% in 2017 (ARD, 2017):

ARD-DeutschlandTREND September 2017

Aufnahme der Türkei in die EU
Zeitverlauf



Seit Jahren wird über eine Mitgliedschaft der Türkei in der Europäischen Union diskutiert. Wie ist Ihre Meinung: Sollte die EU mittel- bis langfristig auch die Türkei aufnehmen oder sollte die Türkei prinzipiell nicht in die EU aufgenommen werden?

15

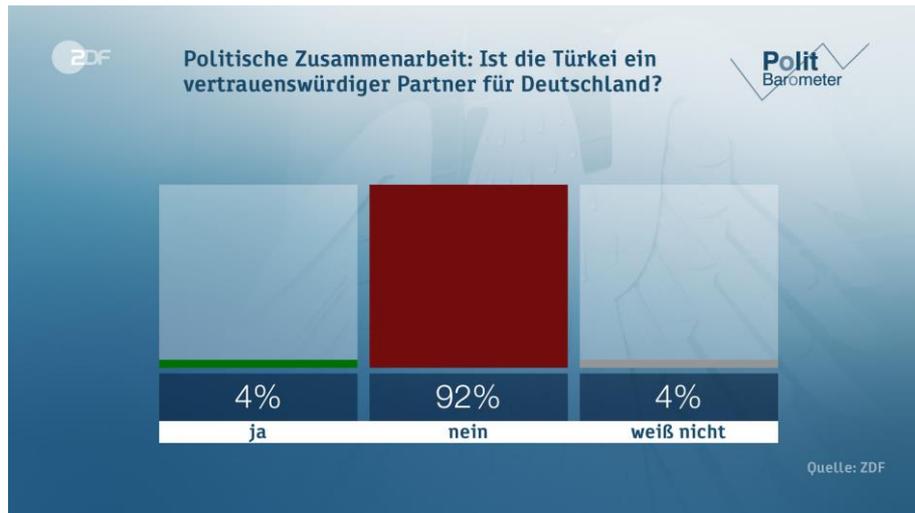
16

Other drivers of this steep and sudden change are of course possible, including a discontent with the developments of human rights and state of democracy in Turkey following the much publicized 2013 crackdown on the Gezi demonstrations in Turkey, and support from key segments of the political left of the Kurdish cause. But they are hardly likely to suffice as explainers of this change. Also, as Merkel kept a low voice during most of the outlined developments because of her much-needed commitment to the March 2016 migration “statement” between the EU countries and Turkey, political leadership is unlikely to explain this change. It is thus relatively safe to conclude that changes in bilateral relations in cases such as the German one (see note 16 for reference to the Dutch parallel) are likely to be a key driver of opinions.

The question is if recent tendencies towards rapprochement between Turkey and Germany are likely to see a shift back in a more positive direction. If this February 2018 ZDF poll on whether or not Turkey is a trustworthy partner for Germany is anything to go by, such a reversal will at least need more time to have an effect (ZDF, 2018):

¹⁵ In an email exchange with the author of the FEUTURE country report on the Netherlands Jan Marinus (see Wiersma, 2017), Wiersma outlines a similar development in the Netherlands, if in lack of concrete numbers to back it up. With both countries having pulled back their ambassadors from the other country, and Dutch resentment also at a new pro-AKP Dutch political party—DENK—it is Wiersma’s assessment that developments in public opinion in the Netherlands has seen a similar dip as a result of these troubled developments of bilateral relations.





Ad. 8 As already noted, there is a growing awareness in the EU that Turkey is a key partner on migration and terrorism, even if this can seem to be out of need rather than want. To what extent this has been a driver of public opinion is unclear. But working with Turkey on a more pragmatic, realist ground of cooperation on challenges that the EU face a steep challenge in meeting without Turkey’s help is likely to meet some degree of understanding as the new realism that embraces much of international politics is likely to have ramifications for public opinion of EU’s relation with Turkey in the near future.

The key question here is whether this will make the EU audience retain some support for Turkish EU membership, or whether it will see other forms of differentiated cooperation find their way into the polls and into popular support. In any case, cooperation on migration and terrorism is hardly likely to be a strong driver of a revamped European public support for Turkish accession to the EU.

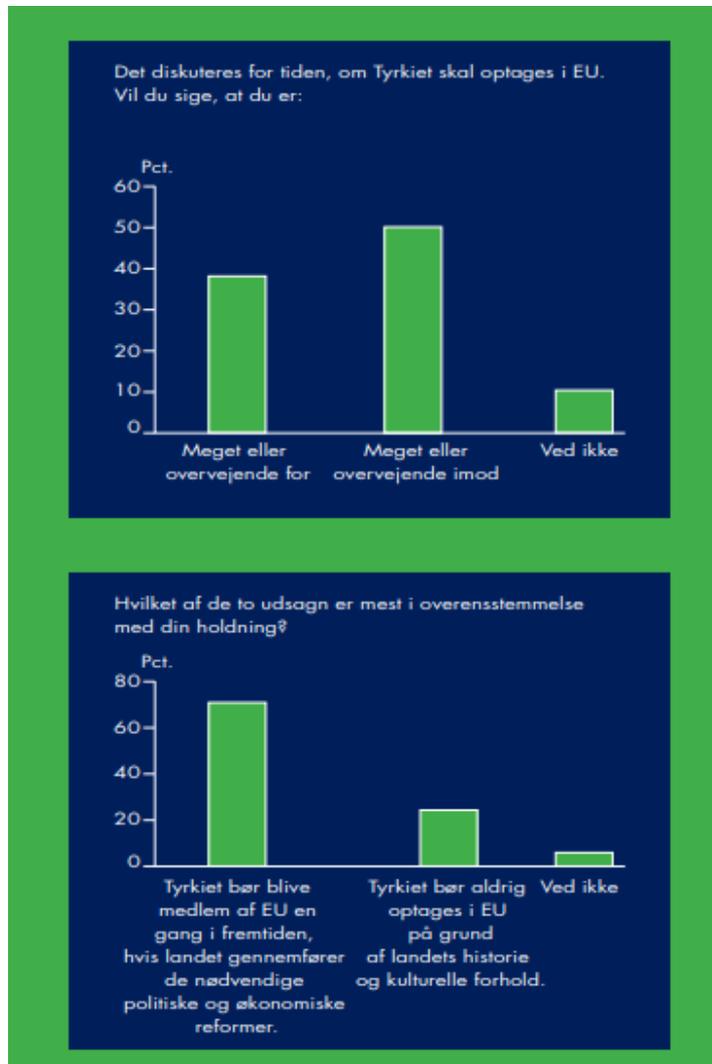
Ad.9 The final candidate driver is the EU public perceptions of developments in Turkey on human rights and democracy. As already noted, it is likely that this area has swayed former supporters of Turkish EU membership on the European liberal center-left in a more sceptical direction. Also, it has likely shifted the basis of scepticism away from the more contentious identity-based one—which is also and still a source of division and polarization within the EU—towards a more unifying opinion that developments in Turkey are out of sync with basic principles on human rights and democracy as spelled out in the so-called Copenhagen Criteria.

Going off of the ARD poll invoked above, a slight increase in German support of Turkish EU membership from 2006 to 2013 was reversed in the second half of 2013, with a steeper decrease to follow. This 2013 turn is coeval with the summer 2013 Gezi demonstrations and the perceived hardline crackdown on them by the Erdoğan Government.

Again, ostensible correlation of this kind does not rule out the influence of other variables—Turkey’s early discord with Europe on Syria could be one such variable—and correlation does not entail causation and driver status. But questions of the past on conditional support—e.g. along the lines of ‘would you support ... were Turkey to meet the Copenhagen Criteria on democracy



and Human rights’ have tended to give a considerably more positive return. As but one example, the following survey made by Danish Epinion for the Danish European Movement in 2005 makes the difference of rephrasing the question in conditional terms very clear (Europabevægelsen, 2005):



On the unconditional question on whether or not Turkey should be accepted as an EU member, less than 40% are in support, whereas that number rises to 70% when the question is made conditional on Turkey sometime in the future meeting the necessary political and economic reforms (left-hand column of top table).

The second question (bottom table) includes possibly key variables such as “sometime in the future” and “economic” reforms along with the political. But it is arguably another indicator that conditionality on the development of human rights and democracy in Turkey is a key candidate driver of EU public opinion on Turkish EU Membership.¹⁶

¹⁶ Perhaps also of note here is that only around 20% say that Turkey should never be accepted on grounds of the country’s history and culture.



4. Public opinion – a driver of conflict

It is time to summarize this host of figures, correlations, and candidate drivers, and assess what direction they are likely to drive Turkey-EU relations into in the 2023 timeframe of the FEUTURE project.

If we couple the relatively clear general tendency towards declining support in the EU for Turkish EU membership with the rising tide of populist politics in Europe, and include the fact that government stances still seem to be less sceptical than public opinion, then public opinion is likely to adversely affect Turkey-EU relations in the near future, pushing the relationship in a more conflictual direction. Devilish detail aside, this is the general conclusion.

Support for this general image is to be found in the following observations. First, compared to the Turkish opinions of the EU, fluctuations on the general EU level have been much smaller and fewer between 1996 and 2017. What developments do reveal are significant periods of time with minor developments, followed by increasingly more frequent and more significant steps in a downward direction, e.g. from 2005-2006, after 2013, and then again since 2016.

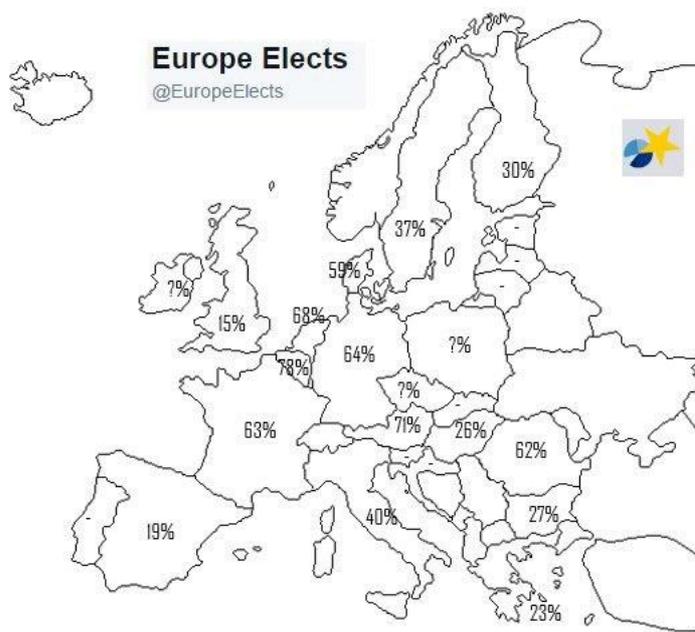
Secondly, popular support for enlargement is unlikely to pick up new momentum anytime soon.¹⁷ Recalling that out of the group not in favour of Turkish EU membership there was a -10% net support for EU enlargement and out of those in favour there was a +25,5% net support for EU enlargement, this correlation is unlikely to help boost EU popular support for Turkey EU membership bid.

Thirdly, vocal and electoral support by European citizens of Turkish citizens for the otherwise highly unpopular AKP leadership is also likely to further depress public support for Turkish EU membership. This draws on a number of drivers, including the presence of Turkish minorities, the still present debates on the integration of Muslim-background immigrants, and a rising disbelief that EU citizens, even of Turkish background, can support the further decline of the human rights and democracy in Turkey.

Fine. But have you seen the 2006 Eurobarometer poll on the same question: 60 % of Europeans then declared opposition to Turkey’s membership by citing its “cultural differences” from EU members (Eurobarometer 66: National Report. Executive Summary: Turkey, Fall 2006, p. 4). So how does this large number stand in relation to the 20% reported in Denmark alone around the same time (2005)? (Author: As I see it, they are different questions in different contexts, as this Danish examples is set against a “meeting criteria in the future” clause as opposed to the Eurobarometer question)

¹⁷ And if it does—e.g. in relation to the Western Balkans—it is likely to further complicate relations with Turkey.





See also (American Interest, 2017)¹⁸

Fourthly, the tendency towards a broader bi-partisan agreement on Turkey in the EU is also likely to keep public support for Turkish EU membership low, barring of course wild card changes such as a return in Turkey to political negotiations with the PKK or a change of government and change of direction on human rights and democracy in Turkey. Arguably, this is a relatively strong driver, and is correlated to the perceived downturn in human rights and liberal democratic values since at least 2013; a time-frame that also saw a marked drop in popular EU support of Turkish EU membership.

Fifthly, recent returns to salience of historical animosities between Turkey on the one hand, and Greece and Cyprus on the other, also do not bode well for public opinion on Turkish EU membership in Greece and Cyprus. Mindful of the formal hurdles placed on the process from those countries, this is likely to have a high and counterproductive impact on Turkey’s EU bid. Some of the same things can be said for Austria, if to a significantly lesser degree. As Sweden, a historical ally, also seem to have turned sour on public support, vocal support is unlikely to materialize from this front either.

Now, there are still drivers that could act to either stabilize or even buttress public support for Turkey’s EU membership bid. One such driver is assessed utility. Warning signs for the Turkish economy is one recent driver. The EU has a strong interest in keeping the faltering Turkish economy from collapsing. Also, Europe faces a more challenging international trading climate, making it look for new trading opportunities. Mindful of the slight increase in support for Turkey’s EU bid

¹⁸ It should be noted here, however, that with all the caveats and reservations that must be taken on this map in mind, the tendency for Bulgaria and Romania is the exact inverse from the rest of Europe. In those two countries there actually seems to be an inverse correlation between the presence of Turkish minorities and support for the constitutional changes. It is unclear to the authors of this paper why this is.



the 2008 financial crisis seemed to entail (still only as a correlation rather than cause), assessed socio-economic utility through enhanced trade could help boost EU popular support.

Another such possibly positive driver is the relative absence of European political leadership engaging in overt criticism of Turkey. Overt support is of course also absent, but at present there seems to be a relative reluctance to address the issue overtly balancing an unpopular topic with a recognition that migration and security makes cooperation necessary. If this realist attitude is to permeate also into European publics, then it is likely it could add some respite to the downward trend.

5. Conclusion and Initial recommendations for how to address the downward turn in Europe

In sum, the general trend of EU public opinion towards Turkey's prospective EU membership is relatively clear. In 1996, 36% were in favour, in 2016 it was 7%. Conversely, 44% were not in favour in 1996; in 2016 it was 76%.

A host of variables have driven this trend forward, including deemed socio-economic utility, perceived cultural differences, presence of Turkish background minorities in a given country, a tendency towards bi-partisan scepticism towards Turkish EU membership, historical alliances and animosities, political leadership, current bilateral relations, stances on migrants and on terrorism, perceptions of developments of human rights and democracy in Turkey, etc.

The main assessment of the paper is that the declining support coupled with the relative success of populist politics in the EU, and the fact that European Government stances on EU membership still seem more positive than those of the populations is likely to see European public opinion on Turkish EU membership act as a driver that will pull Turkey-EU relations in a more conflictual orientation in the near future. Examples in support of this assessment count the unlikelihood of a revamped interest in EU enlargement, and if this will happen e.g. in relation to the Western Balkans, it is unlikely to alleviate tensions with Turkey. Also, a bi-partisan scepticism on developments in Turkey is likely to continue. Finally, though the EU leadership could arguably stay relatively quiet on Turkey, heeding an interest in keeping the 2016 migrants 'statement' on track, a turn to a proactive support amongst the leading EU members states of the kind displayed by Blair and Schröder in the late 1990's is unlikely to return.

That said, predictability is also in short supply these days. Mindful of global developments, a primary interest in utility and a relative absence of criticism from the European leadership, a reversal of the trend is not entirely unlikely, if still less likely. Also, public opinion in countries such as Poland and Hungary could end up following their leadership and support Turkish EU membership in support of their own troubled relations with Brussels.

Wild card developments such as a resumption in Turkey between the AKP Government (there to stay following the 24 June 2018 Presidential and Parliamentary elections) and the PKK could also



act as game changers, as could trust-building measures out of Turkey focussing on development of human rights, freedom of expression, and strong and independent institutions.

All that said, European public opinion on Turkey’s prospective EU membership is still likely to act as a driver that will push Turkey-EU relations in a further conflictual orientation into the 2023 timeframe of the FEUTURE research programme.

So how to buck the trend? This is no easy feat, not least since levels of trust appear to be at a historic low. Rebuilding trust is thus key. But this is a complex endeavour with a host of variables, all difficult to control. For one, it requires a dedicated will of the political leadership on both sides to display leadership over and against the temptation to embrace public opinion on the way to the next electoral victory. And this is a tall ask with mutual recriminations seeming to be the most popular as the ever-reappearing ballot box approaches.

Reminding everyone of the necessity of cooperation, even if the want is not present, could also be a path to pursue. Turkey is a crucial partner for the EU on migration, on anti-terrorism, and on securing that the war-prone Middle East does not yet again erupt into conflict and safe havens for terrorist ambitions against targets in Europe. For example, the EU and Turkey could easily come to find common ground on sustaining the JCPOA agreement and attempts at a thaw with Iran in spite of e.g. US wants. Also, the EU citizen could also come to find the motivating socio-economic utility and support for stability also in Turkey that enhanced trade—e.g. within the umbrella of an upgraded Customs Union—could garner. Asides from stimulating trust, such a more realistic, interest-based awareness could arguably contribute to halt the decline of support.

Finally, another track could prove helpful, if it runs against the tendency towards transactionalism and compartmentalization in dealings with Turkey; insisting on nudging Turkey back on the track of liberal democracy with a free press and free opposition politicians, and strong and independent institutions. Whether or not this is a viable option is both a good question and a different matter, but the perhaps unlikely prospect of success at such attempts could well help buck the downward trend.



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ABOUT FEUTURE

FEUTURE sets out to explore fully different options for further EU-Turkey cooperation in the next decade, including analysis of the challenges and opportunities connected with further integration of Turkey with the EU.

To do so, FEUTURE applies a comprehensive research approach with the following three main objectives:

1. Mapping the dynamics of the EU-Turkey relationship in terms of their underlying historical narratives and thematic key drivers.
2. Testing and substantiating the most likely scenario(s) for the future and assessing the implications (challenges and opportunities) these may have on the EU and Turkey, as well as the neighbourhood and the global scene.
3. Drawing policy recommendations for the EU and Turkey on the basis of a strong evidence-based foundation in the future trajectory of EU-Turkey relations.

FEUTURE is coordinated by Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Wessels, Director of the Centre for Turkey and European Union Studies at the University of Cologne and Dr. Nathalie Tocci, Director of Istituto Affari Internazionali, Rome.

The FEUTURE consortium consists of 15 renowned universities and think tanks from the EU, Turkey and the neighbourhood.

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