



Approfondimento n. 24/ luglio 2023

Turkish centrality in the Mediterranean
historical debates, regional influence
geopolitical implications

Sara De Ponte

Master's Degree in International Cooperation on Human Rights

Bologna University

Con il sostegno di



**Fondazione
Compagnia
di San Paolo**

Summary

INTRODUCTION.....	3
Chapter 1 TÜRKIYE -EU RELATIONS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.....	6
1.1 From the Ankara Agreement to the Negotiation Framework Document.....	6
1.2 A fluctuating but ongoing relationship: from 2006 to 2015	8
1.3 Cooperation efforts on common challenges.....	10
1.4 Possibilities for reunification?.....	12
Chapter 2 TURKISH STRATEGY IN THE SYRIAN CONFLICT	14
2.1 Erdoğan's fluctuation between the two camps: Russia and US	14
2.2 Turkish interests in the Syrian civil war	15
2.3 The end of the “Strategic Depth” Doctrine	19
Chapter 3 ITALIAN-TURKISH INTERESTS IN THEIR BILATERAL RELATIONS.....	22
3.1 Turkish-Italian relations: a strategic partnership.....	22
3.2 Italian and Turkish interests in the Mediterranean: the Libyan case	24
3.3 The “Calabrian route”	26
CONCLUSION.....	28
Bibliography.....	31
Sitography	32

INTRODUCTION

The 100th anniversary of the Republic founded by Atatürk this year should have been the moment of its history when Türkiye presents itself as one of the largest economies in the world with a strong international position, based on multi-ethnic and cohesive identity and characterized by institutional revolution from the past. All of these should have been promoted and covered by AKP and its leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: «Türkiye will run with much bigger steps and advance much faster towards its goals, we will work tirelessly and without a break on the path to building the Century of Türkiye »¹.

Contrary to expectations, today the situation appears different: economically, according to World Bank data, Türkiye presents annual inflation near 72.3%² while the Turkish Central Bank declares a value of 43.68% for the month of April³. Hence, Erdoğan is trying an “economic experiment”; forcibly keeping interest rates low to preserve economic growth, consequentially causing the doubling of prices. The effects of this economic crisis on the population were a key element of the consensus for the Erdoğan Presidency in the elections held last May⁴ in Türkiye.

Looking at Türkiye’s international role, at the beginning of his political career President Erdoğan used European conditionality and pressure to influence the Turkish political condition, showing a strategic alignment with the EU. After the 2010s, however, he started to combine democratic and more authoritarian rules, creating a hybrid system in which multipartyism is under central control and the President focuses the powers on his person. The strategy of cooling relations with the EU has responded to the AKP decision to present Türkiye as an alternative to the European model. This is not only in terms of institutions, breaking the process of democratization started with a new Penal Code (2004) and amendments to the constitutions about equality and non-discrimination clause, arriving as the first country to ratify the Istanbul Convention in 2011, but also in terms of identity, presenting Turkish people as something else, better on moral and values than the West and Europeans.

Even if, due to the decline of democratic rights and freedom in the country, European Parliament decided on June 7, 2022 to not resume agreements for full membership of Ankara in the EU⁵, European countries know how crucial coworking with the AKP government is in fields such as foreign policy, security and immigration issues. Conscious about the necessity for the EU to keep relations with his country, Erdoğan is reinforcing his international position by presenting himself as the mediator in the Ukraine-Russia conflict, offering the Turkish gas pipelines as an alternative for Russian gas and keeping almost 4 million refugees on national territory, of which 3,6 million are Syrians⁶.

Therefore, the latest statements by the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan regarding the lifting of the veto on Sweden's entry into NATO, a decision hand in glove with the reopening of Turkey's accession process in the EU, correspond to Turkish interests of international prestige and European centrality.

Before that, the devastating earthquakes, measuring between 7.7 and 6.5 on the Richter scale, which took place on February 6, 2023 and caused destruction in various cities among the South

¹ See [Presidency Of The Republic Of Turkey : “We will work tirelessly on the path to building the Century of Türkiye” \(tccb.gov.tr\)](https://www.tccb.gov.tr)

²See [Inflation, consumer prices \(annual %\) - Türkiye | Data \(worldbank.org\)](https://data.worldbank.org)

³See [TCMB - Consumer Prices](https://www.tcmb.gov.tr)

⁴ About a possible postponement of the elections, see [nota 2 radar turchia 2023 sette 0.pdf \(cespi.it\)](https://www.cespi.it)

⁵ See [I rapporti tra UE e Turchia: tra cooperazione e tensioni | Attualità | Parlamento europeo \(europa.eu\)](https://www.europa.eu)

⁶ See [Le relazioni UE-Turchia sono al minimo storico | Attualità | Parlamento europeo \(europa.eu\)](https://www.europa.eu)

and South-East of Türkiye and the North-West of Syria⁷ had complicated the picture of EU-Türkiye relations. The estimated number of deaths in Türkiye alone was more than 50.000 and in Syria more than 6.000. Additionally, almost 2 million people were evacuated⁸. The solidarity that the closest European countries showed despite the complex relations with Ankara, like Greece and Cyprus, are unlikely to demonstrate an immediate change of heart but surely raise the question of how Europe should react to the emergency founding of a more stable balance with Türkiye. Keeping in mind that Türkiye remains a strategic challenge, on one hand the EU should be providing unconditional support for impacted areas in the wake of the earthquake. On the other hand, looking at the increasingly uneven and non-democratic situation in these countries, European leaders and institutions should manage relations, defining a firm position in the rocky months ahead.

While the EU is thinking about how to define its strategy with Ankara, the leader of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) in Turkey is shifting focus towards the Middle East. Especially with the recent elections, the President believed that directing his energy and resources in the region will help garner more domestic support. Simultaneously, Turkey is actively competing with other countries in the Middle East to assert its leadership and influence. For the past century Türkiye's foreign policy has been driven by the achievements of the Lausanne Peace Treaty's clauses⁹, in the face of which Türkiye was a predominantly status quo country, out of the broader geopolitical struggles, committed to preserve sovereignty and territorial integrity against the continuing threats. Since the end of the Cold War and the subsequent economic and diplomatic growth, Ankara has decided to reshape the regional order to achieve its desire to international influence.

This goal to change the traditional Turkish foreign policy of non-intervention is intensified under the AKP government: Erdoğan is starting a competition with the other Arab powers, Egypt, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, and at the same time the President pursues his goal to break Türkiye out of the regional isolation that did little to advance Turkish interests in the Middle East. Firstly, he is trying to reset relations with Saudi Arabia after the tensions over the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi and Ankara's support for Doha after the imposition of the Saudi-led blockade on Qatar in 2017. He is looking at new friendship with Israel where, after more than 10 years of a complicated relationship, there seems to be a possibility for a turnaround due to the economic crisis in Türkiye and more flexibility of Gulf diplomacy. Indeed, there are interests from both actors to collaborate on specific topics such as the economy, internal security, and the willingness to restrict Iran's influence on Syria. On the contrary, Israel's relations with the Kurds community and Ankara's support of Hamas activities continue to represent possible elements of friction.

There has been a recent hyperactivism of the Turks¹⁰ and their military in the region, especially in Syria, where the Turkish army has intervened several times to assure security on borders and show its power and presence in the Syrian civil war. They are occupying areas and threatening new interventions constantly, re-creating a conflict in which foreign policy's interests and

⁷ See <https://en.afad.gov.tr/day-5-of-the-disaster-of-the-century>

⁸ See <https://en.afad.gov.tr/press-bulletin-36-about-the-earthquake-in-kahramanmaras>

⁹ At Lausanne, the 24th July 1923 is signed the Peace Treaty between The British Empire, France, Italy, Japan, Greece, Roumania and the Serb-Croat-Slovens State of the one part, and Turkey, of the other part; with the aim to settled officially the conflict that had originally existed among parties since the World War I, the Treaty established Turkey's modern borders and its political independence as Republic under the guide of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. For details about territorial and diplomatic clauses see <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/lausanne-peace-treaty-part-i-political-clauses.en.mfa>; while for a deeper historical overview see N. Danforth and A. Stein, *Turkey's new foreign policy. Ankara's Ambitions, Regional Responses, and Implications for the United States*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, Philadelphia, 2023, chapter 1.

¹⁰ See [Turkey at the Centre of the Mediterranean Geopolitical Chessboard : IEMed](#)

internal security issues converge around the Kurdish question, causing more than 6.500 deaths inside Turkish territory¹¹ from July 2015 to January 2023.

A possible window for dialogue among parties is opened with the earthquakes that struck southern Türkiye near the northern border of Syria. During a meeting of the UN Security Council on the last 1st of March, the representative of Türkiye said that «the devastation wrought by the earthquake demonstrated the concomitant need to create momentum in Syria's political process»¹² and to do this his Government continues to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Syrian people and has made the border gates at the Bab Al-Salam and Al Ra'ee crossings more available in order to allow the faster transfer of United Nations aid in greater quantities. The standardization process also led to a quadripartite meeting on the 3rd of April 2023 between Russian, Turkish, Iranian and Syrian foreign ministers¹³, the first direct meeting for Turkish and Syrian governmental representatives after the war - even though the refugees' return issue remains a key problem.

Another central area of interest for Ankara in the Middle East is Libya, seen as a strategic partner through which to expand Turkish influence on the Mediterranean, contrasting other Arabs countries in the region. This also can obscure internal economic crises creating more consensus on foreign policy's strategy. To comply with these purposes, in 2019 Türkiye signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Libya based on military cooperation assuring Turkish army personnel and Syrian mercenaries along the coast around Tripolitania¹⁴.

In summary, Erdoğan's political strategy indicates that the AKP agenda focuses primarily on ensuring internal consensus and emphasizing the defence of national interests in foreign policy decisions, rather than actively seeking substantial changes in international and Mediterranean power dynamics.. Inside this discourse, the new mediator role with the EU, the interventionist turn in Syria and Libya, and the reconciliation with Israel and Saudi Arabia can be interpreted as responses to internal political, security and consensus needs in addition to the willingness to avoid an international isolation and maximise the possible returns coming from the area.

Erdoğan's change of position on Sweden joining NATO, last 10th July in the late evening in the eve of the alliance's landmark summit in Vilnius, can be seen in the same way: the Turkish President, indeed, tied Sweden's bid to join the NATO military alliance with the Turkish future in EU, declaring to reporters at Istanbul's Ataturk airport «First, pave the way for Turkey in the European Union, and then let us pave the way for Sweden, just as we paved the way for Finland»¹⁵.

Hence, to reinforce and consolidate the AKP and the President's domestic power, the Ankara government is presenting itself as a consolidated alternative to the European identity and Arabs countries' domination in the region, trying to cover, as much as possible, the economic and diplomatic crises which are also linked with the security's policy on its borders and the lack of protection for minorities and refugees' rights in the countries.

¹¹ See [Turkey's PKK Conflict: A Visual Explainer | Crisis Group](#)

¹² See [Plagued by 12 Years of Conflict, Syria's Suffering Only Compounded by Earthquake, Officials Tell Security Council, Citing Hampered Emergency Response - Syrian Arab Republic | ReliefWeb](#)

¹³ See [Disgelo Siria-Turchia, a Mosca la delegazione di Damasco - Politica - ANSAmed.it](#)

¹⁴ For a deeper overview of the Turkish foreign policy in Libya, see [brief 13 - turchia-libia ferhat polat.pdf \(cespi.it\)](#)

¹⁵ See [Turkey's Erdoğan links Sweden's NATO membership bid to Ankara's EU accession – EURACTIV.com](#)

Chapter 1 TÜRKİYE -EU RELATIONS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

1.1 From the Ankara Agreement to the Negotiation Framework Document

Since its foundation in 1923, the Republic of Türkiye looked to the European Countries as an example of the process of modernization. In economic and civil terms, Türkiye was trying to balance the European model of civilization with the creation of its own, specular identity.

The beginning of this relationship is represented by the EU-Türkiye Association Agreement, known as the “Ankara Agreement”, signed in 1963, to establish «closer bonds between the Turkish people and peoples brought together in the European Economic Community»¹⁶ and to constitute the legal basis of the association among parties. The principal aims were, not only accelerating the economic program and expanding trade but also improving the living conditions in Türkiye and reducing the disparities between the Turkish economy and the economies of the other European States.

In 1970 the Additional Protocol was added, which entered into force in 1973. The two actors created conditions for a transition period when «free movement of industrial and agricultural products, as well as persons, were foreseen»¹⁷. Even with a timetable for the establishment of the Customs Union, the political and economic conditions in Türkiye, characterized by more authoritarianism and the strengthening of the executive with pressure from the military, led to a suspension of the relations with the EU after the military coup of 12 September 1980.

The internal political instability persisted; this process of economic liberalization and democratic modernization has been started again with the re-establishment of civil authority in 1983. In 1987 Turkey applied for full membership in the EU, although the phases foreseen in Ankara Agreement were not completed. Due to this, their application received a negative response from the EU.

The Helsinki Summit held in December 1999 represented a breakthrough through which Türkiye was officially recognized by the European Council as a candidate State without any preconditions, putting them at the same level as the other candidates. Then, in 2001, the Accession Partnership¹⁸ prepared the EU Commission with «principles, priorities, intermediate objectives and conditions»¹⁹ for supporting Türkiye to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria²⁰.

In his discourse after the acceptance of the candidacy, Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit underlined the exceptional nature of Türkiye as «the only country to have effected a customs union with

¹⁶ See [EU-Turkey Association Agreement \(the "Ankara Agreement"\), 1963 - dipublico.org](https://dipublico.org)

¹⁷ See [History of Türkiye- EU Relations \(ab.gov.tr\)](https://ab.gov.tr)

¹⁸ See [EUR-Lex - accession partnership - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu)

¹⁹ See [Turkey APD 2001.pdf \(ab.gov.tr\)](https://ab.gov.tr)

²⁰ Copenhagen criteria, or Accession criteria, are certain conditions and principles that were established by the Copenhagen European Council in 1993 and strengthened by the Madrid European Council in 1995 to which any country wishing to become a member of the EU must conform. How to indicate in <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/accession-criteria-copenhagen-criteria.html>, they are stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities; a functioning market economy and the ability to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU; the ability to take on the obligations of membership, including the capacity to effectively implement the rules, standards and policies that make up the body of EU law (the ‘acquis’), and adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

the European Union without becoming a full member»²¹ and as the country that «carried the heavy economic burden of this responsible role with a great sense of duty»²². He also claimed that his country played an important role for Europe as «leader country in democracy and secularism among countries having a majority of Muslim population»²³. With this speech, Ecevit wanted, on the one hand, to reassure the European Community about the willingness of his Party to overcome their deficiencies, especially in terms of human rights and democracy, and on the other hand, to show at the domestic contest how «during the six and a half months that elapsed after our three-party coalition government took office, we took far-reaching strides in expanding human rights and democracy in Türkiye and in improving our economic performance»²⁴.

Indeed, the fear felt by a part of Turkish society, politicized by nationalist groups as the main opponents to Türkiye -EU accession, was that this standards' implementation required changes in economy and politics but mostly within social dimension, with the risk to lose their identity in favour of a complete Europeanization.

Following this tension, on 3 November 2002, the elections were won by the Justice and Development Party (AKP), a Millî Görüş' descendant which was more able to manage diverse tendencies, including Islamist, centre-right, and far-right, as well as the various ethnic and class backgrounds holding these different constituencies together and governing the country in a heterogeneous way.²⁵ Challenging the establishment of the old regime which acted militantly to protect the secular and modernist constitution against an Islamist and separatist threat, AKP under the leadership of Erdoğan initially promoted the expansion of individual liberties and recognition of pluralism. This put the dialogue about the fulfilled process of integration in the EU at the core of its political agenda, showing that giving priority to the reforms proposed by the Copenhagen criteria was a necessary step to enter into the international community. These propositions helped the party establish hegemony, and shift discourses, alliances and policies to acquire total control of the state apparatus.

At first, the need to be recognised as a more democratic and modern Türkiye by the international arena responded to internal dynamics; with the support of the EU, AKP started to promote a series of domestic reforms primarily meant to limit the military power in favour of civilian one and increase the consensus around the Party working liberally and democratically. Between October 2003 and July 2004, the Parliament approved 261 laws that change the military role inside the political system, renewed the judicial procedures, and established human rights. In 2005 another 166 laws were passed²⁶.

Hence, the progress of the reform process under the AKP let the European Council, firstly to recognize Türkiye in line with the political criteria promoted by the EU in December 2004 and, secondly to launch the accession negotiations with the Negotiation Framework Document and its 35 chapters negotiated among parties in October 2005²⁷. The Document, which states «the shared objective of the negotiations is accession»²⁸ at the same time points out the «open

²¹ [Statement of Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit In Helsinki On Turkey's Candidacy To The EU December 11, 1999 / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(mfa.gov.tr\)](#)

²² *Ibidem*

²³ *Ibidem*

²⁴ *Ibidem*

²⁵ See Massicard E., *Parties and Politics in Turkey* in *The Routledge Handbook on Contemporary Turkey*, Routledge, 2021, Chapter 9.

²⁶ See Guidi M., *Atatürk addio: come Erdoğan ha cambiato la Turchia*, il Mulino, 2018, p. 66.

²⁷ To have more information about the 35 chapters and the Accession Negotiations see <https://www.avrupa.info.tr/en/accession-negotiations-720>. While to know the current state of the negotiation, see [Current Situation \(ab.gov.tr\)](#)

²⁸ See [GEN \(europa.eu\)](#)

nature» of that process, which enables the EU to determine opening and closing benchmarks for every negotiation chapter, heralding a tough time ahead, including difficulties with long transition periods, derogations and permanent safeguard measures. However, «the fact that it could not be deconstructed into objective, measurable criteria applicable to all candidate states made the document, and consequently the negotiation process, ambiguous»²⁹. This ambiguity is also probably the result of a certain level of mistrust towards Türkiye. Nonetheless, the negotiations opened a new scenario for Türkiye within the European community.

Essential for the European Council's positive decision was the Turkish government's acceptance to sign the Protocol to extend the Ankara Agreement to the other ten new Member States in the negotiations. Among these countries, there was also The Republic of Cyprus, recognized by the international community but not by the Turkish government. That will be a key issue in the whole future of Türkiye -EU relations.

1.2 A fluctuating but ongoing relationship: from 2006 to 2015

The enthusiasm for the modern and reforming spirit that characterised the AKP political agenda in its first years of governance ended shortly with the issue of the recognition of the Republic of Cyprus. Even though in 2006 the first chapter of negotiation on Science and Research was provisionally closed, in December of the same year «the Council decided in particular to suspend negotiations on eight chapters relevant to Türkiye's restrictions about the Republic of Cyprus, and will not close the other chapters until Türkiye fulfils its commitments under the additional protocol to the EU-Türkiye association agreement, which extended the EU-Türkiye customs union to the ten member states, including Cyprus, that joined the EU in May 2004»³⁰. Despite the position taken by the Council, Erdoğan proved himself determined to carry on reforms in European and democratic terms through pragmatic, liberal-conservative and at the same time cautious politics creating the conditions for a re-start of the negotiations on the chapters that were not suspended, which began in January 2007³¹.

In this ongoing but fluctuating EU-Türkiye relationship, the period between the two elections in 2007 and 2015 signified a shift from a policy of regional economic and diplomatic cooperation to a less predictable foreign policy filled with abrupt changes. This included strong support to the Muslim Brotherhood and armed Sunni groups in the Middle East, as well as anti-Kurdish militarism as an expression of a mix of key domestic political push and external pull factors that gave the possibility to AKP to consolidate its power and impose its Islamic orientation³².

In particular, two external threats created domestic consequences and a decline of consensus around the AKP political agenda, which were evident in the General Elections of 2015³³: the Russian invasion of Crimea and the civil war in Syria.

²⁹ See [The State of Turkey-EU Negotiations : IEMed](#)

³⁰ Chapter suspended by the General Affairs and External Relations Council Decision of 11 December 2006: 1) Free Movement of Goods; 3) Right of Establishment and Freedom to Provide Services; 9) Financial Services; 11) Agriculture and Rural Development; 13) Fisheries; 14) Transport Policy; 29) Customs Union; 30) External Relations. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/PRES_06_352

³¹ See [Current Status | EU Delegation to Türkiye \(avrupa.info.tr\)](#)

³² See [Too big for its boots \(clingendael.org\)](#)

³³ On 7 June 2015 in Turkey were held general elections to elect 550 members to the Grand National Assembly. The result was the first hung parliament since the 1999 general elections: AKP lost its parliamentary majority and won 258 seats with 40.9% of the vote, clearly missing the aimed two-thirds majority for the implementation of

The Crimea crisis represented an issue for Erdoğan not only due to the geographical proximity (only 173 miles across the Black Sea) but also because of the huge community of Turkic Tartars who are ethnically and linguistically near to Anatolian Turks and were against the Russian annexation of the peninsula. This has led to, on one hand, a Crimean diaspora with millions of Tartars concentrated in certain provinces such as Eskisehir, Ankara and Konya³⁴ and all the internal problems concerning security and integration. On the other hand, this led to a possible diplomatic and economic crisis with Russia. Türkiye, which depends on Russian natural gas and oil, has adopted a moderate position, playing a balancing game in the Crimea issue. They have acted even more pragmatic in the Syrian crisis where «even though Russia has blocked international action against the Bashar al-Assad regime in Damascus, effectively undermining Ankara's policy of helping Assad's opponents, Erdoğan has shied away from picking a fight with Putin, knowing that his country's economic growth and his political fortunes depend on his ability to maintain a steady supply of Russian gas and oil»³⁵. The role of Ankara after the deterioration of the situation in Syria was essential for managing the huge numbers of refugees fleeing the war who were accommodated in its territory, helping the EU address its public opinion of issues around immigration flows and internal security.

At that moment, the common Turkish feeling was expressed by Foreign Minister Egemen Bağış with the statement «the EU's need for Türkiye is much more than Türkiye's need for the EU in the long run»³⁶ reflecting on how AKP, once the internal program on changing bureaucracy, political administration and the judicial system ended, has no more need of European conditionality to obtain centrality and prestige in the region³⁷. However, the EU needed Türkiye as a strategic partner in the area, especially after the Syrian crisis.

For these reasons in December 2013, the Visa Liberalization Dialogue (VDL) was launched between Türkiye and the EU, in parallel with the signature of the Türkiye -EU Readmission Agreement based on the "Roadmap", a document setting out the requirements that need to be met. Following the aim to lift the Schengen visa requirement for Turkish citizens during their short stays in the Schengen Area, «once the Visa Liberalization Dialogue is finalized, all Turkish citizens with biometric passports will be able to travel for short stays (i.e. of 90 days within any 180 days) in the Schengen Area without a visa for business, family or touristic purposes»³⁸.

Intending to cover these criteria and to strengthen domestic consensus, Erdoğan showed a significant strategic change in his foreign and internal policies, fulfilling Türkiye's democratization through the resolution of the Kurdish question. After almost 30 years of violent conflict between the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) and Türkiye, on October 1, 2013 the government announced the "democratization package" as the first act of a new era of peace proposing «education in the Kurdish language, decreasing the election threshold, recognizing letters used in the Kurdish alphabet, and returning Kurdish names to cities and villages»³⁹. This

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's call for an executive presidency. Reasons can be identified in a faltering economy, in the political conflict between the government and the Gülen Movement, and in Turkey's involvement in the Syrian Civil War, emphasized by growing allegations of government corruption and authoritarianism. Unsuccessful attempts to form a coalition government resulted in a snap general election being called for November 2015 where AKP obtained finally the majority with almost 50% of votes.

³⁴ See [Crimean Tatars and Noghais in Turkey \(iccrimea.org\)](http://iccrimea.org)

³⁵ See [Turkey's Muted Reaction to the Crimean Crisis | The Washington Institute](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org)

³⁶ See [Egemen Bağış-"THE EU'S NEED FOR TURKEY IS MUCH MORE THAN TURKEY'S NEED FOR THE EU IN THE LONG RUN" \(egemenbagis.com\)](http://egemenbagis.com)

³⁷ See Guidi M., Atatürk addio: come Erdoğan ha cambiato la Turchia, il Mulino, 2018.

³⁸ See [The Visa Liberalization Dialogue \(ab.gov.tr\)](http://ab.gov.tr)

³⁹ See [The Kurdish Peace Process and Presidential Elections in Turkey | Wilson Center](http://www.wilsoncenter.org)

action obtained strong support from NGOs, civil society and the Kurdish community in light of the next presidential election.

Notwithstanding, the AKP's willingness to assimilate minorities, embrace multicultural populations and protect human rights by promoting the peace process with Kurds, the events of Gezi Park, the strong police repression and the forced silence of the media, have shown how the steps taken by Ankara government to democratize the state were tiny. Even though the European Parliament in the resolution on the situation in Türkiye released on 13 June 2013 expressed «its deep concern at the disproportionate and excessive use of force by the Turkish police in its response to the peaceful and legitimate protests in Istanbul's Gezi Park, and calls on the Turkish authorities to thoroughly investigate the police violence, to bring those responsible to justice and to offer compensation to the victims»⁴⁰, the controversial Türkiye - EU relationship is destined to continue in the next years especially on topics like immigration and security, and as a tentative answer to the exacerbation of the Syrian conflict.

1.3 Cooperation efforts on common challenges

The peace process intending to end the conflict between PKK and Türkiye began in 2013, but was quickly closed two years later after the escalation of violence across Turkish southern borders, which implicated both a bigger regional conflict and the pressure of ISIS in Syria. PKK was identified as the main supporter of the Syrian Kurdish militias, responsible, in the eyes of the Ankara government, for threatening internal stability and security. As a consequence, Türkiye saw another influx of refugees⁴¹, especially Kurds from Kobane, leading AKP and the EU to re-think cooperation about migration management and reduction of irregular flows.

To overcome the common challenges and fulfil the need for synchronised responses, the EU and Türkiye signed the Action Plan in 2015 «to step up their cooperation on support of Syrians under temporary protection and migration management in a coordinated effort to address the crisis created by the situation in Syria»⁴². During various informal meetings, a series of collaborative actions were identified to supplement Türkiye's efforts due to the urgency of the crisis. Hence, this joint action tried to address the situation in three different ways: (a) by addressing the root causes leading to the massive influx of Syrians, (b) by supporting Syrians under temporary protection and their host communities in Türkiye and (c) by strengthening cooperation to prevent irregular migration flows to the EU. Under a spirit of burden sharing, they also recognized the firm commitments and commendable efforts taken by Türkiye to provide massive humanitarian aid and support to an unprecedented and continuously increasing influx of people seeking refuge from Syria (at that date, it had exceeded 2.2 million) for whom Türkiye has spent more than €7 billion of its resources. The Plan was built on two parts: the first focused on supporting the Syrians under temporary protection and their Turkish hosting communities, showing the EU intention to mobilise substantial and concrete new funds outside the IPA funds to support Turkish humanitarian assistance. In exchange, Türkiye committed to further enhance the effective implementation of the law on foreigners and international protection by continuing the identification procedure of Syrian asylum seekers. The second part, based on strengthening cooperation to prevent irregular migration, was built on the

⁴⁰ See [Texts adopted - Situation in Turkey - Thursday, 13 June 2013 \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴¹ Between 2015 and 2016, the Turkish government assessed that among 1,5- 2,5 million of registered Syrian refugees were in the country: [Situation Syria Regional Refugee Response \(unhcr.org\)](#)

⁴² For a complete overview of the joint Action Plan see [EU-Turkey joint action plan \(europa.eu\)](#)

liberalisation dialogue, the visa roadmap and the provisions of the EU-Türkiye readmission agreement.

To further discuss the importance of re-energizing the accession process as a way to overcome the common challenges ahead, the leaders of the EU and their Turkish counterparts met several times between November 2015 and March 2016. Particularly significant was the Brussels meeting⁴³ on 26 November when the Action Plan was finally adopted, reaffirming the vast potential of Türkiye-EU relations. In this occasion, chapter 17 of the Negotiation Framework Document was opened in order to relaunch preparatory steps for upgrading the Customs Union.

To assist Türkiye in dealing with the Syrian refugee crisis, the EU used the European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) to earmark an EU Facility for Refugees in Türkiye. Its goals were summarized as «managing a total of €6 billion in two tranches, provides for a joint coordination mechanism, designed to ensure that the needs of refugees and host communities in Türkiye are addressed in a comprehensive and coordinated manner; the Facility focuses on humanitarian assistance, education, migration management, health, municipal infrastructure, and socio-economic support»⁴⁴.

Despite the commitment by the European Union and the signed accord to stem westward migration in return for financial aid, the President of the Turkish Republic has started to criticize funds transferred to Türkiye from the EU, claiming the assistance was not enough and too slow. At the beginning of 2020, he threatened to allow refugees and migrants transit into the EU. In the eyes of the European leaders, the announcement by Erdoğan for whom «the European Union needs to keep its promises; we are not obliged to look after and feed so many refugees; if you're honest, if you're sincere, then you need to share»⁴⁵, appeared as a shift to obtain forced support from the EU and NATO for the Ankara's new military campaign in the province of Idlib in Syria rather than sharing responsibilities and humanitarian duties.

This was not the first occasion of disagreement among parties: the whole relationship between Türkiye and NATO is historically characterized by fluctuations and changes. This has been especially true for the Cyprus question and the tensions with Greece that culminated in Turkish actions strongly criticized by Western actors, especially France. A source of the degradation of relations with the EU and NATO in the last years was also Türkiye's intervention in the Libyan civil war. Using this operation as one of the main points of his strategy to reinforce influence and leadership in the region, Erdoğan has ignored the Atlantic Alliance, sending arms, drones and Syrian mercenaries to help Tripoli government. These actions created tensions culminating in the meeting of NATO defence ministers on 17th June 2020, where French Defence Minister Florence Parly reported that Turkish marines had violated the embargo on the supply of arms in Libya⁴⁶.

Another moment of high tension was the veto initially imposed on Sweden's entry into the Atlantic Alliance due to Swedish support of Kurdish forces and its bans on the sales of some arms to Turkey, thus blocking the enlargement process. Even if recent developments have reopened a window, for the first time the Turkish president linked his country's ambition to join the EU with Sweden's efforts to become a NATO member⁴⁷.

Looking at Middle East region, both sides acknowledge the fundamental role of Türkiye in NATO. However, this type of foreign policy adopted by Erdoğan is not only creating diplomatic

⁴³ See [Meeting of heads of state or government with Turkey - EU-Turkey statement, 29/11/2015 - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴⁴ See [The EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴⁵ See [Erdoğan says border will stay open as Greece tries to repel influx | Turkey | The Guardian](#)

⁴⁶ See [NATO to probe France-Turkey naval incident in Mediterranean \(france24.com\)](#)

⁴⁷ See [Erdoğan: Turkey could approve Sweden's NATO membership if Europeans 'open way' to EU membership \(cnbc.com\)](#)

issues, but also problems in the management of immigration flows and refugees. The Turkish support for opposition forces in Syria's last rebel stronghold pushed almost a million civilians toward the Syrian-Turkish border while hundreds of thousands of others remained blocked between Syrian government forces supported by Russia and rebel fighters helped by Türkiye. As a result, at the beginning of 2020 when Turkish officials announced that police, coast guard and border guards had been ordered to stand down so the passage to Europe would be opened, thousands of Syrian refugees and migrants arrived at Greece and Bulgaria through Türkiye's borders. There, they met Greek border patrols with whom they started fights where teargas and stun grenades were used by police and rocks were thrown by refugees and migrants.

This Turkish strategy of politicising the borders to extract concessions from Brussels, which is what Von der Leyen accused Erdoğan of doing⁴⁸, had exactly the reverse effect. In the resolution of 19 May 2021 on the 2019-2020 Commission Reports on Türkiye, the European Parliament «strongly condemns, in this regard, Türkiye's use of migratory pressure for political purposes in March 2020, when the Turkish authorities actively encouraged migrants and refugees and asylum seekers with misleading information to take the land route to Europe through Greece»⁴⁹. The Parliament pointed to a lack of commitment from the Turkish side, calling into question its wish for accession. Additionally, the European Council, during the summit discussing migration and external relations with Türkiye and Russia in Brussels on 24-25 June 2021, «condemned any attempt by third countries to instrumentalise migrants for political purposes»⁵⁰ and reiterated the «EU's readiness to engage with Türkiye in a phased, proportionate and reversible manner»⁵¹ only in the case where Türkiye fulfils its obligations to respect democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights.

Although Türkiye, as a candidate country and important partner of the EU is expected to uphold the Copenhagen criteria, maintain the highest standards of democracy, respect human rights and follow the rule of law, in the recent years its government has pursued a continuous and growing distancing from EU values and standards. In addition to this, Türkiye has campaigned unilateral actions in the Eastern Mediterranean and at times has made provocative statements against the EU and its Member States that have brought EU-Türkiye relations to a historical low point⁵². The hope is that the latest statements by the Turkish President on the eve of the NATO Summit in Vilnius will be a starting point for a reopening of constructive dialogue between the parties.

1.4 Possibilities for reunification?

Despite the decision to not resume the accession negotiations with Türkiye which was expressed by the European Parliament on the 7th of June 2022, both actors are aware of the necessity of co-working and finding joint responses to common challenges. The first of these is the economic field, where they must develop closer economic cooperation given that the EU is the largest market for Turkish exports (41.3% in 2020), while Türkiye is the EU's sixth largest trading partner⁵³.

⁴⁸ See [EU and Turkey hold 'frank' talks over border opening for refugees | Migration | The Guardian](#)

⁴⁹ See [Texts adopted - 2019-2020 Reports on Turkey - Wednesday, 19 May 2021 \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁵⁰ See [European Council - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁵¹ *Ibidem*

⁵² See [Le relazioni UE-Turchia sono al minimo storico | Attualità | Parlamento europeo \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁵³ See [I rapporti tra UE e Turchia: tra cooperazione e tensioni | Attualità | Parlamento europeo \(europa.eu\)](#)

A significant improvement in the EU-Türkiye relations happened in 2021 when «in a spirit of solidarity»⁵⁴ they started meetings to reinvigorate bilateral cooperation in several areas of common interest: firstly on migration management, underlining the necessity of a strengthened border protection and fight against illegal flows in a non-discriminatory manner; secondly, on the Cyprus issue for a resumption of negotiations under the auspices of the UN, with the EU participating as an observer; lastly, on economic cooperation to implement and modernize the Customs Union. Even though the “sofagate” episode risked worsening the relations between the two sides, the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen declared officially, at the end of the meeting with President Erdoğan in April 2021, a willingness to maintain stability and assure European solidarity through investment and funding in the area⁵⁵. Today two possible resolutions seem more likely for the future of EU-Türkiye relations. The first solution is based on a strengthening of relations that looks at the mutual benefits and interests of finding common solutions on economic cooperation and migration management, even without full Turkish membership in the EU. A second possible scenario is based on the new political and diplomatic strategy promoted by Erdoğan. Indeed, with the beginning of the Ukraine war and his proposition to be a mediator in the relations with Russia, in addition to a willingness for centrality in the Middle East, the President seems less attracted by the European conditionality for a greater democratization process in his country and looks at the supranational organization as a counterpart against which to direct popular discontentment about social and economic failures.

If the Turkish withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention (which officially occurred on 1 July 2021 after the announcement by the President on 20 March 2021)⁵⁶ seemed to represent the «future of Türkiye in Europe»⁵⁷, this has never been so controversial and uncertain. The last announcement of Türkiye allowing to Sweden's entry into NATO with the condition of Turkish admission into the EU, reopens possibilities for reunification of the two sides⁵⁸.

⁵⁴ See [250321-vc-euco-statement-en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁵⁵ See [Statement by the President: Meeting with President Erdoğan \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁵⁶ See [Turkey's withdrawal from Istanbul Convention a setback for women and girls' human rights | International Commission of Jurists \(icj.org\)](#)

⁵⁷ See [Erdoğan calls on EU for dialogue, says Turkey's future in Europe | Recep Tayyip Erdogan News | Al Jazeera](#)

⁵⁸ See [Turkey Clears the Way for Sweden's Entry to NATO on the Eve of Summit - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#)

Chapter 2 TURKISH STRATEGY IN THE SYRIAN CONFLICT

2.1 *Erdoğan's fluctuation between the two camps: Russia and US*

The explosion last year on the 13th of November in a shopping street in the Taksim Square area in Istanbul, which killed six people and wounded 81 and for which the government has blamed Kurdish rebels while the PKK denied any role in the bombing⁵⁹, has been the opportunity for Erdoğan to launch a new military offensive in the Western Syrian region. After a series of arrests, on 19th November the President launched Operation Claw-Sword⁶⁰ to intensify the shelling and airstrikes by targeting key infrastructural and command nodes, blurring existing front lines and threatening more Turkish military incursions across the region.

However, as the days passed, Erdoğan identified a more strategic possible dialogue between Ankara and Damascus rather than following through with his military action. This led to a meeting between the Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar and his counterpart the Syrian Ali Mahmoud Abbas, who met in Moscow on the last 28th December with the Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu. The meeting between Türkiye and Syria was the first since 2011 and signs an important starting point to end the Syrian impasse.

This reopening of the reconciliation process seems to be part of the bigger foreign policy strategy of a “balancing act” carried on by Erdoğan as a consequence of several pushed factors, from abroad actors, inside the region and domestic reasons.

Analysing the external factor, Russia is the first power to push for stabilizing the Syrian crisis. Especially after the beginning of the Ukraine war, Moscow needs to find a balance among various alliances, from the regional states such as Assad and Iran to the Turkish determinant actors, to keep political support in the international dimension. In Putin's plan, his aligned position with Erdoğan could be an important mediation with European Countries and Washington during peace negotiations. At the same time, Ankara is playing a mediator role between the West and Russia to obtain both a stronger regional position and a softer response by the international community for its military attacks in Syria. If Russia seems to be fully involved in the Turkish-Syrian conflict, the US must adopt a different stance amidst a fear of a new destabilised situation and the lack of diplomatic intervention against the Turkish military attacks. With its contradictory policies, Washington is trying to guarantee protection to Syrian Kurds who helped in the fight against ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), but has also created distance with Türkiye that complicates a possible diplomatic resolution of the conflict.

In this web of interests, a determinant role is played by regional actors. Since its beginning, the Syrian civil war represented a great opportunity for Middle East countries to strengthen their position, looking at Syria as the place where they could re-shape their influences. In the tension between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates on one side and Iran on the other, the last Turkish anti-Kurds attacks in the area are seen by the Gulf monarchies as an aligned position with Iran, committed in the same way to fight its Kurdish region. So, to avoid possible conflicts with the other regional powers and reset relations, Erdoğan is pushed to start a dialogue and diplomatic relations with Assad.

The last push factor in the shifted Turkish military actions in Syria is the link with domestic reasons and the Turkish popular consensus. In a country that still suffers from a huge economic crisis and is divided on the Syrian immigration issue, the costs for a new and more intense

⁵⁹ See [Istanbul: Six dead, dozens wounded in Turkey explosion - BBC News](#)

⁶⁰ For a complete overview of the whole Turkish official operation in Syria see [Relations between Türkiye–Syria / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(mfa.gov.tr\)](#)

military operation in Syria are seen as unnecessary and dangerous. While the original Erdoğan plan intended to create a buffer zone of Syrian Refugees under his control, following the growing anti-Syrian feelings among the Turkish population he changed his strategy by looking at general scepticism about this type of resolution. In recent years, anti-Syrian sentiment has grown to the point that even Erdogan's direct opponent in the elections, the Alevi Kılıçdaroğlu, during the May 28 run-off, «declared he would expel all refugees in Türkiye within two years of coming to power»⁶¹, «pivoting away from his previous messages of inclusion and democracy and instead focused solely on his anti-refugee promises, reiterating a pledge to send refugees back to their countries of origin»⁶². To do this, and to obtain more consensus, Kılıçdaroğlu signed a memorandum of understanding with the leader of Türkiye 's ultranationalist Victory Party, based on guarantees to deport all refugees in Türkiye within a year of coming to power⁶³. Additionally, last February's earthquakes signified an important consolidating moment in Turkish-Syrian relations: if before the disaster Erdoğan's plan to open dialogue with Assad had responded to the need to reinforce his domestic consensus and regional role, after the tragic events the cooperation was implemented firstly around the humanitarian aid for the victims, meant to divert the attention from the political responsibility and the lack of prevention -- always looking at the consensus for the May elections.

Following the willingness to assuage all different needs coming from the international contest, Gulf monarchies and domestic pushes, Erdoğan accepted Moscow's proposal to open Turkey-Russia-Syria summits with the presence of Iran as an observer. This summit is meant to find a balance between the Turkish plan to build a buffer zone 30 km wide around Turkish borders to confirm the refugee return process and the Assad impossibility to break the relations with the Kurds forces essential to the supervision of the country.

Hence, following the double aim of countering the expansion of Kurdish forces and increasing its regional influence, since the beginning of the Syrian war Türkiye was swinging between the two camps: Russia and Iran's support of the Assad regime on one hand and the US, European States and Sunni Gulf Arabic States closer to the anti-government forces on the other.

2.2 Turkish interests in the Syrian civil war

Türkiye 's interests in Syria are historically linked with the Kurdish question. During the period between the 1980s- 1990s the Syrian regime offered refuge and protection to many Kurds and their leader Abdullah Öcalan, but after the Turkish threat to invade Syria at the end of the 1990s, the Syrian President Hafez al- Assad decided to expel Öcalan in 1998, who was captured in Kenya in 1999 and sentenced to life imprisonment in 2002. This political and diplomatic decision resulted in a decade (2000-2010) of friendly relations among parties sealed with bilateral agreements and practices on free trade and visa exemption⁶⁴. Under this economic and political project, there was a more ambitious one: the creation of a free-trade zone between Türkiye, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan under the aegis of Türkiye, presented as the most important regional initiative in Türkiye's Republican history. For Syria, this kind of partnership could be a way to improve its relations with the West.

⁶¹ See [Ultrnationalist leader backs Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu for Turkish presidency | Turkey | The Guardian](#)

⁶² *Ibidem*

⁶³ *Ibidem*

⁶⁴ See [Joint Political Declaration on the Establishment of the High Level Cooperation Council among Turkey, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(mfa.gov.tr\)](#)

Later, with the domestic political consolidation of AKP, Erdoğan invested great efforts to sustain the Kurdish population with the goal to obtain their support for his executive Presidency which was introduced later in 2017. He decided to promote reforms in favour of Kurd identity affirmation, calling a democratic new era for minority Kurds⁶⁵, signing a formal ceasefire and bringing an end to hostilities in 2013⁶⁶. An example of this new initiative was the launching the first 24-hour Kurdish-language TV station.

Upon the outbreak of the Rojava conflict (also known as the Rojava Revolution) within the larger Syrian civil war, between a Kurdish-dominated coalition promoting the establishment of a new constitution and the recognition of a de facto autonomous region and the military wings that fought to maintain control of the territory in northern Syria, the Turkish President has officially condemned his Syrian counterpart due to the violent repression⁶⁷. Türkiye's first reaction to the crisis was to try to persuade Damascus to meet people's demands, offering Turkish help to implement social, economic and political reforms. The Ankara government actually believed in Assad's liberal instincts but, as events unfolded, the Syrian state repression against protesters was revealed.

Indeed, after an escalation of violence, the Syrian regime responded with heavier force, encircling cities and neighbourhoods considered hubs of protest, such as Bāniyās or Homs, with armed attacks and cutting off utilities and communications. Meanwhile some groups of protesters began to take up arms against the security forces. Consequently, in June 2011 Syrian troops and tanks moved into the northern town of Jisr al-Shugūr, sending thousands of refugees fleeing into Türkiye.

For all of these reasons, «Türkiye hosted the Free Syrian Army's initial military headquarters, facilitated collaboration among FSA field commanders, welcomed supportive Western/Gulf representatives in the early stages of the war, and launched a "train and equip programme" in 2014 for vetted fighters to accelerate the overthrow of the Assad regime, together with the US»⁶⁸.

Despite this, the trust between the parties weakened markedly in 2012 when a wing of PYD (Democratic Union Party, a Kurdish left-wing political party) and the YPG (People's Defense Units, a primary component of the Syrian Democratic Forces, considered by Turkish government a PKK affiliated offshoot⁶⁹) took control over vast areas of land in the North of Syria. Türkiye's concern reached the breaking point in 2014 when it refused to help the Kurdish forces against ISIS in Kobani. The situation ended with the Kurd's victory and the realization of the Turkish fear of a possible territorial enlargement under Kurdish armies. Hence, since that moment, Türkiye's government has been accused of supporting ISIS both directly and indirectly «because its failure is equal to the victory of the Kurds in northern Syria»⁷⁰. The Assad regime was accused of the same assistance, with the aims to replace the legitimate opposition and to put pressure on Western powers trying to remove it.

All this happened after the general election in June 2015, in which AKP losing the absolute majority of seats in parliament showing a decline in consensus. Meanwhile the pro-Kurdish HDP found success for the first time in overcoming the 10% election threshold but the «failure among the four main political parties to agree the formation of a coalition government

⁶⁵ See [Turkey's Kurdish TV channel opens to mixed reviews | Reuters](#)

⁶⁶ See [International Initiative "Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan - Peace in Kurdistan" \(freeocalan.org\)](#)

⁶⁷ See [Turkish PM calls on Syria's Assad to quit | Reuters](#)

⁶⁸ See YÜKSEL E., *Turkey and the armed Syrian opposition: From Free Syrian Army to Syrian National Army*, Chapter 1 in *Strategies of Turkish proxy warfare in northern Syria's CRU Report*, Clingendael, November 2019.

⁶⁹ See [PKK / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(mfa.gov.tr\)](#)

⁷⁰ See [How Syria Changed Turkey's Foreign Policy - Carnegie Europe - Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#)

precipitated a second general election on November 1, which the AKP won with 49 percent»⁷¹. The November 2015 election was the first to be overseen by an interim election government formed by Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu at the request of President Erdoğan⁷², who decided to change drastically his strategy by using his influence to prevent the formation of an anti-AKP coalition and called new elections using national rhetoric in an attempt to delegitimize the HDP. This allowed him to recover the absolute majority in the November 2015 elections. The run-up to the November election was marked with violence, including the suicide bomb attack that killed 32 young activists on 20 July 2015 in the Suruç district⁷³ and a double suicide bombing in Ankara on 10 October, by individuals close to ISIS, which was «the worst single attack in Türkiye 's modern history, killing 102 people»⁷⁴.

In line with the context, Erdoğan's declaration that «there is no Kurdish issue in Türkiye » signalled the shutdown of peace negotiations and the beginning of direct military action in August 2016⁷⁵, strengthening the rhetoric against PKK and Kurds people. The military operations served as a pretext for the government to abolish Kurdish rights and limit parliamentary representation to guarantee 2017's constitutional reform.

The constitutional reform was deeply criticised, primarily due to the timing of adoption of the amendments during a declared state of emergency: «The referendum is planned for 16th April 2017, when the state of emergency will have been in force for almost nine months consecutively»⁷⁶. According to the Turkish Constitution, the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (the Turkish Parliament) needed a three-fifths majority (more than 330 votes) for submitting the constitutional amendments to a referendum and in that case, it was possible with 339 votes in favour, 142 votes against, 5 blank and 2 null votes. Moreover, the constitutional amendments were assumed to «under consideration aim at operating a change in the political regime of Türkiye, adopting a "Turkish-style" presidential regime»⁷⁷. With this reform, the President obtained new powers such as: appointing and dismissing Vice-presidents and ministers, appointing and dismissing high-level State officials, determining the national security policies, declaring a state of emergency, dissolving parliament, preparing the state budget, using the veto laws, addressing the TGNA, and appointing members of the Council of Judges, Prosecutors and the judges of the Constitutional Court⁷⁸.

Moreover, after the bloodiest coup attempt in its modern history on July 15, 2016⁷⁹, the Kurd repression was intensified with Erdoğan and his Party imprisoning Kurdish activists and overturning the democratic will of Kurdish voters, putting the future of Kurdish political and cultural aspirations in a dire position. They presented the Kurdish people as an internal and external threat; AKP removed elected mayors and banned public displays of Kurdish culture and language. Of the 65 mayors elected in the 2019 local elections for the Kurdish-led People's Democratic Party (HDP), «Ankara has forced out or detained 59, replacing them with loyal

⁷¹ See [World Report 2016: Turkey | Human Rights Watch \(hrw.org\)](#)

⁷² See [Presidency Of The Republic Of Turkey : PM Davutoğlu Returns Mandate to Form New Government to President Erdoğan \(tcgb.gov.tr\)](#)

⁷³ See [Suruç massacre: Turkey suicide bombing suspect identified - BBC News](#)

⁷⁴ See [World Report 2016: Turkey | Human Rights Watch \(hrw.org\)](#)

⁷⁵ For more information about the 4 military interventions by Turkey in Syria see [Turkey's Military Operations in Syria and Iraq - Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik \(swp-berlin.org\)](#)

⁷⁶ See European Commission for Democracy through law, *Turkey: opinion on the amendments to the constitution adopted by the Grand National Assembly on 21st January 2017 and to be submitted to a national referendum on 16th April 2017*, adopted by Venice Commission at its 110th Plenary Session, Venice 10-11 March 2017.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*

⁷⁹ See [What was Turkey's failed coup about – and what's happened since? | Turkey Attempted Coup News | Al Jazeera](#)

AKP trustees»⁸⁰. Equating the HDP with the PKK, police arrested a huge number of HDP-affiliated figures on the charge to incite a rebellion against the government. The desire to crush Kurdish political aspirations also reached into the cultural sphere, utilising laws to suppress the Kurds' basic civil rights by banning Kurd media critical of the President from operating in Türkiye, forcing residents in predominantly Kurdish areas to hold underground Kurdish language classes in order to avoid reprisals from the government, and censoring books written in Kurdish or about Kurdish history⁸¹.

Despite the attempts of repression Erdoğan and his party were given political confirmation, not only at the election in May but also with the election in 2018⁸², the first after the new presidential system which depended on the Kurdish minority that, with an electoral basin of 8 million people, seemed to be play a determinant role in defining the outcome of the vote. Since the electoral campaign, with polls showing support balanced between Erdoğan's ruling alliance and the opposition, the main pro-minority political party HDP, which has a potential electoral basin of more than 10%⁸³, has decided not to field a candidate. Instead, they implicitly support the so-called anti-Erdoğan "Table of Six", led by CHP (Republican People's Party) leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, «a 75-year-old figure from the Alevi community and a native of one of Türkiye 's Kurdish regions»⁸⁴, who has emerged as a unifying force able to facilitate a certain consensus. But a part of this support ended after the first round due of elections to anti-migrants and nationalist declarations by Kılıçdaroğlu, harming a determinant part of the consensus.

The soaring inflation and public criticism over the way the government handled the response to a devastating earthquake in February this year has left Erdoğan and his AKP facing the toughest electoral challenge since he first rose to power. During the electoral campaign and the election days the President has been touring some of the worst-hit areas in response to strong criticism of the handling of the emergency by local people. He also said that hundreds of people were under investigation and nearly 200 people, including construction contractors and property owners, have already been arrested⁸⁵. In addition to this, legal challenges could derail the role of HDP which could be banned from the May vote over charges that it has links to Kurdish militants which would guarantee the electoral success of AKP.

The apparent decline in popularity of the AKP government recorded by the polls seemed to be linked not only with the Kurdish question and the Kurd's electorate, but also with the continuous Turkish military interventions in the Syrian conflict that implicate increasing population flows into the country. A survey conducted by the MetroPoll Center for Strategic and Social Research shows that the rate of people who, in the last Erdoğan's mandate, think that the government should change its Syria policy is 83,6%, and that 40,5% of AKP voters disapprove this strategy, while one in three says «they should be sent back even if the war continues»⁸⁶. For Turkish citizens, the most disturbing issue about asylum seekers was the increasing unemployment, further aggravated by the mismanagement of the migration flows, with the huge risk to exacerbate the current economic and financial crisis. For these reasons, the vast majority of citizens think that aid to Syrian refugees should be reduced: according to 47,6%, the most effective method of solving problems with Syrian asylum seekers is their return to Syria.

⁸⁰ See [Erdoğan continues repression of Kurdish political and cultural rights | Ahval \(ahvalnews.com\)](#)

⁸¹ *Ibidem*

⁸² See [Kurdish Votes in the June 24, 2018 Elections: An Analysis of Electoral Results in Turkey's Eastern Cities, Articles Hüseyin Alptekin | Insight Turkey](#)

⁸³ See [Turkey's Kurds eye kingmaker role in election against Erdogan | Reuters](#)

⁸⁴ See [Might Erdogan lose Turkey's presidential elections? - L'Orient Today \(lorientjour.com\)](#)

⁸⁵ See [Turkey earthquake: Erdogan seeks forgiveness over quake rescue delays - BBC News](#)

⁸⁶ See [Metropoll araştırdı: Her dört kişiden üçü iktidarın Suriyeli politikasını onaylamıyor, üç kişiden biri "Savaş sürse bile geri gönderilsinler" diyor - Medyascope](#)

Following the social unhappiness, once the elections are won, Erdoğan seems more inclined to find a diplomatic solution with Assad, helped by Russia, to build a buffer zone even though that means possibly tainting relations between Türkiye and the Western States.

2.3 The end of the “Strategic Depth” Doctrine

In foreign political terms, Türkiye 's military policy in Syria has resulted in a conflict of interest with the US and a new phase for the EU in managing refugee flows. Even though Ankara's involvement in Syria has boosted the country's image and its international role, allowing them to secure a seat at the negotiating table with the biggest powers, the distance with Washington could only be bridged in several years -- with efforts and releases by both parties and the lack of trust, the EU is hesitant to carry out the integration process.

But Türkiye 's foreign policy ambitions were not always growing; on coming to power in 2002 AKP foreign policy was managed by Ahmet Davutoğlu, a professor of international relations with a strong influence over Erdoğan who became Türkiye 's Minister of foreign affairs from 2009 to 2014 and, after Erdoğan was elected as president, prime minister from 2014 to 2016. He is linked with a new approach, known as "Neo-Ottomanism" or "Strategic Depth" doctrine⁸⁷, based on shifting the traditional defensive and Western-oriented policy in favour of more interactions with the Middle East and a more multidimensional foreign policy able to go beyond relations with the US and EU.

Following the aim to be an independent and global power that asserts its influence in its neighbourhood, Türkiye increased its involvement in regional activities and presented itself as a mediator between East and West. The Ankara government started proactive diplomatic strategies in the Balkans, the Middle East, Caucasus, the Gulf and also in Syria, where since 2008 Erdoğan intervened in Syrian domestic policy to mediate for Peace between Israel and Syria⁸⁸.

Changes happened with the Arab Spring when AKP, being caught off-guard, supported the pro-democracy movements in Tunisia and Egypt, presenting a possible model of conservative and at the same time liberal Islamism. They were unable to help protesters in the cases of Libya and Syria due to economic and domestic reasons; it was harder criticising Muammar Qaddafi because Libya was one of Türkiye 's major investors and tens of thousands of Turkish peoples lived in Libya at the beginning of the fight. For all of these reasons, Erdoğan hesitated over the NATO operation against Qaddafi and he decided to help the Libyan population only secondly, inviting the Libyan leader to step down and supporting the opposition. Nevertheless, the biggest challenge to "Strategic Depth" was in Syria, where Türkiye tried to show its role as a regional mediator for the West by using its influence over Assad to push him toward peaceful political change. But the Erdoğan's objectives had not translated into real links among governments, forcing AKP to support Washington's plan of a more prudent balancing policy in the Middle East: imposing sanctions rather than an international intervention. Hence, after the suspension of the strategic cooperation between the Turkish and Syrian governments by Erdoğan and the economic sanctions on Syria⁸⁹, the Secretary of State Clinton affirmed to look to Türkiye as a «guarantor of Middle Eastern stability» during a visit to New York in September 2011⁹⁰.

⁸⁷ Ahmet Davutoğlu expressed this vision in his 2001 book *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Strategic Depth: Turkish Foreign Policy).

⁸⁸ See [Erdoğan, İsrail-Suriye barışı için aracı olmuş - Son Dakika Haberleri Milliyet](#)

⁸⁹ See [Factbox - Turkey sanctions on Syria | Reuters](#)

⁹⁰ See [Clinton urges Turkey to smooth ties with neighbors | Reuters](#)

This continuous shift in foreign policy, between pursuing good relations with neighbours and advocating democracy and values, had also affected the relations with other countries in the region. A major example is Iran which criticized the contradictory behaviour of Türkiye, deciding to support Damascus over Ankara.

With the crisis in the summer of 2012 due to Syria's downing of a Turkish Air Force jet and the lack of NATO intervention despite the Turkish position that «an attack against Türkiye 's borders is an attack against NATO»⁹¹, AKP become frustrated and reluctant to the West intervention against the Assad regime.

It appears therefore that the Arab Spring exposed the problems related to the Strategic Depth, prompting AKP towards supporting new and different actors in the crisis, such as the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliates which meant a break with the multidimensional foreign policy in favour of an Islamic one, signalling a crisis in Türkiye -US relations.

Indeed, the Turkish policy, especially in Syria, has contributed to create a power vacuum filled by non-state actors and ISIS which initially took control over large swathes of territory by using Türkiye as a transit point for the so-called “foreign fighters”, individuals who join insurgencies abroad and whose primary motivation is ideological or religious rather than financial⁹². Ankara was also accused of «helping jihadist groups in Syria, including those linked to al-Qaida because they were the most effective fighters against Assad»⁹³ and of providing ISIS with weapons and training because they «allowed free movement across its borders by jihadists, gave them control of two critical crossing points, permitted recruitment in Türkiye, and allowed ISIS to sell Syrian crude oil via Türkiye, with USD 100 million estimated hidden in Turkish banks»⁹⁴.

After years few controls across borders, due to pressure from Washington and Europe to seal the borders with Syria Ankara has partly reversed its open-door policy that allowed Syrians to enter the country easily. But these control regulations across frontiers were also against those Syrians who need protection⁹⁵, who have since been obligated to come through illegal ways, increasing security issues and management flow problems within Türkiye.

Because the refugee crisis showed no sign of slowing, in the spring of 2016 Davutoğlu negotiated an agreement with EU leaders to manage the borders, taking back migrants who entered Greece but allowing Türkiye to send the legal migrants on into the EU. Türkiye also obtained 6 billion euros, half immediately and the second part later, and the revocation of visa requirements for Türkiye citizens. The consequence of this negotiation was the exacerbation of the pre-existing tensions between the President and Prime Minister, which ended with Erdoğan's success and Davutoğlu's resignation⁹⁶. Indeed, within the party, there was an internal struggle during Davutoğlu's time in office between «a pro-Erdoğan wing, supportive of the leader's plan to transform Türkiye into a presidential republic, and a more moderate wing, to which Davutoğlu was reportedly close, wary of further concentration of power in Erdoğan's hands»⁹⁷.

The Davutoğlu withdrawal and the failure of the 2016 coup d'état attempt had a great impact on Turkish foreign policy and produced a stronger fight against Kurds, coming closer to actors such as Russia, which was increasingly involved in the conflict in favour of Assad, and improving the relations with Iran, As a witness of these reinforced relations, Russia, Türkiye

⁹¹ See [Attack on Turkey means attack on NATO: Erdogan | Arab News](#)

⁹² See [Briefing European Parliamentary Research Service \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁹³ See [ORIENT JANUARY 2015.pdf \(st-andrews.ac.uk\)](#)

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*

⁹⁵ See [Turkish border guards sweep up fuel smugglers and Isis fighters alike | Turkey | The Guardian](#)

⁹⁶ See [Turkish PM Davutoğlu resigns as President Erdoğan tightens grip | Recep Tayyip Erdoğan | The Guardian](#)

⁹⁷ See D'Alema, F., *The Evolution of Turkey's Syria Policy*, IAI -Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2017, p.11.

and Iran signed the Joint Statement on the International Meeting on Syria in the Astana format (10-11 December 2019) affirming the purpose to reject «all attempts to create new realities on the ground, including illegitimate self-rule initiatives, under the pretext of combating terrorism»⁹⁸ and they «expressed their determination to stand against separatist agendas aimed at undermining the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria as well as threatening the national security of neighbouring countries»⁹⁹.

Due to these reasons, the relationship with the EU and the US, under the Obama presidency which was reluctant to intervene again in the Middle East, has deteriorated. Indeed, Erdoğan accused Europe of not showing support for the government of Türkiye, hinting that the European leaders had sided with the participants of the coup. He also criticized the American decision not to extradite Turkish Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen, who Erdoğan blames for orchestrating the failed military coup, due to the lack of evidence of his complicity. This led government officials and media to accuse the US of also being involved in the coup¹⁰⁰.

Moreover, the main concern in US-Türkiye relations is the American support of PYD in Syria as a tool to stop ISIS dominance in the region and stabilize the territories through an international coalition with British and French troops, a strategy adopted until 2019 when the Trump administration decided to withdraw U.S. troops from north-eastern Syria. This threw a previously stabilized part of the war-torn country back into chaos and gave Türkiye a new opportunity to attack¹⁰¹.

The same position is adopted by Biden¹⁰² and the military and political estrangement by the US strengthens the position of Russia and Iran in favour of the regime, leading Türkiye to approach them which threatens the country's relations with the West and its earlier pro-democratic commitments.

⁹⁸ See [Joint Statement by Iran, Russia and Turkey on the International Meeting on Syria in the Astana format, Nur-Sultan, 10-11 December 2019 / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(mfa.gov.tr\)](#)

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*

¹⁰⁰ See [Turkey blames U.S. for coup attempt \(usatoday.com\)](#)

¹⁰¹ See [Trump's Syria Shambles - Center for American Progress](#)

¹⁰² See [The Biden administration's Syria policy sets a path towards disengagement. Here's why it's problematic. - Atlantic Council](#)

Chapter 3 ITALIAN-TURKISH INTERESTS IN THEIR BILATERAL RELATIONS

3.1 *Turkish-Italian relations: a strategic partnership*

Turkish-Italian relations date back to the times of the Ottoman Empire when the Ottomans had close relationships with Italian city-states such as Genoa and Venice. In fact, the Galata Tower, for a long time the tallest building in the city of Istanbul, was built by the Genoese, with an inscription recalling that the Genoese of Istanbul were respected and privileged under Sultan Mehmet II¹⁰³. On the other hand, the relations between the Ottoman Empire and Venice go back to 1381¹⁰⁴. Diplomatic relations among Türkiye and Italy were established officially in 1856, hence 2006 marked the 150th anniversary of this official relationship with several activities in both countries¹⁰⁵.

Today, as two regional powers with common interests, Italy and Türkiye have developed strong ties in multilateral and bilateral contests, which determines certain aspects of the commercial and political cooperation between them. Indeed, both are members of the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), NATO, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)¹⁰⁶. Additionally, Türkiye is associated with the EU by a Customs Union agreement since 1995 and «as a founding member of the European Union, Italy supports Türkiye 's membership to the EU»¹⁰⁷.

Turning to bilateral relations, after a break in the relationship during the First World War when the countries fought on opposite sides and with the establishment of Kemalist Türkiye, Italy was the second country (after the Soviet Union) to recognize the Republic of Türkiye. Their relationship has only deepened and flourished since then.

A first diplomatic crisis arrived at the beginning of the 2000 under the Italian government of Massimo D'Alema (DS, Democratici di Sinistra) around Abdullah Ocalan. The leader and founder of PKK sought political asylum in Rome but, even if the Italian government initially seemed to want to offer him this possibility, due to Turkish and American pressure and the Turkish threat to impose economic sanctions, D'Alema decided not to compromise the strategic relationship with Ankara and his international image¹⁰⁸. Ocalan was hence invited to leave the country, and his escape culminated in Kenya where he was arrested and incarcerated.

In these ups and downs, a very positive moment in terms of bilateral partnership was under the centre-right government led by Silvio Berlusconi who fostered a personal friendship with Erdoğan; he was even hosted by the AKP leader at his son's wedding¹⁰⁹.

At that time, the Turkish-Italian Forum was created. Together with Türkiye -Italy Intergovernmental Summits and Turkish-Italian Media Forum,¹¹⁰ this is one of three platforms to exchange views regarding various dimensions of cooperation through preferred

¹⁰³ See [apr. 2 marsili italia-turchia.pdf \(cespi.it\)](#)

¹⁰⁴ See [Relations between Türkiye and Italy / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(mfa.gov.tr\)](#)

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*

¹⁰⁶ For an overview about latest developments of EU trade relations with Turkey see [EU trade relations with Türkiye \(europa.eu\)](#)

¹⁰⁷ See [Relations between Türkiye and Italy / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(mfa.gov.tr\)](#)

¹⁰⁸ See [Turkey, the United States, and Ocalan: The Stakes | The Washington Institute](#)

¹⁰⁹ See KESGIN, B., *Turkey's Erdoğan: leadership style and foreign policy audiences*, Turkish Studies, 2020, 21:1, pp. 56-82.

¹¹⁰ See [Relations between Türkiye and Italy / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(mfa.gov.tr\)](#)

appointments in Rome and Istanbul with the involvement of Italian and Turkish business companies and investors. These meetings over the years have involved different political leaders showing how Türkiye represents an essential regional actor and how important it is to improve the relations among the two parties. In 2009 the President of the Italian Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, visited Ankara and Izmir, firmly claiming the need to create an «Europe global actor»¹¹¹ through the recognition of Türkiye's integration process. During the Summit in 2012 Italian Prime Minister Mario Monti promoted a closer economic partnership in the regional market in favour of both countries¹¹². Then years later, in July 2022 during the third Türkiye -Italy Intergovernmental Summit in Ankara, Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi signed new nine bilateral cooperation agreements and negotiated possibilities for a diplomatic resolution of the Ukraine conflict through the Türkiye mediation¹¹³ through which he «included a message of cooperation in many areas ranging from the defence industry to transport, from the economy and trade to Türkiye-EU relations»¹¹⁴, showing that they had overcome the 2021 crisis when Draghi explicitly called Erdoğan «a dictator»¹¹⁵. Recently, the Turkish leader summoned the Italian Ambassador in the country for a meeting between Italian and Turkish Foreign Ministers, Tajani and Cavusoglu, during which they discussed not only migration and diplomatic resolutions of the Ukraine crisis, but also the willingness to improve the economic exchange between the two countries, which is reaching 30 billion euros¹¹⁶.

Analysing the economic partnership with a focus on foreign trade, Italy is Türkiye's second largest European trading partner (behind Germany) and the fifth in the world, with their trade only predicted to increase in future years¹¹⁷. In 2021, Türkiye exported \$11.6B to Italy in sectors like Cars (\$939M), Delivery Trucks (\$616M), and Hot-Rolled Iron (\$539M), with an annualized rate of exports in the last 26 years of 7.88%, from \$1.62B in 1995 to \$11.6B in 2021¹¹⁸. With an export of \$11.3B, Italy exports to Türkiye Refined Petroleum (\$655M), Motor vehicles; parts and accessories (8701 to 8705) (\$506M), and Jewellery (\$407M), with an increase in the last 26 years of 4.38%¹¹⁹. This economic connectivity is affected positively by various projects and investments by large companies from both sites. On one hand, especially in the Italian manufacturing industry, Fiat, Barilla, and Ferrero carry out a part of their business activities with their facilities in Türkiye, on the other, projects such as Turkish Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge and TOGG Turkish national car are results of the bilateral agreements with Italy. Therefore, the economic partnership between Italy and Türkiye, encompassing multiple interests to further the development of their ties, is a priority for both countries as they strive to actualize investments and implement agreements and reform in favour of different kinds of industrial sectors.

¹¹¹ See [Il Presidente della Repubblica Giorgio Napolitano... \(quirinale.it\)](#) pg 80-85

¹¹² See

[Italia-Turchia: summit a Roma per la cooperazione e lo sviluppo – Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale](#)

¹¹³ See [Turkey, Italy sign 9 bilateral cooperation agreements | Daily Sabah](#)

¹¹⁴ See [The Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications \(iletisim.gov.tr\)](#)

¹¹⁵ See [Draghi sparks Turkish ire with 'Erdogan dictator' comment - English - ANSA.it](#)

¹¹⁶ See [Tajani ad Ankara: «Fermiamo la tratta nel Mediterraneo»- Corriere.it](#)

¹¹⁷ See [Turkey trade balance, exports, imports by country 2020 | WITS Data \(worldbank.org\)](#)

¹¹⁸ See [Italy \(ITA\) and Turkey \(TUR\) Trade | OEC - The Observatory of Economic Complexity](#)

¹¹⁹ *Ibidem*

3.2 *Italian and Turkish interests in the Mediterranean: the Libyan case*

The major changes that have occurred in the Central and Eastern Mediterranean in the last decades, more specifically in the Libyan conflict, play a very important role in the definition and implementation of Italian and Turkish foreign policies, as well as in the interactions between the two countries.

At the end of the Cold War Italy, with ambitions for international prestige, promoted the strategy to co-work with non-aligned countries in a post-bipolar world and to fight terrorism through re-opening a dialogue with Libya as possible ally in the region¹²⁰. This relationship with Libya was consolidated through funding allocated through the Italian Law n. 271 promulgated in 2004, with which the Internal Minister, combating illegal immigration, contributed to the fulfilment of buildings and structures in third countries to help prevent irregular departures to Italian territory¹²¹. The bestowed funding by Italy to Libya was not linked to migrants' rights respect, the Geneva Convention regarding asylum rights, or keeping the minimum international standards for detention. With these funds and law, Italian governments finance more than three detention centres for irregular migrants in Libya where the violation of human rights is constant¹²². In addition to migration management, Italy and Libya started to collaborate to overcome post-colonial litigation and consolidate stronger economic relations. Rome worked vigorously to remove the international embargo of Libya, showing an extreme continuity in foreign policy from 1999 with D'Alema, to Berlusconi and then Prodi.

But this cautious approach to stabilize Libya by keeping their special relations and safeguarding the Italian position in the Mediterranean ended on April 2011 when, after signing an agreement with Mustafa Abdul Jalil, de facto head of the state, Berlusconi supported NATO intervention and sealed the closure of the special relations with Tripoli to preserve and regulate Italian presence and ENI's activities on territory. The strategic importance of that agreement is linked with the historical ENI centrality in the Italian economy; ENI has been operating in the country since 1959. They are active in various sectors such as the Exploration & Production and Global Gas & LNG Portfolio in the offshore of the city of Tripoli and the desert area and have a natural gas pipeline capacity of 8 billion cubic meters per year that arrive in Gela, Sicily, from Mellitah, through 520 kilometres of natural gas pipeline¹²³.

In following years, the Italian political leaders worked to stabilize the domestic situation in Libya, putting the management of migration flows, the fight against terrorism and the Italian economic interests in Tripoli at the top of the agenda. Firstly, with Paolo Gentiloni¹²⁴ and after him with Matteo Renzi¹²⁵, Italy continuously refused military options, prioritizing a diplomatic approach, which culminated in the 2015 peace meeting in Rome¹²⁶ to set the ground for a political agreement (Libyan Political Agreement, LPA)¹²⁷ among the Libyan government and its counterparties.

¹²⁰ See [La caduta di Gheddafi e la frantumazione della Libia | ISPI \(ispionline.it\)](#)

¹²¹ See [L. 271/2004 \(parlamento.it\)](#)

¹²² See [Nuove intese tra Italia e Libia e salvaguardia dei diritti umani \(unifi.it\)](#)

¹²³ See [Our work in Libya | Eni](#)

¹²⁴ See [Libya: Gentiloni, talks in the final stretch – Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale](#)

¹²⁵ See [Renzi reaffirms policy on Libya, Ukraine - English - ANSA.it](#)

¹²⁶ See [Ministerial Meeting for Libya \(December 13, 2015 – Rome, Italy\) | UNSMIL \(unmissions.org\)](#)

¹²⁷ See [The Libyan Political AGREEMENT \(unmissions.org\)](#)

On the other hand, the Turkish-Libyan relationship has also been historically deep: going back to 1552, Libya was a part of the Ottoman Empire where they enjoyed a degree of autonomy but acknowledged Ottoman control. This kind of mutual recognition survived until the Italo-Turkish War (from 29 September 1911 to 18 October 1912), a consequence of the Italian claims to Libya after the Congress of Berlin in 1878 and supported by secret agreements with Britain in 1887 and France in 1902.

With the Kingdom of Italy's conquest, Türkiye and Libya officially lost their connections until the end of the Second World War and the establishment of the Kingdom of Libya, which was overthrown by Qaddafi's coup in 1969 leading to the creation of the Libyan Arab Republic. Historically, Ankara and Tripoli kept cordial relations, building on cultural and religious common values, and shared bases that also favoured an economic partnership over the years.

For all these reasons, after the outbreak of the Libyan civil war Türkiye has taken an active role in the conflict, allocating human and financial resources to support military operations by the Libyan government, allowing them to take a central role in the international community. Türkiye first tried a diplomatic approach, speaking with Qaddafi and persuading him to abdicate, believing a change of governance could resolve the crisis. After the NATO intervention, Erdoğan sent humanitarian aid and worked to rebuild the country due to its Ottoman legacy, especially for economic reasons. With the upsurge of 2011 revolts, Turkish firms in Libya «had to abandon their projects incomplete, losing 19 billion»¹²⁸, leading Türkiye to invest time and resources in the post-conflict rebuilding of the country to reacquire domains in the economic and energy sector.

Hence, based on the historical Italian and Turkish interventions in Libya, their strong interests converge in the energy sector where they compete to obtain a large energy market share. Especially for Ankara, the contested Memorandum of Understanding with Tripoli¹²⁹ in 2019 opened a window of opportunity in the Mediterranean to make its own Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), involving Libya maritime space and affecting the maritime continuity of Greece and Cypriot EEZ, ignoring the parallel claims by Greece¹³⁰ and Egypt¹³¹ over the same portion of the sea. Once the isolation had been broken and Türkiye entered into the extraction and transportation activities of the Libyan gas, Italy started worrying about the massive investments made by Türkiye and the international observers feared that the Turkish strategy of presence and intervention in Libya could provide an incentive for other actors in the “enlarged Mediterranean” to do the same. From this came the need and willingness of Rome to keep and strengthen diplomatic and economic relations with Ankara, which relates also to the control and the containment of migrants in the Central Mediterranean migratory route.

In addition to these relationships, in 2015 both Rome and Ankara endorsed the UN-backed Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA), thus advocating for a political resolution to the Libyan crisis through the UN-led diplomatic process and demonstrating the pursuit of bilateral policies aimed at protecting their respective interests¹³².

Even though the Italian and Türkiye interests merge, the two NATO members have decided to close commercial and diplomatic partnerships rather than clashing on energy interests over the Mediterranean, using a high level of cooperation to mitigate potential competition.

¹²⁸ See YAHIA H. ZOUBIR, *The Protracted Civil War in Libya: The Role of Outside Powers*, KEDGE Business School, France Brookings Doha Center, Qatar, p. 15.

¹²⁹ See [Turkey 11122019 \(HC\) MoU Libya-Delimitation-areas-Mediterranean.pdf \(un.org\)](#)

¹³⁰ See [Greece expels Libyan ambassador in row over maritime boundaries | Greece | The Guardian](#)

¹³¹ See [Egypt Cancels The Illegal Turkish-Libyan Memorandum Demarcating Maritime Borders \(greekcitytimes.com\)](#)

¹³² See [Mediterranean Equilibria: Italian-Turkish Balancing and Competition over Libya | IAI Istituto Affari Internazionali](#)

3.3 The “Calabrian route”

The Italian-Turkish relations concern the economic and energetical agreements and also the frequent and steadily increasing migration flows from Türkiye to Italy. The tragedy which took place at dawn on the 26th February 2023, when the boat named "Summer Love"¹³³ which had left from Türkiye five days before with 180 migrants on board, smashed apart on rocks within sight of the village of Steccato di Cutro in Calabria, leading to the death of some 90 people, is representative of one of the last efforts to arrive to Italy by sea through the so-called “Calabrian route”¹³⁴.

In recent years Italy has become a favourite destination for migrant smugglers, especially those departing from Türkiye, after the closure of the Balkan route with the implementation of the EU-Türkiye statement¹³⁵. According to data from UNHCR, arrivals from Türkiye represented 15% of the 105.000 migrants who arrived in Italy the last year; these people come from countries in conflict or with security, humanitarian, and environmental issues such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and West Africa¹³⁶.

The decision to undertake the “Calabrian route” is primarily related to two factors: firstly, migrant smugglers have an incentive to cross the Mediterranean to Italy on sailboats because the boats, which look like ordinary cruise ships, are very difficult to catch¹³⁷. The smugglers ask for \$10.000 per adult while every child pays around \$4.500. In addition to this, migrant smugglers decide via the “Calabrian route” to avoid Greece, where authorities are accused repeatedly of pushbacks against asylum seekers and the mistreatment of migrants. Additionally, political leaders in the government have expanded the border wall in the country’s northeast. This «steel wall facing neighbouring Türkiye»¹³⁸, that extends more than 27 kilometres and which will be widened to cover most of the 192-kilometre border according to Greek authorities, increases the difficulty «to join family in Western and Northern Europe have also led more people to pay smugglers thousands of euros to get to Italy instead»¹³⁹.

Ankara government has lashed out at Atene’s policy to stop migrants and throw them into the Aegean Sea. The tensions with the EU were intensified after the Turkish Interior Minister Süleyman Soyulu’s attacks: «The European Union, that beacon of freedom and human rights, continues to sleep»¹⁴⁰, adding that «murderous Frontex will have to answer for this»¹⁴¹ with reference to a further episode of Greek failed rescue near to the Aegean Coast in January 2022.

Even though the total number of migrants who have crossed the Mediterranean from Türkiye to reach Europe and Italy has declined after the EU-Türkiye 2016 agreements, the alarming fact is the death toll: according to UNHCR, in 2021 3.231 people were registered as dead or still missing in the Mediterranean as a consequence of 123.300 departures, compared with 1.882 dead or still missing people in 2021, 1.510 in 2019 and 2.277 in 2018¹⁴².

Given the unresolved tensions with Greece about the management and containment of migration flows and resulting from the strong economic and diplomatic relations between Italy and Türkiye, Rome and Ankara are formulating common solutions to obtain more productive

¹³³ See [Spotlight on ruthless smugglers, rescue failures after Italy migrant disaster | Reuters](#)

¹³⁴ See [Migrant smugglers have a new route from Turkey straight to Calabria \(rmx.news\)](#)

¹³⁵ See [What of the Refugees? The Closure of the Balkan Route, Two Years On | ISPI \(ispionline.it\)](#)

¹³⁶ See [Situation Mediterranean Situation \(unhcr.org\)](#)

¹³⁷ See [Migrant smugglers have a new route from Turkey straight to Calabria \(rmx.news\)](#)

¹³⁸ See [Greece expanding border wall, calls for EU help on migration | AP News](#)

¹³⁹ See [Italy migrant tragedy death toll over 60; dozens missing | AP News](#)

¹⁴⁰ See [Turkish interior minister accuses Greek authorities of pushbacks resulting in death - InfoMigrants](#)

¹⁴¹ *Ibidem*

¹⁴² See [Mediterraneo, aumentano i morti e le tragedie: lo rivela la rappresentazione grafica dei dati dell’UNHCR – UNHCR Italia](#)

results on migration issues. In bilateral meetings the two foreign ministers Tajani and Cavasoglu have agreed to identify a strategic priority «fighting illegal immigration»¹⁴³ through developing common initiatives on Libyan stabilization.

¹⁴³ See [Tajani says migration fight Italy and Turkey's priority - Italy - ANSAMed.it](#)

CONCLUSION

A few months after the important 2023 elections¹⁴⁴, Türkiye is still in a very critical situation due to an unstoppable economic crisis which was exacerbated by the recent earthquake in the southeast region and a complex position in the regional and international context. Nevertheless, during the elections, the rule of law and economy moved into the background, with millions of electors voting for a strong leader who provided guarantee of stability, and focused on topics such as security, defence and unity of the state¹⁴⁵ rather than protection of human rights and recognition of minorities.

From an internal point of view, the election on the 14th of May appeared as a final referendum on Erdoğan's republic¹⁴⁶ and his party that, after more than 20 years of government, enjoyed the support of a stable and cohesive front composed of 4 People's Alliance parties (established in February 2018 between AKP and MHP adding on 2023 BBP and YRP), the Sunni Kurdish Islamist political party, HÜDAPAR, and the centre-right neoliberal ANAP. The declared objective of the President as stated by his electoral campaign is the consolidation of the "century of Türkiye" based on economic development, with a goal of growth set at «\$400 billion in exports by 2028, up from \$254 billion at present, while boosting investment in tourism to attract revenues of \$100 billion»¹⁴⁷. On the radicalisation of identity issue, the strategy is to refuse and reject any possible identity imposed from outside that doesn't correspond to Türkiye and, more specifically, party willingness.

The importance of nationalism and the self-perception of Türkiye as a power independent of foreign interference proved decisive on May 28 even though this powerful image that Erdoğan gives to the electorate and media seemed like a strategy no longer likely to win. During the electoral campaign, in fact, Türkiye's opinion polls tracker pointed to a neck-and-neck race with the possibility of a power change¹⁴⁸ in favour of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, who was called "Turkish Gandhi" after the 2017 "March for Justice" from Ankara to Istanbul over the jailing of government critics¹⁴⁹. The communication strategy adopted by the CHP candidate looked at Turkish families' needs and the necessity to improve workers' conditions and women's rights, it being understood that the next President would want to re-open a constructive dialogue with EU and the West: «On May 14th, the government will change in Türkiye. Together we will build a prosperous, fair, and democratic Türkiye where everyone gets their due, with radical innovations in every field from economy to democracy, justice to security policies»¹⁵⁰. But the dream of Erdoğan defeat was broken after the first round, when Kılıçdaroğlu lost more than 2 million of voters with his more nationalistic positions¹⁵¹.

On paper, Turkish electors had many reasons to be dissatisfied with their President who had been in office for 20 years, but it didn't show in the election as «Erdoğan has managed not only

¹⁴⁴ See [If Turkey sacks its strongman, democrats everywhere should take heart \(economist.com\)](#)

¹⁴⁵ See SETTE G., *Verso il ballottaggio: l'ottimismo di Erdoğan, la delusione e resilienza dell'opposizione, e una rinnovata enfasi su nazionalismo e immigrazione*, Radar Turchia: Elezioni 2023, Nota n. 5/ May 2023, CeSPI, Roma.

¹⁴⁶ See [Turkish Elections: A final referendum on Erdogan's republic – EURACTIV.com](#)

¹⁴⁷ See [Turkey's Erdogan lays out promises to party base, but offers few details - Al-Monitor: Independent, trusted coverage of the Middle East](#)

¹⁴⁸ See [Turkey opinion poll tracker: Erdoğan vs Kılıçdaroğlu | Euronews](#)

¹⁴⁹ See [How 'Turkish Gandhi' Kilicdaroglu could influence May's elections - International report \(rfi.fr\)](#)

¹⁵⁰ See [Main opposition presidential candidate Kılıçdaroğlu releases his pledges for first 100 days in power \(duvarenglish.com\)](#)

¹⁵¹ See [Turkey election: Opposition dares to dream of Erdogan defeat - BBC News](#)

to cling to office but also potentially emerge even stronger»¹⁵². If national and international observers do not declare significant or determinant irregularities during the voting process, Erdoğan's political approach can be compared with that of other illiberal leaders in European democracies. A primary example is the Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán, «who have used a combination of institutional leverage and populist measures to sustain broad support and rig the system in their favour»¹⁵³, evidenced by the almost absolute limitation and governmental control of the news media (during the first round, for example, Erdoğan appeared in the media a total of 32 hours against his opponent's total 32 minutes, which fell to zero during the runoff¹⁵⁴).

But the outcome of the May elections suggests that Türkiye has now shifted closer to a Eurasian autocracy than an illiberal European democracy, closer to Putin than Orbán. Similar to Russian President Vladimir Putin, Erdoğan «was able to set the parameters of the elections long before any votes were cast»¹⁵⁵, arresting key opposition leaders and civil society activists, demonizing opposition parties as Western sympathizers, coup plotters, and terrorist allies and playing the homophobic card.

For all of those reasons as well as the domestic consequences, from an external point of view (especially that of European countries) the Turkish elections have been seen as a crucial moment in historical and political terms. Erdoğan's reconfirmation¹⁵⁶, made possible after the Supreme Election Council decided to see the 2018 and 2023 elections as his first and second candidacies respectively (which does not take into consideration the first election in 2014 to respect Article 101 of the Turkish Constitution which states that a candidate can be elected for a maximum of two terms)¹⁵⁷, raises fears of a more conservative and radical push with effects on the entire Middle East.

From a European point of view, the reconfirmed President will have to prove to comply with international agreements, in particular those of the EU and NATO, concerning migration policies and the Turkish role as mediator in the Ukraine conflict. These agreements will define its relations with Russia and manage tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, while allowing the country to obtain international help and support, which essential to improve the Turkish economy.

But the greatest fear is that Türkiye, being a «swing state»¹⁵⁸ -- one of the six states of the global south (Brazil, India, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Türkiye) not fully aligned with a superpower -- and «therefore free to create new power dynamics»¹⁵⁹, will strengthen its ambition to take the best from the various world powers, especially Washington and Moscow, to present itself as the leader of its own part of the world, the Middle East.

As he has repeatedly demonstrated during the years, Erdoğan no longer needs Europe to place Türkiye at the centre of the international scene. Increasingly close economic relations with Russia, which continues to ensure gas supplies to Ankara by deferring payment, and China, which supports the Turkish public debt through credit lines, mark an almost definitive

¹⁵² See [Erdogan's Russian Victory: Turkey Is Shifting From Illiberal Democracy to Putin-Style Autocracy \(foreignaffairs.com\)](https://foreignaffairs.com)

¹⁵³ *Ibidem*

¹⁵⁴ See SARGENTINI, R., M., *Erdogan vince ancora, «La famiglia è sacra, adesso il secolo turco»*, «Corriere della Sera», 29 May 2023, pp. 1-8.

¹⁵⁵ See [Erdogan's Russian Victory: Turkey Is Shifting From Illiberal Democracy to Putin-Style Autocracy \(foreignaffairs.com\)](https://foreignaffairs.com)

¹⁵⁶ See [Resmi Gazete'de yayımlandı, Erdoğan üçüncü kez aday \(artigercek.com\)](https://artigercek.com)

¹⁵⁷ See [Can Erdogan run for third term in Turkey's upcoming election? - Al-Monitor: Independent, trusted coverage of the Middle East](https://al-monitor.com)

¹⁵⁸ See [6 Swing States in the Global South Will Decide Geopolitics \(foreignpolicy.com\)](https://foreignpolicy.com)

¹⁵⁹ *Ibidem*

geopolitical estrangement from Europe¹⁶⁰. On the other hand, the recent speech before the NATO Summit in Vilnius suggests a refreshed desire for rapprochement with the EU.

In the year of the 10th anniversary of the Gezi Protests «when citizens first clashed with police in the park after several trees were cut down in preparation for the construction of a mall complex sought by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's and his Justice and Development Party (AKP)»¹⁶¹, Erdoğan was re-elected for his third term extending his government to a quarter of a century. This was done in an extremely polarized Türkiye, where the line between the desire for stability and power expressed by the 52% of the population who voted for Erdoğan and the claims against the authoritarian drift from the other 48% who see a source of hope in the memory of the Gezi protests, appears extremely fleeting.

¹⁶⁰ See [La rivista il Mulino: «Il secolo della Turchia»](#)

¹⁶¹ See [10 years on: What the Gezi protests mean today \(substack.com\)](#)

Bibliography

- Arısan, N., Eralp, A., *The State of Türkiye -EU Negotiations*, IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2010
- D'Alema, F., *The Evolution of Türkiye 's Syria Policy*, IAI -Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2017
- Danforth, N., and Stein, A., *Türkiye 's new foreign policy. Ankara's Ambitions, Regional Responses, and Implications for the United States*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, Philadelphia, 2023
- Davutoğlu, A., *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* (Strategic Depth: Turkish Foreign Policy), Kure, 2014
- Guidi M., *Atatürk addio: come Erdoğan ha cambiato la Turchia*, il Mulino, 2018
- Kesgin, B., *Türkiye 's Erdoğan: leadership style and foreign policy audiences*, Routledge, Turkish Studies 2020, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp. 56-82
- Massicard, E., *Parties and Politics in Türkiye in The Routledge Handbook on Contemporary Türkiye*, Routledge, 2021
- Marsili, C., *I rapporti bilaterali Italia-Turchia*, CeSPI, Roma, 2019
- Polat, F., *La Turchia in Libia, un intervento che cambia gli equilibri*, CeSPI, Roma, 2020
- Schmid, D., *Türkiye at the Centre of the Mediterranean Geopolitical Chessboard*, IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook 2022
- Sette, G., *Le polemiche dopo il sisma ed il probabile slittamento delle elezioni (mentre ancora manca il candidato congiunto dell'opposizione)*, CeSPI, Roma, 2023
- Sette, G., *Verso il ballottaggio: l'ottimismo di Erdoğan, la delusione e resilienza dell'opposizione, e una rinnovata enfasi su nazionalismo e immigrazione*, Radar Turchia: Elezioni 2023, Nota n. 5/ May 2023, CeSPI, Roma
- Veen, E., Yüksel E., *Too big for its boots: Turkish foreign policy towards the middle east from 2002 to 2018*, CRU Report July 2018
- Yüksel, E., *Strategies of Turkish proxy warfare in northern Syria*, CRU Report, Clingendael, November 2019
- Zoubir, Y., H., *The Protracted Civil War in Libya: The Role of Outside Powers*, KEDGE Business School, France and Brookings Doha Center, Qatar, Insight Türkiye 2020 Vol. 22, No. 4, pp. 11-27

Sitography

AFAD, Ministry of Interior Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency, *Day 5 of “The Disaster of the Century”*, 10th February 2023 <https://en.afad.gov.tr/day-5-of-the-disaster-of-the-century>

AFAD, Ministry of Interior Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency, *Press Bulletin 36 about the Earthquake in Kahramanmaraş*, 1st March 2023 <https://en.afad.gov.tr/press-bulletin-36-about-the-earthquake-in-kahramanmaras>

Al-Masri, A., Salahi, R., *The Biden administration’s Syria policy sets a path towards disengagement. Here’s why it’s problematic.*, 21st January 2022, Atlantic Council, MENASource [The Biden administration’s Syria policy sets a path towards disengagement. Here’s why it’s problematic. - Atlantic Council](#)

Aljazeera, *Erdogan calls on EU for dialogue, says Türkiye ’s future in Europe*, 21st November 2020 [Erdogan calls on EU for dialogue, says Türkiye ’s future in Europe | Recep Tayyip Erdogan News | Al Jazeera](#)

Altunkaya, T., *Türkiye opinion poll tracker: Erdoğan vs Kılıçdaroğlu*, 19th April 2023, Euronews, [Türkiye opinion poll tracker: Erdoğan vs Kılıçdaroğlu | Euronews](#)

Amante, A., *Spotlight on ruthless smugglers, rescue failures after Italy migrant disaster*, 7th March 2023, Reuters [Spotlight on ruthless smugglers, rescue failures after Italy migrant disaster | Reuters](#)

ANSA, *Draghi sparks Turkish ire with 'Erdogan dictator' comment*, 9th April 2021, [Draghi sparks Turkish ire with 'Erdogan dictator' comment - English - ANSA.it](#)

ANSA, *Renzi reaffirms policy on Libya, Ukraine* 26th February 2015 [Renzi reaffirms policy on Libya, Ukraine - English - ANSA.it](#)

ANSA, *Tajani says migration fight Italy and Türkiye 's priority*, 13th January 2023, [Tajani says migration fight Italy and Türkiye 's priority - Italy - ANSAMed.it](#)

ANSA, *Disgelo Siria-Turchia, a Mosca la delegazione di Damasco*, 3rd April 2023, [Disgelo Siria-Turchia, a Mosca la delegazione di Damasco - Politica - ANSAMed.it](#)

Arab News, *Attack on Türkiye means attack on NATO: Erdogan*, 7th October 2015, [Attack on Türkiye means attack on NATO: Erdogan | Arab News](#)

Aras, B., *The Kurdish Peace Process and Presidential Elections in Türkiye* , 8th August 2014, Wilson Center, [The Kurdish Peace Process and Presidential Elections in Türkiye | Wilson Center](#)

Archivio del Quirinale, *Conferenza sul tema “Eredità del passato e sfide del futuro: Turchia e Europa nei nuovi equilibri del mondo globale”*, November 2009 [Il Presidente della Repubblica Giorgio Napolita... \(quirinale.it\)](#)

Artigercek, *Resmi Gazete'de yayımlandı, Erdoğan üçüncü kez aday*, 31st March 2023 [Resmi Gazete'de yayımlandı, Erdoğan üçüncü kez aday \(artigercek.com\)](#)

BBC, *Suruc massacre: Türkiye suicide bombing suspect identified*, 21st July 2015 [Suruc massacre: Türkiye suicide bombing suspect identified - BBC News](#)

BBC, *Türkiye earthquake: Erdogan seeks forgiveness over quake rescue delays*, 27th February 2023, [Türkiye earthquake: Erdogan seeks forgiveness over quake rescue delays - BBC News](#)

BBC, *Istanbul: Six dead, dozens wounded in Türkiye explosion*, 14th November 2022 [Istanbul: Six dead, dozens wounded in Türkiye explosion - BBC News](#)

Boffey, D., *EU and Türkiye hold 'frank' talks over border opening for refugees*, The Guardian, 9th March 2020 [EU and Türkiye hold 'frank' talks over border opening for refugees | Migration | The Guardian](#)

Brzozowski A., *Turkey's Erdoğan links Sweden's NATO membership bid to Ankara's EU accession*, Euractive, 10th July 2023 [Turkey's Erdoğan links Sweden's NATO membership bid to Ankara's EU accession – EURACTIV.com](#)

Burch, J., *Turkish PM calls on Syria's Assad to quit*, 22nd November 2011, Reuters [Turkish PM calls on Syria's Assad to quit | Reuters](#)

Bureau, A., *Egypt cancels the illegal Turkish-Libyan memorandum demarcating maritime borders*, 14th December 2022, Greek City Times, [Egypt Cancels The Illegal Turkish-Libyan Memorandum Demarcating Maritime Borders \(greekcitytimes.com\)](#)

Busby, M., Smith, H., *Erdogan says border will stay open as Greece tries to repel influx*, The Guardian, 29th February 2020 [Erdogan says border will stay open as Greece tries to repel influx | Türkiye | The Guardian](#)

Butler, D., Ozdal U., *Türkiye 's Kurds eye kingmaker role in election against Erdogan*, 21st March 2023, Reuters [Türkiye 's Kurds eye kingmaker role in election against Erdogan | Reuters](#)

Cagaptay, S., Jeffrey, J., *Türkiye 's Muted Reaction to the Crimean Crisis*, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 4th march 2014, [Türkiye 's Muted Reaction to the Crimean Crisis | The Washington Institute](#)

Cagaptay, S., *Erdogan's Russian Victory. Türkiye Is Shifting From Illiberal Democracy to Putin-Style Autocracy*, Foreign Affairs, 29th May 2023 [Erdogan's Russian Victory: Türkiye Is Shifting From Illiberal Democracy to Putin-Style Autocracy \(foreignaffairs.com\)](#)

Çevik, S., *Türkiye 's Military Operations in Syria and Iraq*, 30th May 2022, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, German Institute for International and Security Affairs [Türkiye 's Military Operations in Syria and Iraq - Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik \(swp-berlin.org\)](#)

CNBC, *Erdogan says Turkey could approve Sweden's NATO membership if Europeans 'open way' to EU membership*, 10th July 2023 [Erdogan: Turkey could approve Sweden's NATO membership if Europeans 'open way' to EU membership \(cnbc.com\)](#)

Council of the European Union, *Enlargement: Accession negotiations with Türkiye*, 12th October 2005, [GEN \(europa.eu\)](#)

Daily Sabah, *Türkiye , Italy sign 9 bilateral cooperation agreements*, 5th June 2022 [Türkiye , Italy sign 9 bilateral cooperation agreements | Daily Sabah](#)

Delegation of the European Union to Türkiye, [Current Status | EU Delegation to Türkiye \(avrupa.info.tr\)](#)

Derecho Internacional, *EU-Türkiye association agreement (The "Ankara Agreement") 1963*, 12th September 1963 [EU-Türkiye Association Agreement \(the "Ankara Agreement"\), 1963 - dipublico.org](#)

DuvaR. English, *Main opposition presidential candidate Kılıçdaroğlu releases his pledges for first 100 days in power*, 13th April 2023 [Main opposition presidential candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu releases his pledges for first 100 days in power \(duvarenglish.com\)](#)

Egemen Bağış, *The EU's need for Türkiye is much more than Türkiye's need for the EU in the long run*, 2016 [Egemen Bağış-"THE EU'S NEED FOR TÜRKIYE IS MUCH MORE THAN TÜRKIYE 'S NEED FOR THE EU IN THE LONG RUN" \(egemenbagis.com\)](https://www.egemenbagis.com)

ENI, *Our work in Libya* [Our work in Libya | Eni](#)

Erlanger S., Hubbaro B., Jakes L., Sanger E. D., Turkey Clears the Way for Sweden's Entry to NATO on the Eve of Summit, The New York Times, 10th July 2023, [Turkey Clears the Way for Sweden's Entry to NATO on the Eve of Summit - The New York Times \(nytimes.com\)](#)

EUR-Lex, *Accession partnership*, [EUR-Lex - accession partnership - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

EUR-Lex, *Accession criteria (Copenhagen criteria)*, [EUR-Lex - accession criteria copenhagen - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

European Commission, *EU-Türkiye joint action plan*, 15th October 2015 [EU-Türkiye joint action plan \(europa.eu\)](#)

European Commission, *EU Support to Refugees in Türkiye*, [EU Support to Refugees in Türkiye \(europa.eu\)](#)

European Commission, *Türkiye: EU trade relations with Türkiye. Facts, figures and latest developments.*, [EU trade relations with Türkiye \(europa.eu\)](#)

European Commission, *2770th Council Meeting General Affairs and External Relations*, 11th December 2006 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/PRES_06_352

European Commission, *Statement by President von der Leyen following the meeting with Turkish President Erdoğan*, 6th April 2021 [Statement by the President: Meeting with President Erdoğan \(europa.eu\)](#)

European Council, *Meeting of heads of state or government with Türkiye - EU-Türkiye statement*, 29th November 2015 [Meeting of heads of state or government with Türkiye - EU-Türkiye statement, 29/11/2015 - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](#)

European Council, *Statement of the Members of the European Council Brussels*, 25th March 2021 [250321-vtc-euco-statement-en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

European Council, *24-25 June 2021* [European Council - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](#)

European Parliament, *I rapporti tra EU e Turchia: tra cooperazione e tensioni*, 29th June 2022 [I rapporti tra UE e Turchia: tra cooperazione e tensioni | Attualità | Parlamento europeo \(europa.eu\)](#)

European Parliament, *Le relazioni EU-Turchia sono al minimo storico*, 19th May 2021 [Le relazioni UE-Turchia sono al minimo storico | Attualità | Parlamento europeo \(europa.eu\)](#)

European Parliament, *'Foreign fighters' Member States' responses and EU action in an international context*, Briefing February 2015 [Briefing European Parliamentary Research Service \(europa.eu\)](#)

European Parliament, *Resolution of 13 June 2013 on the situation in Türkiye (2013/2664(RSP))* [Texts adopted - Situation in Türkiye - Thursday, 13 June 2013 \(europa.eu\)](#)

European Parliament, *Resolution of 19 May 2021 on the 2019-2020 Commission Reports on Türkiye (2019/2176(INI))*, [Texts adopted - 2019-2020 Reports on Türkiye - Wednesday, 19 May 2021 \(europa.eu\)](#)

Kowalski, P., Fidan, U., *Erdoğan continues repression of Kurdish political and cultural rights*, 9th November 2020, Ahval [Erdoğan continues repression of Kurdish political and cultural rights | Ahval \(ahvalnews.com\)](#)

Kupchan C., *6 Swing States Will Decide the Future of Geopolitics*, FP, 6th June 2023, [6 Swing States in the Global South Will Decide Geopolitics \(foreignpolicy.com\)](#)

Letsch, C., *Turkish border guards sweep up fuel smugglers and Isis fighters alike*, 25th September 2014, The Guardian [Turkish border guards sweep up fuel smugglers and Isis fighters alike | Türkiye | The Guardian](#)

Letsch, C., *Turkish PM Davutoğlu resigns as President Erdoğan tightens grip*, 5th May 2016, The Guardian [Turkish PM Davutoğlu resigns as President Erdoğan tightens grip | Recep Tayyip Erdoğan | The Guardian](#)

Libyan Political Agreement, 17th December 2015, [The Libyan Political AGREEMENT \(unmissions.org\)](#)

Makovsky, A., *Türkiye , the United States, and Ocalan: The Stakes*, 20th November 1998, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy [Türkiye , the United States, and Ocalan: The Stakes | The Washington Institute](#)

Memorandum of Understanding between the government of the Republic of Türkiye and the government of national accord-state of Libya on delimitation of the maritime jurisdiction areas in the Mediterranean, Istanbul 27th November 2019 [Türkiye 11122019 \(HC\) MoU Libya-Delimitation-areas-Mediterranean.pdf \(un.org\)](#)

Michaelson, R., *Ultranationalist leader backs Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu for Turkish presidency*, The Guardian, 24th May 2023 [Ultranationalist leader backs Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu for Turkish presidency | Türkiye | The Guardian](#)

Milliyet, *Erdoğan, İsrail-Suriye barışı için aracı olmuş*, 31st March 2008, [Erdogan è stato determinante per la pace israelo-siriana - Ultime notizie Milliyet](#)

Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, *Italia-Turchia: summit a Roma per la cooperazione e lo sviluppo*, 4th May 2012, [Italia-Turchia: summit a Roma per la cooperazione e lo sviluppo – Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale](#)

Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, *Libya: Gentiloni, talks in the final stretch*, 13th September 2015 [Libya: Gentiloni, talks in the final stretch – Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale](#)

NATO, Operation Sea Guardian [NATO - Topic: Operation Sea Guardian](#)

Observatory of Economic Complexity, *Historical data: Bilateral Trade by Products*, [Italy \(ITA\) and Türkiye \(TUR\) Trade | OEC - The Observatory of Economic Complexity](#)

Öcalan, A., *Öcalan's Historical Newroz 2013 Statement*, 21st March 2013, International Initiative, “Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan- Peace in Kurdistan” [International Initiative "Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan - Peace in Kurdistan" \(freeocalan.org\)](#)

Osterlund P. B., *10 years on: What the Gezi protests mean today*, Türkiye Recap, 6th June 2023, [10 years on: What the Gezi protests mean today \(substack.com\)](#)

Paleologo, F. V., *Nuove intese tra Italia e Libia e salvaguardia dei diritti umani*, ADIR- L'altro diritto, 2008 [Nuove intese tra Italia e Libia e salvaguardia dei diritti umani \(unifi.it\)](#)

Parlamento Italiano, Legge 12 novembre 2004, n.271, *Conversione in legge, con modificazioni, del decreto-legge 14 settembre 2004, n. 241, recante disposizioni urgenti in materia di*

immigrazione, pubblicata nella Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 267 del 13 novembre 2004 [L 271/2004 \(parlamento.it\)](#)

Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye , Directorate of Communications, *Joint Declaration Issued Following Third Türkiye-Italy Intergovernmental Summit*, 6th July 2022 [The Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications \(iletisim.gov.tr\)](#)

Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye , *PM Davutoğlu Returns Mandate to Form New Government to President Erdoğan*, 28th August 2015 [Presidency Of The Republic Of Türkiye : PM Davutoğlu Returns Mandate to Form New Government to President Erdoğan \(tccb.gov.tr\)](#)

Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye , “*We will work tirelessly on the path to building the Century of Türkiye*”, 23rd May 2023, [Presidency Of The Republic Of Türkiye : “We will work tirelessly on the path to building the Century of Türkiye” \(tccb.gov.tr\)](#)

Republic of Türkiye , Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Joint Statement by Iran, Russia and Türkiye on the International Meeting on Syria in the Astana format, Nur-Sultan*, 10-11 December 2019 [Joint Statement by Iran, Russia and Türkiye on the International Meeting on Syria in the Astana format, Nur-Sultan, 10-11 December 2019 / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(mfa.gov.tr\)](#)

Republic of Türkiye , Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorate for EU Affairs, *The Visa liberalization dialogue*, 14th June 2022, [The Visa Liberalization Dialogue \(ab.gov.tr\)](#)

Republic of Türkiye , Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorate for EU Affairs, *Current situation*, 15th November 2022, [Current Situation \(ab.gov.tr\)](#)

Republic of Türkiye , Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorate for EU Affairs, *History of Türkiye -EU relations*, 10th March 2023 [History of Türkiye- EU Relations \(ab.gov.tr\)](#)

Republic of Türkiye , Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Lausanne Peace Treaty*, Part I., Political Clauses, [Lausanne Peace Treaty / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(mfa.gov.tr\)](#)

Republic of Türkiye , Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Relations between Türkiye–Syria, [Relations between Türkiye–Syria / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(mfa.gov.tr\)](#)

Republic of Türkiye , Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Relations between Türkiye and Italy* [Relations between Türkiye and Italy / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(mfa.gov.tr\)](#)

Republic of Türkiye , Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Statement of Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit In Helsinki On Türkiye ’s Candidacy To The EU December 11, 1999*, [Statement of Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit In Helsinki On Türkiye ’s Candidacy To The EU December 11, 1999 / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(mfa.gov.tr\)](#)

Republic of Türkiye , Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Joint Political Declaration on the Establishment of the High Level Cooperation Council among Türkiye , Syria, Jordan and Lebanon* [Joint Political Declaration on the Establishment of the High Level Cooperation Council among Türkiye , Syria, Jordan and Lebanon / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(mfa.gov.tr\)](#)

Republic of Türkiye , Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *PKK* [PKK / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(mfa.gov.tr\)](#)

Republic of Türkiye , *Official Journal of the European Communities*, 24th March 2001, [Türkiye APD 2001.pdf \(ab.gov.tr\)](#)

Reuters, *Türkiye 's Kurdish TV channel opens to mixed reviews*, 2nd January 2009 [Türkiye 's Kurdish TV channel opens to mixed reviews | Reuters](#)

Reuters, *Factbox - Türkiye sanctions on Syria*, 30th November 2011 [Factbox - Türkiye sanctions on Syria | Reuters](#)

Reuters, *Clinton urges Türkiye to smooth ties with neighbours*, 1st November 2011, [Clinton urges Türkiye to smooth ties with neighbors | Reuters](#)

Ryšánek, A., *Migrant smugglers have a new route from Türkiye straight to Calabria*, 23rd November 2021, REMIX [Migrant smugglers have a new route from Türkiye straight to Calabria \(rmx.news\)](#)

Sanderson, S., *Turkish interior minister accuses Greek authorities of pushbacks resulting in death*, 2nd February 2022, Info Migrants, [Turkish interior minister accuses Greek authorities of pushbacks resulting in death - InfoMigrants](#)

Santalucia, P., Navarra, L., *Italy migrant tragedy death toll over 60; dozens missing*, 28th February 2023, AP News [Italy migrant tragedy death toll over 60; dozens missing | AP News](#)

Sargentini, R., M., *Il ministro degli Esteri incontra l'omologo turco Cavusoglu e propone una mediazione con l'Egitto per portare la Libia alle elezioni. Polemica sulla delegazione italiana formata solo da uomini*, 13th January 2023, «Corriere della Sera» [Tajani ad Ankara: «Fermiamo la tratta nel Mediterraneo»- Corriere.it](#)

Scotti V., R., *Erdoğan vince il secondo turno e si conferma presidente. «Comincia il secolo della Turchia», dichiara. Come sarà, questo secolo, è però tutto da vedere*, Il Mulino, 29th May 2023 [La rivista il Mulino: «Il secolo della Turchia»](#)

Siccardi, F., *How Syria Changed Türkiye 's Foreign Policy*, 14th September 2021, Carnegie Europe [How Syria Changed Türkiye 's Foreign Policy - Carnegie Europe - Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#)

The Economist, *If Türkiye sacks its strongman, democrats everywhere should take heart*, 4th May 2023 [If Türkiye sacks its strongman, democrats everywhere should take heart \(economist.com\)](#)

TMB, Consumer Price Index (2003=100) (TURKSTAT), [TCMB - Consumer Prices](#)

UNHCR, *Mediterraneo, aumentano i morti e le tragedie: lo rivela la rappresentazione grafica dei dati dell'UNHCR*, 10th June 2022 [Mediterraneo, aumentano i morti e le tragedie: lo rivela la rappresentazione grafica dei dati dell'UNHCR – UNHCR Italia](#)

UNHCR, *Operational Data Portal, Refugee situations*, [Situation Mediterranean Situation \(unhcr.org\)](#)

UNHCR, *Registered Syrian Refugees*, 19th April 2023 [Situation Syria Regional Refugee Response \(unhcr.org\)](#)

United Nations, *Plagued by 12 Years of Conflict, Syria's Suffering Only Compounded by Earthquake, Officials Tell Security Council, Citing Hampered Emergency Response*, 28th February 2023 [Plagued by 12 Years of Conflict, Syria's Suffering Only Compounded by Earthquake, Officials Tell Security Council, Citing Hampered Emergency Response | UN Press](#)

UNSMIL, *ministerial meeting for Libya*, 13th December 2015, [Ministerial Meeting for Libya \(December 13, 2015 – Rome, Italy\) | UNSMIL \(unmissions.org\)](#)

Valenziano, C. G., *Mediterranean Equilibria: Italian-Turkish Balancing and Competition over Libya*, IAI, 20th December 2021 [Mediterranean Equilibria: Italian-Turkish Balancing and Competition over Libya | IAI Istituto Affari Internazionali](#)

Wilks, A., *Can Erdogan run for third term in Türkiye 's upcoming election?*, 30th January 2023, Al-Monitor, [Can Erdogan run for third term in Türkiye 's upcoming election? - Al-Monitor: Independent, trusted coverage of the Middle East](#)

Wilks, A., *Türkiye 's Erdogan lays out promises to party base, but offers few details*, 11th April 2023, Al-Monitor, [Türkiye 's Erdogan lays out promises to party base, but offers few details - Al-Monitor: Independent, trusted coverage of the Middle East](#)

Wintour, P., *Greece expels Libyan ambassador in row over maritime boundaries*, 6th December 2019, The Guardian [Greece expels Libyan ambassador in row over maritime boundaries | Greece | The Guardian](#)

World Bank, *Inflation, Consumer Price (annual%)- Türkiye* , [Inflation, consumer prices \(annual %\) - Türkiye | Data \(worldbank.org\)](#)

World Bank, *Türkiye trade balance, exports and imports by country 2020*, WITS [Türkiye trade balance, exports, imports by country 2020 | WITS Data \(worldbank.org\)](#)

Yayan, I., *Metropoll araştırdı: Her dört kişiden üçü iktidarın Suriyeli politikasını onaylamıyor, üç kişiden biri "Savaş sürse bile geri gönderilsinler" diyor*, 11th September 2019, Medyascope [Metropoll ha indagato: tre persone su quattro disapprovano la politica del governo sulla Siria, una persona su tre dice "Anche se la guerra continua, dovrebbero essere rimandati indietro" - Medyascope](#)