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The institutionalization of Turkish Diaspora and its impact on domestic and foreign agenda

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Introduction

The phenomenon of migration is an undeniable reality throughout history, from the moment people began to live as communities. Forced migration occurs in specific situations involving conflict and war. The reasons for migrating have diversified in the past century and are mainly related to education and work. In recent history, the largest waves of migration occurred after the Second World War. Reconstruction of Europe became the priority of all people throughout the continent. Germany, which led World War II, developed its industry and needed a lot of manpower in order to pay off its war debts. To solve this problem, Germany signed agreements with Italy, Spain, Greece, Morocco, Portugal, Tunisia, Yugoslavia and Türkiye in 1961.

Turkish people who traveled to Europe under the "guest worker system" beginning in the early 1960s and who established a permanent resident community were never referred to as a "diaspora" by the Turkish state. For Turkish state authorities, these labor migrants and their descendants were simply Turks abroad, or as they are known in Turkish, expatriates (*gurbetçiler*). Depending on estimated numbers, the Turkish diaspora is almost 6.5 million currently living in various countries (Turkish Citizens Living Abroad, 2023).

Since the 1960's, academic studies about Turks living abroad have diversified to different disciplines, mostly clustered in sociology, and discussed their integration in those countries and relationships with Turkish people in Türkiye. In addition, unfortunately most of the literature has ignored the role of Turks abroad in Turkish domestic and foreign policy. For many years, Turkish policymakers did not prioritize Turks living abroad in domestic and foreign policy agendas. Most academic work and policy implementations did not lead to effective policies. Although perceptions and policies regarding Turks living abroad have transformed, reflecting policymaking in the last 20 years, academic studies are still limited to the same scope and approaches. In this respect, this report addresses the role of the Turkish diaspora in domestic and foreign policy. The first part of the report will focus on brief information about Turks living abroad in terms of numbers, countries, etc. The second part will give institutional and historical facts about Turks living abroad. The third and last part will discuss and analyze the changing involvement of Turks living abroad in foreign and domestic policies with varying understandings about the Turkish diaspora.

1. Türkiye as a Sending State: History, Countries and Numbers

Türkiye is one of the top ten countries in terms of emigration in the world, with over 6.5 million Turks residing abroad. About 5 million of them are concentrated in Western countries. Hence, Türkiye can be characterized as a sending country in four stages since the establishment of the Republic.

1.1 Mass labor migration to Europe and Australia from the 1960s until the mid-1970s.

Since the 1950s, restructuring work in many areas such as metro and road building, industry and mining has been carried out in Western European nations where the economic destruction of WWII was felt profoundly. However, because of a shortage of sufficient manpower to carry out the restructuring, Western European nations were compelled to import workers from other countries. Labor migration from developing nations has been underway since 1955, particularly to the Federal

Republic of Germany. To alleviate the bottleneck that developed in the European nations and Germany in the 1960s, laborers were initially brought in from Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Greece, and subsequently from Mediterranean countries such as Türkiye, Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Türkiye negotiated bilateral agreements with Germany in 1961, Austria, the Netherlands, and Belgium in 1964, France in 1965 and Sweden in 1967. Thus, in the ethnic or national sense, Turkish emigration is a comparatively recent phenomenon. The Turks, in contrast to the British, Germans, Italians, Greeks, Chinese, or Indians, had no particular history of mass emigration in modern times until the bilateral Turkish-West German agreement was signed on October 30, 1961. At that time, Turkish individuals were allowed to enter West Germany on a temporary one- or two-years work contract, and later this was extended to allow the entry of families (İçduygu, 2012). These agreements are still in force. Belgium unilaterally cancelled the accords in 1974, and Sweden unilaterally ended them in 1983. Turkish workers have not been sent to other nations since European countries stopped recruiting guest workers in 1973-1974.

The majority of Turkish workers came from rural regions. This has resulted in adaptation issues. Between 1961 and 1973, there was a surge in emigration to other countries. Approximately 780,000 countrymen emigrated during this period, with 82% of migrants going to Western Europe and 84% of them settling in Federal Germany. Workers migrating from Türkiye came from the following regions: 10% from East and Southeast Anatolia, 12.5% from the Black Sea Region, 15% from the Aegean Region, 23% from Central Anatolia Region, and 33% from Central Anatolia Region. Worker recruitment decreased from 1973 to 1974, then ceased entirely after 1980.

When it comes to cities where Turks moved to, Berlin, which is home to 50% of the Turkish population in Germany, has the most Turkish immigrants. In the other countries: 50% of Turks in Sweden are in Stockholm; 64% in England are in London; 35% in Austria are in Vienna; and 50% in Denmark are in Copenhagen. In Belgium, 25% of Turks live in Brussels and 21% of Turks in Switzerland dwell in Zurich.

Another factor related to Turkish labor migration to Europe is hometowns in Türkiye. The majority of Turks that migrated to Sweden are from Konya's Kulu area. One-fourth of Turks in Belgium come from Afyon Emirdag, the majority of Turks in the Netherlands come from Karaman, and the majority of Turks working in Denmark come from the Southeast Anatolia Region (Güngör and Aslan, 2022).

Countries	Numbers	%
Federal Germany	651,998	78.99
France	55,974	6.78
Austria	37,858	4.59
Holland	24,992	3.03
Belgium	15,995	1.94
Switzerland	7,640	0.93
Denmark	3,579	0.43
Britain	2,175	0.26
Others	25,172	3.05
Total	825,383	100.00

Table 1. Number of Workers From Türkiye in Europe Between 1961-1976

The numbers of Turks residing abroad are currently unknown. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, 5.5 million Turkish people live in Western Europe (Turkish MFA, 2023).

Data from the General Directorate of Foreign Relations and Overseas Worker Services within the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, which collects information on Turkish residing abroad, back up the figures from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to the Directorate's 2015 report, there were 6,240,358 Turkish residents living abroad (Turkish Ministry of Labor and Social Security's, General Directorate of Foreign Relations and Overseas Worker Services Report, 2015).

Today, in Europe Germany is home to the most Turks, with 3,081,113 individuals. France has 649,482 individuals, and the Netherlands has 396,555. When non-EU member nations such as Switzerland and Norway are included, the total population surpasses 5.5 million.

1.2 Political migration to Europe during the 1980s and the 1990s

Following the 1980 coup, specific migrant routes were established from Türkiye. The 12 September 1980 coup had a different dynamic and resulted in a different outcome than the 12 March 1971 memorandum, and it began directly with the termination of political life (Kartal, 2006). Following the military takeover on September 12, 1980, some political activists planned to go overseas. While a small group went to Türkiye's southern neighbors such as Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, others travelled mostly to European countries. The Federal Republic of Germany was the primary destination. There was also a migratory trend towards nations in the socialist bloc, by those with left-wing views. The 1980 coup was an attempt to bring these elements under control and members of the communist party comprised the majority of the initial wave of emigration. Between 1980 and 1989, people with right-wing views who wanted to emigrate for political reasons or felt obligated to emigrate for political reasons mentioned the names of various left/socialist organizations in order to become refugees, instead of mentioning political organizations from their own political spectrum. They were scared that if they did not comply, the asylum procedure would be halted (Mutluay, 2019).

Towards the end of 1980s there was a large movement from Türkiye to UK and other European countries – Germany, France, Sweden and Austria among the others – based on economic and political reasons (Londra Haringey Council, 1997). A sizable proportion of individuals who sought asylum after September 12 fled to West Germany. Approximately 30,000 people sought shelter in Europe for political reasons throughout the 1980s. According to estimates, 10,000 of this number sought refuge in West Germany while around 20,000 people emigrated to France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, Austria, and UK (Keles, 2015).

1.3 Temporary labor migration to the Middle East and North Africa from 1980 to the mid-1990s and the former Soviet countries since the 1990s

When migratory routes that conducted outside of Europe are examined, the oil-producing countries of Australia, followed by the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), are new movement locations. Different immigrant profiles emerged in both areas as a result of guest worker migration to Europe, and the new habits and lifestyles developed as a result of these trends that broadened the migratory landscape from Türkiye.

After the 1973 Oil Crisis, foreign labor employment in Europe came to an end, and Türkiye begun to suffer an unemployment crisis. In this context, the Middle East, North Africa, and the former Soviet republics became important. New ties developed with MENA nations, particularly in the years after migration to this area begun. This enabled Turkish immigrants who moved overseas to encounter this new geography. As a result, Turkish immigrants moved to MENA countries after Europe and Australia.

Along with rising income levels in oil-exporting and low-population Middle Eastern countries, rising labor demand emerged as a critical element in the region's growth. Furthermore, the 1973 Oil Crisis, the closed economic and political structure of the Eastern Bloc countries and the lack of an environment in which Turkish construction companies could compete in European countries encouraged Türkiye's educated young/entrepreneurial engineers to seek new horizons in these countries. In addition, historical and cultural ties, geographical proximity, similar characteristics of the region's construction structures/needs, and the development plans implemented in these countries were among other dynamics that caused this new geography to be prioritized.

The engagement of Turkish construction businesses in new investments in the region boosted the possibility of a new destination country on the path of migration from Türkiye. As a result, Turkish laborers began to migrate to MENA nations in the second half of the 1970s. Turkish immigrants in nations such as Libya, Saudi Arabia and Iraq were primarily unskilled and semi-skilled laborers hired by Turkish construction firms to work on specific projects (Martin, 1991). Although among Turkish immigrants to the Middle East there were highly skilled technical employees, such as engineers and accountants, in the early 1980s around 60% of Turkish workers in the Middle East were unskilled (Adler, 1981). Workers were employed in a temporary position despite the fact that they were working within projects that span several years in the countries where they worked. Many of them returned to Türkiye when their employment contracts expired and return back to these countries with similar contracts after a while (Erder, 2007). Labor migration to MENA nations differs from waves of migration to Europe as it was more transient and involved mobility of project-dependent male employees who worked exclusively on contract (İçduygu, 2006).

However, by the end of the 1980s, the region's contracting investments had come to a halt due to the completion of large-scale infrastructure projects and administrative and technical disruptions in project administration. This, combined with the region's political and economic uncertainties caused by the Gulf Crisis, led to bankruptcy. As a result, businesses who made these investments and immigrants who worked on the projects were barred. Parallel to these developments, foreign contracting services capable of addressing these issues were not yet developed in Türkiye, and many project-dependent migrant workers had various grievances due to limited or non-existent social security services, which exacerbated the existing negative conditions. Between 1975 and 1980, more than 70,000 Turkish employees went to these nations, and this figure significantly topped 40,000 between 1981 and 1990.

Since the mid-1980s, Türkiye's one-sided, Western-oriented foreign policy was replaced by a flexible and multi-allied foreign policy, which has also been a source of varying political and economic expectations since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This campaign, launched by Turgut Özal's administration near the end of the 1980s, resulted in the creation of various political objectives in the dissolving Turkic Republics. Economic contacts built in tandem with these political ambitions gave a new dimension to Türkiye-Russia relations. With the changing Turkish foreign policy in the coming years, the inclination of Turkish contracting businesses to open up to new markets overseas was one of the deciding elements in the immigration system between the two nations.

Before the intensification of political and economic contacts, a limited number of Turkish enterprises were created by entrepreneurs and/or retired officials who were largely familiar with the closed Soviet economy and Türkiye's requirements in the region. In this context, based on the limited information provided by a few studies about the subject and interviews with academics and journalists, the population that migrated to the region from Türkiye prior to the collapse of the USSR was largely shaped by the activities of businessmen and entrepreneurs close to the country's representative offices in Ankara. With their efforts in the region, businessmen and businesspeople who took the initial steps attracted a limited number of Turkish employees to Russia.

1.4 After the 1990s, high-skilled and student migration to Europe, the USA, Canada and Australia

While Türkiye has become a transit country and an immigration-receiving country for migrants who want to move to other parts of the world, it has also maintained its position as a sending country, which had started in the 1960s. Thousands of citizens of the Republic of Türkiye have continued to go to European countries for family reunification, marriage migration, asylum and refugee movements. Meanwhile, there was visible development in migrations to other countries, such as Australia, the United States and Canada, which receive more settlement-based immigrants. A similar movement began with temporary migrant workers transported by companies to Arab countries in the Middle East and to new countries arising from the former Soviet system after the collapse of socialist regimes (İçduygu, Erder & Gençkaya, 2009).

The Australian example reflects a migration phenomenon based on settlement and labor migration from Türkiye; thus, it acquired a different character from the European example. Today, approximately 100,000 Turkish immigrants live in Australia. It is worth mentioning that, apart from the Australian example, the USA and Canada are two countries where immigration from Türkiye has become established. Looking at the data, more than 250,000 immigrants of Turkish origin live in the United States and Canada. The majority of these immigrants are students and qualified employees, which are a source of brain drain. Apart from guest work and settlement-based migration, new regions other than Europe, Australia, the USA and Canada have come to the fore for labor migration originating from Türkiye. In this context, migration to MENA and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries has been an important turning point in the development of migration from Türkiye (İçduygu, Erder & Gençkaya, 2009).

While discussing the issue of migration, it is useful to take some basic points into consideration.

First of all, the European continent is not the only destination of the migration waves originating from Türkiye. Traditional immigration countries such as Canada, the USA and Australia, and newer immigration routes such as Middle Eastern countries and CIS countries provide job opportunities for hundreds of thousands of people coming from Türkiye. Therefore, future migration projections and assumptions should take into account that there will be other destinations for migrant movements originating from Türkiye.

Secondly, younger generation of Turkish people arrived as university students in the 2000s, and many more have immigrated in recent years, to flee with the reason of economic and political conditions – as they asserted – which exacerbated after *coup d'état* attempt in 2016 and related measures taken against the affiliated members of Fetullah Gülen Movement, considered as a Terrorist organization (FETÖ) and responsible of 15 July tragic events.

As Türkiye still maintains high the fight against FETÖ, nowadays it is not clear how many of its members are living abroad. Although there are no precise numbers in this regard, the profile follows that of far-left sympathizers, affiliated with separatist ideological organizations, and those who have preferred to move elsewhere also for a question of economic convenience. In any case, it is not easy to make a precise mapping of the number and countries of destination because there are no official figures in this regard, although some reports states that in the most recent years, there has been a sharp rise in the number of Turkish nationals fleeing to Germany and Northern European Countries to seek asylum.¹

¹ <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/48759/more-will-flee-turkey-if-erdogan-is-reelected-migration-expert-warns>

2. Institutions and policies for Turks living abroad: A Short Historical Review

Türkiye has been a sending country. Generally, most sending governments have evolved numerous tactics and techniques to purposefully and proactively interact with their emigrant groups in order to retain relationships and establish diaspora policies. There is an increasing interest in emigrants in discourse, as well as in the implementation of a variety of relevant policies and organizations (Mencutek & Basar, 2017). In the case of Türkiye, the story is completely different. Turks living abroad have a long history back to the first migration flow from Türkiye to European countries, but most legal and institutional design started later than the 1960s.

During the first two decades of labor migration, Turkish authorities were both hesitant and somehow conflicted. Politics about Turkish emigration were "selective, variable, contingent, contested, and revocable in nature" (Ünver, 2013). Turkish administrations prioritized remittances from employees overseas as one of their top political concerns. Türkiye's nationality legislation was revised in 1982, making it easier for Turkish nationals who wished to gain the host country's nationality to do so. This significant shift can be seen as a watershed moment in Turkish policy toward its nationals living abroad. The 1982 Constitution, on the other hand, presented – for the first time in a constitution – an emphasis on preserving greater links between Turkish migrants and Türkiye and emphasized the state's duty to develop these relationships.

President Özal personally prioritized cultural and political policies for the first time, which resulted in establishing the Turkish-Islamic Union of the Religious Affairs (DİTİB) in Germany. There were already attempts in the 1990s to organize Turkish migrant groups, but these efforts were not particularly effective, partly due to variety and strong splits of the diaspora itself, and partly due to a lack of regular programs addressing diaspora members (Akaçapar & Aksel, 2017).

2.1 From migrant to diaspora: AK Party era

After drawing a concise and broad picture of Turks living abroad with historical and institutional perspective, this section will discuss how politics in Türkiye changed for Turks living abroad to the Turkish diaspora since 2002 when AK Party came to power. With this aim, the conceptualization of diaspora is also discussed as an introductory perspective.

2.1.1 Conceptualization of Diaspora

In order to understand how Türkiye's policies changed to encompass the diaspora, the notion of diaspora must be understood. The concept of diaspora is not new; however, the importance and development of national policies addressing diasporas can be considered new. Although the Armenian and Jewish diaspora are well known, the 1990s was milestone for diaspora studies and politics across the world. These diaspora policies were connected to a "diaspora turn" in policy discourse and practice within the wider literature on diaspora and transnationalism that arose in the 1990s (Vertovec & Cohen, 1999). In contrast to various concepts in migration studies, the concept of diaspora politics was revisited with the shifting policies of governments.

Jorge suggested that after years of being ignored or rejected by national discourses, people from other countries are now symbolically depicted as a fundamental aspect of the national population, progressing from "traitors to heroes" (2004). Adamson explained this change through globalization, claiming that new technologies and the rise of global media and communication allowed the dispersed population to engage in transnational politics (2016). Also, the rise of soft power discussions can be deemed as another element which made diasporas more visible. Actors, but especially states, are keen to find new tools to increase their soft power. As a result of the believed

connection to the country, common standards, and recognized values, diaspora is best placed to receive the message in that 'attractive' fashion (Sønderholm, 2016). In other words, the changing approach to diaspora was mostly affected by efforts of the state, looking for alternative power tools through transnationalism. This positive connotation of the concept of diaspora, the discovery of diaspora groups as political, economic and cultural instruments, and this positive picture, which emerged as globalization and democracy push humanity, also help to explain the increase in interest towards diaspora among states on a global scale.

When it comes to relations between Türkiye and the diaspora, it is quite controversial from the historical perspective. Yıldız underlined that the word diaspora was first used in the Great Turkish Dictionary in 1998 defined as fragment; however, in 2005 it was revised as branches of Jewish people who start to settle in foreign countries after leaving their homeland. Finally in 2009, the concept of diaspora is mentioned as a branch of any nation that leaves its homeland (2019). So, conceptualization of diaspora in Turkish was developed after the 2000s.

In this respect, this section of the present study will focus on the transformation of Türkiye's policies for Turks living abroad to policies for the Turkish diaspora. The term "diaspora" has undergone considerable alterations throughout history; the reluctance to associate the term diaspora with Turkish immigrants has progressively faded, which will be analyzed in terms of both domestic and foreign policy.

3. Role of Turkish Diaspora in Domestic Policy

In 2002, AK Party came to power in a very turbulent domestic atmosphere that was shaped by economic crisis and political instability, as well as social disruptions. The main agenda was democratization of Türkiye, along with economic reforms. There is no doubt, prioritizing European Union membership pushed Türkiye to rethink diaspora policies through public policies from education to religion. Changing policies of Türkiye for Turks living abroad to the Turkish diaspora can be only understood with a holistic perspective for the main aim of strengthening relations between the homeland and Turks living abroad. This aim converted to a multidimensional domestic policy as well, building institutional capacity and inclusion into politics.

3.1 Building Institutional Capacity

In the 2000s, both Türkiye population and the Turkish community living abroad started to change because the third and fourth generations were high skilled workers. One of the visible changes in Türkiye was that the government no longer used the word "workers" in public policy texts defining corporate identities, together with the definitions of the target audience for administrative structures. In addition, the Turkish government started to focus on identity rather than economic dimension of Turks living abroad. However, the biggest shift in public policy was facilitated by non-governmental organizations (NGO) of the Turkish diaspora (Yurtnaç, 2012).

First of all, institutional capacity is one of the main pillars in Türkiye's diaspora politics. In 2003, a parliamentary commission was reestablished to study the problems of Turks living abroad. In contrast to previous years, the commission called these people Turks living abroad rather than workers (Köse, 2020). It advocated for the creation of a separate unit to deal with Turkish residents living abroad in order to develop relationships and capitalize their existing political and economic commitments (TBMM Araştırma Komisyonu, 2003). In this respect, the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities was established in 2010 with the motto of "where we have a

relative, we will be there". Bekir Bozdağ, who was a state Minister, later described this institution as the "Ministry of Diaspora". Türkiye aimed to establish a central actor that would carry out policies towards both its citizens abroad and the communities of their relatives (İnat, Aslan & Duran, 2017).

Karadeniz (2017) defined cognate and related communities as the second priority area of activity for the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), which develops strategies for Turkish citizens who have migrated abroad for a variety of reasons from the past to the present and coordinates activities carried out at home and abroad. The Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities, which also coordinates the activities offered by many institutions for cognate and related communities, performs these responsibilities. With this institutional structure, the three primary categories of initial labor migrant communities, family or related communities in the Balkans and Central Asia, and Muslim (and non-Muslim) students, are anticipated to establish and strengthen relationships with Türkiye from within their countries of residence (Öktem, 2014).

The World Turkish Business Council (DTIK, Dünya Türk İş Konseyi), established in 2007 under the semi-autonomous Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK, Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu), is the primary institution through which Türkiye maintains ties with the "Turkish business community" abroad (Mencutek and Baser, 2018). According to its website, DTIK's mission is "to strengthen and disseminate the Turkish diaspora further, to create one main center for all problems that Turkish entrepreneurs face abroad, and to lead the efforts to establish a stronger image for Türkiye in the world."

Also, since 2007 the Yunus Emre Foundation (YEV, Yunus Emre Vakfı) and the Yunus Emre Cultural Centres (YEKMs, Yunus Emre Kültür Merkezi) have served as primary institutions for the development of Turkish culture. Their tasks are listed as "presenting Turkish cultural heritage, promoting cultural exchange, making information about Türkiye available, and providing educational services on Turkish language and culture, as well as the country's arts" (Aydın, 2014). The services they provide, such as Turkish language and culture classes, may be of interest to the young generation of the Turkish diaspora.

Not only new and distinct institutions but also existing public institutions have extended their responsibilities regarding the Turkish diaspora. Türkiye also provides mobile consular assistance. The law does not specify these services, the consulate in question determines their extent, and not all consulates provide them. Services include assistance with military recruitment, citizenship applications, civil register (marriage, birth, ID card, etc.), address declarations, and criminal record disclosure.

Along with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, attachés and advisers hired by Turkish ministries operate in consulates or embassies and provide additional services. Attachés and advisers primarily have diplomatic responsibilities, but they also provide information and other services to the Turkish diaspora in host and home country. Their respective ministries set their broad responsibilities, while their specific responsibilities are dictated by the requirements of the diaspora. For example, The Ministry of Family and Social Services established consular services, although currently they only operate in Germany (Aydın and Østergaard-Nielsen, 2020).

3.2 Inclusion policies in decision making process

There is no doubt that building institutional capacity is a game changer for the changing role of the Turkish diaspora in domestic policy. However, inclusivity of all segments of diaspora is still the main issue. With this aim, in the last 20 years, two approaches were employed: establishing strong ties with NGOs in the Turkish Diasporas and reforming the voting system.

The first approach includes the civil society of the Turkish diaspora into different countries through an inclusive approach. Formation of civil society in the Turkish diaspora was first established with socio-cultural associations in the 1960s and 1970s. In later years, paralleling with the waves of migration mentioned in the first section, a more diverse civil society for the Turkish diaspora developed (Yabancı, 2021). Unfortunately, NGOs or cultural associations of Turks living abroad were not effective in terms of mobilization and creating strong ties with Türkiye.

In order to increase the role of civil society, the Turkish government invested a lot in YTB and related institutions for capacity building and other activities. Since 2011, the YTB has worked to maintain a deeper relationship with the Turkish diaspora in the nations where they live by offering administrative and financial support to local NGOs. The name of this program has evolved over time; at the time of its launch in 2013, it was known as the "IMECE program" and later became the YTB Financial Assistance Program. With particular programs developed to represent the policy priorities in the political-legal and socio-cultural domains, financial support programs emerged as the primary vehicle for the launch of activities. Since 2011 (YTB, Sivil Toplum Destekleri), the YTB has funded more than 1,000 projects in 70 countries, with funds totaling around 100 million TL (Kolbaşı-Muyan, 2023).

Also, it should be noted there is some criticism towards the AK Party about their distinctive relationship with some NGOs, such as the Union of International Democrats (UID), in Western European countries. The UID was established in 2004 in Cologne. Informal links between Turkish parties and migrant associations in Germany have existed for decades (Becker-Bertaau, 2020). While criticism still exists among the European public, UID closed a gap, acting as an umbrella for majority of the Turkish diaspora.

This institutional design and community building project related to the Turkish diaspora, however, pivots on specific value and political vision in which not all Turks living abroad find themselves and adhere to. The reasons, as mentioned before, can be traced back to divergent political positions, which, beside personal beliefs or pending penal charges, reflect the socio-political diversification in Türkiye.

3.3 Turkish Diaspora's impact on Türkiye's election

The last and one of the most important reforms regarding the Turkish diaspora is the voting reform to enable members of the diaspora to vote in general elections. In the case of Türkiye, from 1987 onwards, Turkish immigrants were only allowed to vote in elections at customs. As a result, diaspora members were expected to return to their home nation to vote. In 2012, Law No. 5749 about Basic Provisions on Elections was officially revised to allow Turkish people living abroad to vote (Bozdağ, 2016). Following legal changes, Turks living abroad voted for the first time in the 2014 election. Voting rights for the Turkish diaspora should be also interpreted through the lens of political inclusion and convenience. Although there is controversy about this topic, the Turkish diaspora once indirectly became stakeholder in the decision-making process.

In light of this, we should open parenthesis here on how diverse structure of Turks living abroad reflect on Turkish general elections. Turkish citizens voted abroad in the Presidential Election in 2014, the General Elections for the 25th and 26th Terms of Parliament in 2015, the Referendum on the Constitutional Amendment in 2017 and the Presidential Election and the General Election for the 27th Term of Parliament in 2018. Voters data collected especially from elections are worth to be analyzed. As participation rate of voters abroad have been increasing year by year, participation rate from abroad in the elections held since 2014 has increased steadily. The 18.94% participation rate in 2014 elections increased to 50.9% in 2018 elections. These numbers increased even more in the Presidential Election and the 28th Term Parliamentary General Election (Tarhan et al, 2023). In addition to this, the number of voters registered in the Voter Registry Abroad, which was 3 million

44 thousand 837 in 2018 elections, increased to 3 million 416 thousand 150 in 2023 elections (Ayvaz, 2023). In March and April 2023, when applications intensified, all foreign representations remained open for three weekends. As expected, willingness of Turks living abroad to vote also made them influential factor in overall voters in the last presidential and general elections.

To exemplify, in 2015 elections AK Party received 50.37% of the votes cast abroad, while People's Democratic Party (HDP) received 21.43%, Republican People's Party (CHP) 15.93% and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) 9.09% (YSK, 2015). On the other hand, in the presidential and parliamentary elections of 24 June 2018, which was the first elections of the new Presidential system, there were 3 million 44 thousand 837 registered voters abroad, while the participation rate in the presidential election was 44.62%. That time, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan received 60.24% of the votes while Muharrem İnce, presidential candidate of the opposition, received 24.53% of the votes (YSK, 2018).

As matter of facts, not only numbers in voting but also votes from abroad have power to change the distribution of seats in the parliament as following numbers; June 2015 - 3, November 2015 - 5 and 2018 elections - 11 (Köse, 2023). Also, Köse pointed out Elected President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan received 894,585 valid votes in votes above the 50% threshold that received from outside. In the parliamentary elections, there were 3 votes in the 7 June 2015 elections, 5 votes in the 1 November 2015 elections and elections of 24 June 2018, 11 deputies lost their votes due to the fact that overseas votes were cast in electoral districts across the country. For example, after the votes cast abroad were distributed to the parties in 2018 elections, the parliamentary seat won by İYİ Party in Kahramanmaraş was transferred to CHP. According to the unofficial results of the June 24 Presidential and Parliamentary General Elections, 2,390 of the 2,391 ballot boxes in Kahramanmaraş, which has 8 parliamentary seats with 738,677 voters registered, were opened. 661,205 voters cast their ballots in the election and 6 of the 8 parliamentary seats were taken by the AK Party and one each by the MHP and the İYİ Party (Yurt dışı oyları iki şehirde seçimi doğrudan etkiledi, 2018). This reality and importance of votes from abroad makes pressure on political parties to specialize on campaigning in those countries and develop diaspora policies. To some extent, it can be said that political parties in Türkiye designed their policies towards diaspora with different strategies. For example, AK Party opened offices in London, Berlin, Brussels and there is formal position in Ankara headquarter along with AK Party Overseas Election Coordination that would establish election times. In contrast, main opposition party CHP established NGOs in those countries which doesn't have hierarchical relations with headquarter (Wódka, 2015). In this respect, CHP's Deputy Chairman Tarhan mentions that they have 21 representatives in Germany. They have 47 representatives worldwide. However, they envisage the establishment of an association/federation in Germany in accordance with the legal legislation to carry voters abroad to the polls through associations, taking into account the legal legislation in those countries (CHP yurtdışında birlik modeliyle örgütlenecek, 2023).

Last Presidential elections held in May 2023 also show diversification of voters within Turkish diaspora, depending on European Union member countries that can be visualized in Table 2.

Especially 2023 election was quite exciting because results were not early comer, which made diaspora voters more important. In addition to this, numerous members of parliament, mainly from AK Party, originated from the Turkish diaspora, especially Germany, such as Zafer Sirakaya and Meryem Göka who focused on problems of the Turkish diaspora.

Last and concrete example can be given from 2023 cabinet. Ambassador Mahinur Özdemir, born in Belgium and representing the third generation of a migrant family, was appointed as Minister of Family and Social Affairs.

Thus, reforming the voting system and members of parliament for Turks living abroad clearly indicates that the current government now considers the diaspora to be an influential player in domestic politics.

2023 TÜRKİYE'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES VOTE DISTRIBUTION		
COUNTRY	Recep Tayyip ERDOĞAN	Kemal KILIÇDAROĞLU
Germany	% 65.49 475.593 Vote	% 32.52 236.127 Vote
Austria	% 71.96 44.455 Vote	% 25.9 15.997 Vote
Belgium	% 72.31 61.435 Vote	% 24.65 20.943 Vote
Bulgaria	% 24.3 475 Vote	% 69.16 1.352 Vote
Czech Republic	% 7.7 155 Vote	% 87.28 1.756 Vote
Denmark	% 58.22 9.030 Vote	% 39.69 6.156 Vote
Estonia	% 3.78 25 Vote	% 91.53 605 Vote
Finland	% 23.18 778 Vote	% 72.89 2.447 Vote
France	% 64.76 126.572 Vote	% 33.63 65.733 Vote
Holland	% 68.41 98.265 Vote	% 28.85 41.436 Vote
Ireland	% 7.53 353 Vote	% 86.74 4.069 Vote
Spain	% 16.09 565 Vote	% 82.06 2.882 Vote
Sweden	% 44.22 5.993 Vote	% 53.45 7.244 Vote
Italy	% 23.95 2.424 Vote	% 73.85 7.474 Vote
Lithuania	% 11.72 68 Vote	% 80.86 469 Vote
Luxembourg	% 59.19 9.137 Vote	% 38.9 6.004 Vote
Hungary	% 20.68 496 Vote	% 72.74 1.745 Vote
Malta	% 21.22 345 Vote	% 21.22 345 Vote
Poland	% 8.61 436 Vote	% 85.28 4.317 Vote
Portugal	% 4.42 38 Vote	% 91.39 785 Vote
Romania	% 37.81 1.696 Vote	% 57.77 2.591 Vote
Slovakia	% 15.1 58 Vote	% 78.65 302 Vote
Greece	% 16.98 250 Vote	% 75.88 1.117 Vote

Table 2. Voting Distribution in 2023 of Turkish Diaspora living in EU countries (YSK,2023)

3.4 Role of Turkish Diaspora in Turkish Foreign Policy

Through the previous pages, the changing role of the Turkish diaspora in domestic politics was touched upon in different dimensions. Domestic and foreign policy was mutually constructed when it comes to diaspora politics during the AK Party reign. With this aim, how Türkiye positioned diaspora politics in its foreign policy framework must be understood. Türkiye implemented a new approach that focused on constructing a socio economically strong diaspora in host countries

retaining ties with Türkiye. President Erdoğan directly touches upon Türkiye's approach with the motto "Strong Diaspora, Strong Türkiye". In light of this approach, the Turkish diaspora has a crucial place in the "enterprising and humanitarian" foreign policy paradigm proposed by the AK Party. Especially, if policies in general are examined, a proactive approach related to the Turkish diaspora can be found in humanitarian terms. Türkiye developed various tools which facilitated the creation of institutions mentioned in the previous heading. Under Erdoğan's government, policies in this framework reflect the role of the Turkish diaspora in three main ways: tools of soft power, actors in bilateral and multilateral relations and combating Islamophobia. Vocally, those are as well the main pillar of Türkiye's political approach.

3.4.1 Turkish diaspora is a new soft power tool for Türkiye

Over the last two decades, discussions about power were dominated by the increasing role of soft power over military power in the international system. Soft power definitions and methods evolved throughout time, with a greater emphasis on the reputation and image of the state or actor (Vuving, 2011). Soft power instruments differ from country to country (Kıran and Açıkalın, 2021). Türkiye successfully managed to implement new strategies and tools to increase its soft power. There is no doubt, Türkiye's changing policy towards Turkish diaspora became one of the strongest dimensions of its soft power strategy. In light of this, Türkiye managed to extend and develop its humanitarian policy to Turks living abroad in order to complement the building of its institutional capacity as useful approach to domestic political gain. With **its diplomatic network and institutional capacity, Türkiye aims at meeting the needs and expectation** of its institutionalized Turkish diaspora. The most recent examples can be given from the COVID-19 era and Russian-Ukrainian war.

Türkiye's soft power was illustrated through connections with the Turkish diaspora during COVID-19. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there are 6.5 million Turks living abroad, with 5.5 million residing in Western Europe (Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs Report, 2020). Following the COVID-19 epidemic, Türkiye implemented additional programs and services to meet the requirements of the Turkish diaspora, including the establishment of emergency hotlines and the strengthening of contact between the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB). Türkiye also reinforced the system by providing monthly COVID-19 updates from Turkish consulates, improving social media channels, digitizing diaspora participation tools, and launching new financing and contribution schemes (Açıkalın, 2022).

The government not only provided services for the Turkish diaspora but also evacuated Turkish people from different countries. On March 11th, the Minister of Foreign Affairs established the Coordination and Support Center in order to provide a more effective response and guidance. This center established the necessary coordination with national institutions, foreign representative offices, and foreign countries during the COVID-19 crisis, which was a global problem, monitored and evaluated all developments, and provided assistance to citizens (Demirci, 2020). Between February 2020 and September 2020, Türkiye evacuated around 100 thousand Turkish citizens from 131 countries (İletişim Başkanlığı, 2022).

Additionally, the Russian-Ukrainian war was major challenge for Türkiye in relation to the protection and evacuation of the Turkish diaspora from the countries at war. Türkiye started an evacuation just a few days after the war broke out. The first travel warning was made by Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 12th of February. Call centers were established at the consulates, and e-mail addresses and phone numbers to be contacted were shared. Evacuations began on February 25 (Ukrayna'dan tahliye edilen Türk vatandaşlarının sayısı 14 bine yaklaştı, 2022). Depending on the numbers, Türkiye managed to evacuate more than 15 thousand Turkish people through Moldova, Romania and Poland in a very short time. Also, Türkiye was one of the few countries who kept its embassy and consulate services in Ukraine open.

Along with Türkiye's strong image in humanitarian terms, the Turkish diaspora is also part of Türkiye's image. Although this perspective is quite controversial due to old image of Turkish migrants in 60s, now the Turkish diaspora is totally insured by the Turkish government when required.

Thus, Türkiye effectively restructured a humanitarian foreign policy approach that covers the Turkish diaspora both for infrastructure and crisis management, which is a great tool of soft power for Türkiye.

3.4.2 Actor in bilateral and multilateral relations

As mentioned in the first section, the Turkish diaspora has wide range and distribution in various countries so it can be deemed a growing economic, political and social resource for Türkiye as well as for the host country. The Turkish diaspora was depicted as an influential actor in bilateral and multilateral relations for Türkiye, rather than a multidimensional object for economy or diplomacy, which was realized only after 2000s.

Economy is one of the main pillars of Türkiye's bilateral relations with countries hosting high numbers of Turkish diaspora. The Turkish diaspora and its economic power vary depending on host countries; it converts to an area of economic cooperation in bilateral relations. Investments of Turkish businessman both in Türkiye and abroad create common economic value for all countries. In order to bring successful businessman in the Turkish diaspora around the world together, DTİK was founded with a decision taken by DEİK (Dış Ekonomik İlişkiler Kurulu - Foreign Economic Relations Board) in 2007. The main goal of the DTİK is to strengthen and disseminate the Turkish diaspora, to create one main center for all kinds of problems that Turkish entrepreneurs face abroad, and to lead the bid to establish a stronger image for Türkiye in the world. Creation of the DTİK and interaction with the diaspora were required owing to Türkiye's desire to become one of the world's leading economies. Türkiye considers its diaspora as one of the most important resources in helping it achieve its goal of becoming a global actor and entering the world's top ten economies.

In this respect, the Turkish diaspora in Germany can be considered a concrete example. Although Turks migrated to Germany as guestworkers in 1960s, the most recent generation is one of the biggest contributors to the economy. According to Andreas Goldberg, director of the Centre for Turkish Studies (ZfT) at the University of Duisburg-Essen, those with Turkish roots are more likely to be self-employed than ethnic Germans (Building a New Empire: Germany's Turkish Entrepreneurs, 2011). In addition, the latest numbers show that there are more than 100 thousand Turkish-origin businessmen in Germany who contribute around 50 billion Euros per year to the German economy (Almanya'daki Türk kökenli iş insanlarından 50 milyar euro ciro, 2020). Furthermore, in the last few years, young Turkish entrepreneurs have become more visible and effective in diverse sectors from health to transportation or consultancy to high tech. In short, within 20 years, the role of the Turkish diaspora has transformed from sender of remittances to investor and entrepreneur.

Not only lobbying, but also political engagement is quite important. Electoral turnout is one of the indicators of political engagement. Through the years, the Turkish diaspora was reluctant to be politically engaged but this started to change after 2000s when Turks in Europe increasingly began to participate in local and national politics. Over the last two decades, Turks throughout Europe have even created political parties. In the mid-2000s, the Alliance for Innovation and Justice Party, a local party founded in Cologne in the early 2000s, became known in the German political landscape. The party's first significant victory occurred in 2009, when it won two seats on Bonn's city council. In the 2013 German federal elections, the party received 17,000 votes, making it the first 'immigrant political party' to contest national elections (Arkilic, 2013). In 2019, the Alternative für Migranten party was established, which holds a strong relationship with Türkiye while addressing all migrants in Germany (Duran, 2019).

3.4.3 Role of Turkish diaspora in fighting against Islamophobia

Currently, the Turkish diaspora has an indirect but vital role in Turkish foreign policy regarding fighting against Islamophobia. This is one of the main priorities of the government as, unfortunately, the Turkish diaspora has been a target of Islamophobic attacks for many years. The YTB introduced the “Struggle against Discrimination and Islamophobia” funding program in 2018, which seeks to cultivate legal experts who can become leaders in combating racism and right-wing populism directed at Islam in the West (Şenay, 2021). Türkiye not only trains members of the Turkish diaspora, but also developed concurrent policies in foreign policy making. Maritato noted that the relationship between diaspora politics of Türkiye and fighting against Islamophobia is mutually constructed through image building by Türkiye (2022). In other words, empowering the social capital of the Turkish diaspora through policies makes them a strong voice against Islamophobia as one of the biggest Muslim communities.

Conclusion

The Turkish diaspora in the world dates back to more than fifty years ago. Through the years, the demographic distribution of the Turkish diaspora has changed. Most of early migrants from Türkiye were mostly guest workers in West European countries. In later years, political and economic migrants increased and they started to choose USA, Russia and Gulf countries.

Although the number in the Turkish diaspora has been increasing, Türkiye’s policies towards Turks living abroad was limited. Due to historically poor ties between Turks and traditional diasporas such as the Armenian, Greek, and Jewish diasporas, the term 'diaspora' had negative connotations in Türkiye. In 1980-90s, Türkiye mostly focused on economic contributions of Turks living abroad through remittances. After AK Party came to power in 2002, transformation of Turkish foreign policy led to Türkiye's policies toward the Turks living abroad to convert to a Turkish diaspora. This change can be only analyzed using both domestic and foreign policy dimensions.

In the transformation of Türkiye’s diaspora policies, domestic politics was an undeniable part of this process. Building institutional capacity and promoting Turkish diaspora engagement in politics was a result of a multifaceted approach to domestic policy. Türkiye established a key institution called Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akrabalar Topluluğu Başkanlığı (YTB) in the mid-2000s and institutional capacity of related ministries was later strengthened. This capacity building facilitated the inclusion of the Turkish diaspora in the decision-making process in Türkiye by forging close links with Turkish diaspora NGOs and modernizing the electoral process. The most prominent action for this purpose was the extension of the right to vote in Türkiye's parliamentary elections to Turkish nationals living abroad. The second component of Türkiye’s changing diaspora policy was foreign policy. There is no doubt that building institutional capacity and extending the services and rights of the Turkish diaspora also constituted their new role in Turkish foreign policy. The Turkish diaspora was transformed into a key player in the soft power of Türkiye, in bilateral and multilateral relations and in combating Islamophobia. Türkiye’s humanitarian foreign policy also encompasses Turkish diaspora by extending consulate services and crisis management. Especially COVID-19 and the Russian-Ukrainian war can be considered concrete examples of how Türkiye’s policy towards the Turkish diaspora also turned into soft power. In addition to this, the Turkish diaspora is definitely an actor in bilateral relations and interestingly this influence can be both in negative and positive ways.

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