



RELEVANT ACTORS AND INTERDEPENDENCES IN REGIONAL SECURITY: EU-TURKEY RELATIONSHIP

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The EU-Turkey relationship finds its basis in the EU Enlargement Policy, which is one of the organisation's most important foreign policy instruments. Thus, the integration of a relevant actor such as Turkey gains important regional connotations, with one of Turkey's gains in this relationship being the access to the EU single market. Although the beginning of the relationship seemed promising, its subsequent development is governed by countless divergences and tensions, the result reached so far being eloquent: of the 35 chapters negotiated for accession only 16 were opened, of which only one was provisionally closed. This article aims to highlight the relationship between the two actors, with the effort being directed towards analysing Turkey's EU accession process. Through a critical analysis of the literature, statements and official documents devoted to the subject, the article provides an overview of the accession process and presents some ideas on the advantages that both actors can gain from this relationship. Subsequently, some opinions are issued on the evolution of the EU-Turkey relationship, concluding that in the near future we cannot expect Turkey to fully integrate into the EU.

Keywords: *European Union; Turkey; partnership; security environment; security actor.*

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Introduction

The beginning of the 21st century leads to a paradigm shift in security, its scope being widely extended by accepting the multisectoral character. Furthermore, the significant events that have followed since the end of the Cold War, the shift from bipolarity to unipolarity and the current trend towards multipolarity have had far-reaching effects on the international security environment, leading to an increase in its complexity, fluidity and unpredictability.

In this context, the great actors with global and regional demands understood that in order to achieve their strategic interests and objectives they cannot act in isolation, on their own, as partnerships are the optimal solution to achieve their own goals. However, while the beginning of the millennium shows a strong trend towards the realization and development of partnerships, the second decade seems to have decelerated it amid the tensions generated by the increasing struggle for resources and the aspirations of some actors to play a greater role in the system of international relations.

Faced with significant changes at regional level, from a relatively peaceful state that foreshadowed nothing but peace and prosperity at the end of the Cold War to a state of real uncertainty, aggression and expansionary tendencies outside its borders, a migration crisis that threatens the preservation of social order and beyond, within its borders, complemented by the development of cross-border threats, the European Union continuously adapts its security strategies and policies, becomes much more vocal, more determined and more active through the measures taken at the level of the international relations system, being the main promoter of regional dialogue and integration, a real exponent of the stability and security of the European space, with aspirations as a global security actor.

On the other hand, Turkey, NATO's second-largest military power, has come a long way in the last three decades, substantially increasing its political, military and economic power, which has propelled it into the regional hierarchy as one of the significant players. As a bridge between the West and the Middle East, 21st-century Turkey seems to understand its important role at regional level and propagates its interests in both The European and Asian areas, which gives it a rather controversial portrait in the landscape of international security. Actions taken at regional level over the past decade reveal a more active, ambitious Turkey with a status of player in relations with the West and East, which indicates that the regional actor has higher aspirations within the international relations system than in the past.

However, the gradual degradation of the internal situation caused by the opposition's decline, the increasing polarisation of society, the repressive actions carried out after the failure of the coup attempt in 2016, the deepening of the imbalance of powers in the state as a consequence of the 2017 referendum's results,



reveal a Turkey that slips, under Erdogan's leadership, towards authoritarianism, thus affecting its credibility and legitimacy in international relations.

It is therefore interesting to look at the nature and evolution of the relationship between the two major actors at regional level and finally to formulate an opinion on the future of cooperation relations.

1. Coordinates of EU-Turkey Cooperation

Started more than half a century ago, in 1959, with the signing on 12 September 1963 of the *Agreement establishing an association between the European Economic Community and Turkey*, with the aim of “promoting the continuous and balanced strengthening of trade and economic relations between the Parties, taking full account of the need to ensure the accelerated development of Turkey's economy, raising the level of employment and living conditions of the Turkish people”¹, the relationship between the two actors is one governed by ups and downs. These are generated by the tensions created by Turkey through military interventions on the territory of other states, non-compliance with international agreements and a derailment towards authoritarianism on the one hand, and, on the other hand, by EU's attitude that seems to indicate a lack of concrete intention to integrate Turkey. The proof is also the result reached to date: of the 35 chapters negotiated for accession, of which only the “Science and Research” chapters have been provisionally closed.

Confirmed as a candidate State for accession to the Union at the 1999 Helsinki European Council² and agreed to start accession negotiations at the Brussels Council in December 2004, Turkey appears to be caught between two trends – on the one hand, EU accession and, on the other hand, difficulties in implementing the necessary reforms, which presents it as a difficult partner in relation to the EU.

Turkey of the last decade is much more active and determined to take on a more important role as a power pole at regional level, with actions taken often generating tensions in relation to important actors in the neighbourhood. Thus, although European integration was initially seen by Ankara officials as a “total sum of the values of the present such as freedom, justice, common sense, moderation, peace, unity, security, prosperity, tolerance, cultural diversity”³, the divergences arising in relation to the EU on the background of non-compliance with international

¹ ***, “Acord de instituire a unei asocieri între Comunitatea Economică Europeană și Turcia”, *EUR-Lex*, URL: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A21964A1229%2801%29>, accessed on 03.03.2021.

² ***, “Helsinki European Council 10 and 11 December 1999 Presidency Conclusions”, European Parliament, URL: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hel1_en.htm#a, accessed on 05.03.2021.

³ Călin Felezeu, Radu Gabriel Safta, *Turcia contemporană între moștenirea kemalistă și Uniunea Europeană*, Editura CA Publishing, Cluj-Napoca, 2011, p. 154.



agreements, the increasing degradation of the internal situation and authoritarian policy promoted by President Erdogan, causes real obstacles to accede.

Maintaining the refusal of Ankara officials to recognise the Republic of Cyprus and the repeated non-acceptance of the implementation of the Additional Protocol of the Ankara Agreement in relations with that state, as well as the conditionality of the application of the above mentioned Protocol in exchange for lifting the embargo imposed on the Republic of Northern Cyprus, a state not recognised by the international community⁴, has generated tensions and concern within the Union since the beginning of the accession process, leading to the blocking of negotiations on eight chapters: “Chapter 1: free movement of goods, Chapter 3: right of establishment and freedom to provide services, Chapter 9: financial services, Chapter 11: agriculture and rural development, Chapter 13: fisheries, Chapter 14: transport policy, Chapter 29: customs union and Chapter 30: external relations”⁵.

In the context of EU-promoted trans-government, which involves Member States playing a significant role in establishing the Union’s negotiating position in cooperation relations, maintaining conflicting relations between the Turkish State and the members of the Union has often proved unproductive to accession. In this respect, France’s opposition to Turkey’s integration is well-known, by blocking in 2007 the negotiating chapters covering regional policy, financial and institutional provisions, economic and monetary union and the common agricultural policy.

Relations with Germany are also no less difficult in this area, which is largely overshadowed by the failure to resolve the Cypriot problem. At the same time, tensions between the two actors have evolved, with eloquent examples being the statements of the Ankara leadership in 2011, which urged the Turkish population in Germany to integrate, but not to assimilate, the brutal intervention of the Turkish police to suppress anti-government demonstrations in Taksim Square in June 2013, prompting Germany to block the opening of the negotiating chapter on regional policy. The divisions peaked in 2017, amid the growing deterioration of the rule of law, repeated violations of human rights, increasing censorship of the press, a ban on the visit of German soldiers stationed at military bases in Turkey and the political arrest of German citizens.

At the same time, the divisions created by the non-recognition of the sovereignty of the Government in Nicosia and the continued support for the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus led to the blocking of other negotiating chapters by Cyprus in 2009 and continue to be one of the main obstacles to the accession process.

⁴ Călin Felezeu, Radu Gabriel Safta, *Turcia contemporană între moștenirea kemalistă și Uniunea Europeană*, Editura CA Publishing, Cluj-Napoca, 2011, p. 149.

⁵ ***, “2770th Council Meeting General Affairs and External Relations”, European Commission, Brussels, 11 decembrie 2006, URL: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/PRES_06_352, accessed on 07.03.2021.



Moreover, tensions between the two countries intensified in 2020 amid Turkey's repeated violation of Cypriot territorial waters for the purpose of exploiting energy resources, with the EU's response being first a call for dialogue and a diplomatic resolution of differences, followed by the imposition of new sanctions on Turkey.

From the zero-problem policy with neighbours promoted by Abdullah Gul, Turkey has now become a factor of instability in the area, having the relations with almost all neighbours being governed by tensions. The relationship between Athens and Ankara has worsened particularly after 28 February 2020, when Turkey reopened its borders with Greece for refugees, generating a new crisis and prompting Greece declare a state of emergency. This time, however, the EU's reaction was prompt, demonstrating that 2015 was a lesson learned for the EU. Thus, in the press conference, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, stated: "this border is not only a Greek border, but also a European border. ... We came here today to send Greece a very clear declaration of European solidarity and support. Our first priority is to ensure that order is maintained at Greece's external border, which is also a European border."⁶ Tensions between the two countries are aware of new values due to repeated violations of airspace and Greece's Exclusive Economic Zone in order to exploit gas resources in the Mediterranean. The discovery in recent years of major gas deposits in the eastern Mediterranean has led to escalating divisions over their exploitation between Ankara and Athena. Moreover, Athena is also joined by Nicosia, along accusing Turkey of violating their territorial sovereignty, implicitly, that of the EU. Increased tensions and an increase in incidents in the area have prompted EU to respond appropriately to Turkey. EU's response to Turkey's challenges⁷ is much more prompt than in the past, with the most important measures taken to freeze the accounts of all persons and entities involved in the conduct of illegal actions in the eastern Mediterranean, the suspension of negotiations on the Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement and the temporary cancellation of EU-Turkey high-level meetings, and the reduction of pre-accession assistance to Turkey for 2020. Although the two countries decided to resume talks to resolve their disputes at the end of January 2021, the conflict, which beyond its economic aspect also aims to establish zones of influence in the Mediterranean, is far from being resolved.

Moreover, the transformation of Turkey's leadership, especially after December 2013, from a reforming regime to an authoritarian, democracy-resistant one and the

⁶ ***, "EU-Turkey relations in light of the Syrian conflict and refugee crisis", European Parliament, URL: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/649327/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)649327_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/649327/EPRS_BRI(2020)649327_EN.pdf), accessed on 15.03.2021.

⁷ ***, "Council decision concerning restrictive measures in view of Turkey's unauthorised drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean", *EUR-Lex*, URL: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/GA/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32019D1894>, accessed on 15.03.2021.



regression in the area of reforms leads to multiple implications for the accession process. Edifying in this respect is the inflection point that EU-Turkey relations are reaching with the drastic measures taken by the Ankara leadership after the July 2016 coup attempt failed. Thus, the policy of arrests, actions of censorship of the press and the limitation of the freedom of expression of journalists, as well as actions to suppress the participants in the coup, lead the European Parliament to adopt on 24 November 2016 a resolution calling for the freezing of negotiations with Turkey⁸. Also, it needs to be highlighted the worrying developments in Turkey on the rule of law, respect for human rights and corruption, proposals to amend the constitution, in particular the reintroduction of the death penalty, resulting in a re-establishment of the suspension of accession negotiations by adopting a new resolution in July 2017. In this respect, the European rapporteur, Kati Piri, said: “if Turkey reintroduces the death penalty, if this constitutional package comes into force, the only real consequence will be the end of talks on Turkey’s EU integration. But that does not mean we have to stop all forms of cooperation.”⁹

The experience gained by the EU in the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the European Neighbourhood Policy has ensured the development of a shrewd diplomacy in relations with partners. Even though EU’s behaviour towards Turkey’s skids sometimes seems tolerant, the measures taken to restore the Turkish state to a liberal trajectory are substantial. Thus, in February 2018, the European Parliament issues a new resolution on the human rights situation in Turkey¹⁰, explicitly calling on Turkey to lift the state of emergency, which was established immediately after the coup attempt, respect for human rights, expressing concern about reports on ill-treatment and torture of prisoners. Other important paragraphs of the document also aim to reiterate the November 2017 position, which called for financial support for pre-accession to be provided in the light of progress in areas such as human rights, democracy and the rule of law. In addition, Parliament is concerned about proposals to amend the constitution and the values of the Secular Turkish State, the deterioration of respect for religious freedom, including the deepening of discrimination on ethnic and religious grounds.

The foreign policy change that Ankara’s leadership has been promoting in recent years aims to maintain a position that will strike a balance in this broad

⁸ ***, *Rezoluția Parlamentului European din 24 noiembrie 2016 referitoare la relațiile UE-Turcia*, European Parliament, 2016, URL: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2016-0450_RO.html, accessed on 13.03.2021.

⁹ ***, *Politici și orientări europene: Sinteza activităților UE 3-9 iulie 2017*, Deputy Chambers, Directorate for the European Union, p. 5, URL: http://www.cdep.ro/afaceri_europene/afeur/2017/szs_2255.pdf, accessed on 14.03.2021.

¹⁰ ***, *European Parliament resolution of 8 February 2018 on the current human rights situation in Turkey*, European Parliament, URL: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0040_EN.html, accessed on 14.03.2021.



process of reconfiguring power centres and a greater place in the regional hierarchy. In all this amalgam of conflict situations created in relations with actors such as the US and Russia through interventions in Libya and Syria, by increasingly promoting a nationalist-xenophobic and anti-European discourse, Turkey risks further isolating itself and losing important partners. An eloquent example is Turkey's unilateral launch in October 2019, of the military operation on the territory of Syria, with the aim of creating a buffer zone in the northern part of the country, where Syrian refugees can be repatriated from Turkey, an act that raises EU-Turkey tensions to an unprecedented level. The response is not late, with the EU adopting a new resolution calling for sanctions to be imposed on Turkey¹¹, on 24 October. In addition, the document presents Turkey's action not only as a violation of international law, but as a threat to regional security and stability, recalling the large number of victims and displaced persons. It also evokes the danger of reorganizing and increasing the intensity of the actions of Islamic groups, which can be complemented by ISIS prisoners escaped from prisons in northern Syria.¹²

In this context, of the foreign policy reorientation, it must also be understood the search for powerful new partners such as China and Russia, Turkey's national interests being greatly limited by the neighbouring conflicts (Iraq, Libya, Syria, the Eastern Mediterranean). Another reason is the sense of abandonment that Turkey is feeling from Western states, not understanding that its own behaviour is one of the main causes of the Western attitude. Thus, even if Turkey does not share Russia's vision on issues such as supporting the Assad regime or the Crimea situation, the international community's joint front in condemning Turkey on issues such as intervention in Syria, illegal exploitation in the Eastern Mediterranean and the FETO organisation has led Turkey to move towards concluding relations in certain areas of common interest with Russia. Eloquent examples of this are the partnership in the Astana process and the acquisition of S-400 air defence systems. The acquisition of the S-400 system has been the subject of widespread debate within NATO, creating tensions between the US and Turkey, amid incompatibility with NATO systems and the possibility of revealing secret technical data on US F-35 aircraft.

Of course, the sources of tensions are not only on the side of Ankara, but also on the side of the European Union, whose approach seems to show a lack of real intention to integrate Turkey. In this respect, we can recall the differentiated treatment applied to Turkey for accession by setting different standards, with

¹¹ ***, *European Parliament resolution of 24 October 2019 on the Turkish military operation in northeast Syria and its consequences*, European Parliament, URL: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2019-0049_EN.html accessed on 14.03.2021.

¹² ***, "MEPs call for sanctions against Turkey over military operation in Syria", European Parliament, URL: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/ro/press-room/20191017IPR64569/meps-call-for-sanctions-against-turkey-over-military-operation-in-syria>, accessed on 15.03.2021.



negotiations comprising 35 chapters to be closed, compared to only 31 chapters for the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe.¹³

At the same time, it is necessary to specify the context in which the accession process takes place, marked after 2007 by numerous challenges arising from the economic crisis, the instability of the euro exchange rate, the intensification of Euroscepticism caused by the refugee crisis and beyond, negatively influencing the Union's regulatory and attraction power. Therefore, EU's enlargement policy is secondary, as a political priority for many Member States, bringing into question the integration capacity of a state with different traditions and mindsets such as Turkey.

In addition to this, there are controversial discussions on Turkey's membership in the European area, given that more than three quarters of the country's territory is part of Asia¹⁴ – a reason supported by strong voices of the European elite such as Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy, and often used as an excuse to prolong the accession process. Furthermore, opinions on the form of cooperation between the two actors are different. On the one hand, opinions are increasingly being formed to support Nicolas Sarkozy's view that an association treaty developing relations in the economic and security fields would be most appropriate in relation to Turkey. In support of this view, arguments are made concerning the model of Turkish democracy, the history, traditions and mentality of the Muslim people, which could make it difficult the European project to be carried out. On the other hand, states supporting Turkey's accession to the Union are positioned, their reasoning being supported by the Turkish state's geostrategic position as a buffer between the West and the Islamic world, considerable military power and increased capacity to manage security challenges when needed, and could be an important factor in managing migration.¹⁵

However, despite tensions between the two actors, the EU continues to support Turkey's integration for reasons of the importance of the Turkish state for the development of the EU economy, strategic positioning, the large market and its economic potential. A number of measures and initiatives are therefore being adopted to motivate and support the Turkish State in the accession process. One such act is the adoption of the revised Accession Partnership in February 2008, which

¹³ Bogdan Mureșan, "Dinamica relațiilor UE-TURCIA", in *Microstudii IER*, no. 33, European Institute in Romania, Bucharest, 2016, p. 21, URL: http://ier.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/publicatii/Working_Paper_nr.33_Dinamica_relatiilor_UE-Turcia.pdf, accessed on 09.03.2021.

¹⁴ Șerban F. Cioculescu, Octavian Manea, Silviu Petre, *Fața întunecată a globalizării: războaie civile, state eșuate, și radicalizare religioasă în lumea contemporană*, RAO Publishing, Bucharest, 2016, p. 196.

¹⁵ Cristian Eremia, "Uniunea Europeană-Turcia, după 20 de ani de negocieri de aderare eșuate", in *Monitorul Apărării și Securității*, 2019, URL: <https://monitorulapararii.ro/uniunea-europeana-turcia-dupa-20-de-ani-de-negocieri-de-aderare-esuate-1-23178>, accessed on 11.03.2021.



provides the basis for a number of political/financial instruments to support Turkey in its preparations for accession, constitutes support for future political reforms and a benchmark against which future progress will be measured.¹⁶ Furthermore, Turkey's efforts to resume accession negotiations through participation in missions¹⁷ such as EUFOR-ALTHEA, the EU police mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina (EUPM), the mission to maintain the EU rule of law in Kosovo (EULEX), participation in the European Jandarmerie Force with a monitoring and communication team for operations in Afghanistan, are rewarded by joint adoption, in May 2012, a new complementary dialogue mechanism "Positive Agenda"¹⁸. In this respect, the organisation of joint working groups for each negotiating chapter is intended to support the continuation of reforms at the level of the Turkish state in order to align with the EU rules, so that when the negotiations are unblocked, they can be achieved much faster.

In all this complex of tensions between the two actors, it is also necessary to recognise Turkey's special role in managing the European refugee crisis of 2015, which remains Turkey's main asset in its negotiating relationship with the EU. The measures¹⁹ taken under the EU-Turkey Summit of 29 November 2015, as well as the signing on 18 March 2016 of the EU-Turkey Agreement on Migration, which aims primarily to reduce the number of refugees arriving in the European Union, are evidence that there can be effective cooperation between the two actors. Thus, the agreement on migration has led to a considerable decrease in the number of refugees arriving in the European Union and to a reduction in deaths at sea in the context of this crisis.²⁰

The continuation of the Ankara leadership skids, the deterioration of the internal situation, the deepening of the imbalance of powers in the state, and the regression in the field of reforms are the main arguments for the suspension of Turkey's accession process, with the Council conclusions of 18 June 2019 being

¹⁶ ***, "Council Decision 18 February 2008 on the principles, priorities and conditions contained in the Accession Partnership with the Republic of Turkey and repealing Decision 2006/35/EC", *EUR-Lex*, URL: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2008:051:0004:0018:EN:PDF>, accessed on 10.03.2021.

¹⁷ ***, "Turkey's International Security Initiatives and Contributions to NATO and EU Operations", Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, URL: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/iv_-european-security-and-defence-identity_policy-_esdi_p_.en.mfa, accessed on 11.03.2021.

¹⁸ ***, "Positive EU-Turkey agenda launched in Ankara", European Commission, URL: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_12_359, accessed on 12.03.2021.

¹⁹ ***, "Reuniunea șefilor de stat sau de guvern din UE cu Turcia, 29/11/2015", Consiliul European, URL: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/press/press-releases/2015/11/29/eu-turkey-meeting-statement/>, accessed on 13.03.2021.

²⁰ ***, *Fourth Report on the Progress made in the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement*, European Commission, 2016, URL: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0792>, accessed on 13.03.2021.



as follows: “The Council notes that Turkey is still moving further and further away from the European Union. Recalling its conclusions of 26 June 2018, the Council notes that, therefore, accession negotiations with Turkey have reached a virtually dead end, that the opening or closure of other chapters cannot be considered and that further work is not foreseen to modernise the EU-Turkey customs union”²¹.

At the same time, in economic terms there is a decrease in performance and macro-economic parameters. A first reason for this is the lack of a systematic approach to reforms. Another reason is that the degradation of Turkey’s democracy and image at Union level has made the state no longer attractive to foreign investors. While the EU seeks to maintain economic-trade cooperation and the Agreement on Migration, Ankara regularly threatens to suspend this agreement by claiming that the EU has allocated only funds to support refugees, leaving the issue of visa liberalisation unresolved, with tensions between the two players on accession increasing from day to day.²²

The end of 2020 is a tense one, being best highlighted by the issues presented in the European Council Conclusions of 10-11 December 2020. In this regard, the document condemns Turkey’s provocative actions and the intensification of speeches against the EU, Turkey’s unilateral measures in Varosha, while stressing that the EU remains interested in achieving a cooperative relationship with Turkey and will keep the communication channels open: “the offer on a positive EU-Turkey agenda remains valid, if Turkey shows its willingness to promote a genuine partnership with the Union and its Member States and to resolve differences through dialogue and in accordance with international law.”²³

2. Implications of the EU-Turkey Relationship at Regional Level

Trends in the current international security environment show us that, in an appropriate time frame, strengthening partnerships between the major actors will be the optimal solution for the resettlement of power centres and ensuring security and stability not only at regional level, but even at global level. In this context, the EU-Turkey relationship, whether it is one that will be fully successful and will ultimately lead to the integration of the Turkish State into the Union, or it will continue by deepening the tensions that will result in the definitive break-up of negotiations, has

²¹ ***, *Council conclusions on enlargement and stabilisation and association process*, Council of the EU, 18 June 2019, URL: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/06/18/councilconclusions-on-enlargement-and-stabilisation-and-association-process/>, accessed on 15.03.2021.

²² Cristian Eremia, „Uniunea Europeană-Turcia, după 20 de ani de negocieri de aderare eşuate”, in *Monitorul Apărării și Securității*, 2019, URL: <https://monitorulapararii.ro/uniunea-europeana-turciadupa-20-de-ani-de-negocieri-de-aderare-esuate-1-23178>, accessed on 11.03.2021.

²³ ***, *Concluzii – 10 și 11 decembrie 2020*, European Council, URL: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-22-2020-INIT/ro/pdf>, accessed on 15.03.2021.



a major role in ensuring security and stability at regional level.

Thus, an interesting question we intend to answer is: what advantages EU could gain from this relationship?

The last decade has presented an EU, particularly in terms of economic development. With the use of new technologies, consumption of energy resources and raw materials increased considerably, in 2018, 58.2%²⁴ of the raw energy available in the EU being from imports, which brought to the fore a new priority for the EU – ensuring energy security. In this respect, Turkey could play a key role in ensuring the Union’s energy resource needs, by controlling the access through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits in the most important transport corridor for EU raw materials and energy resources crossing the Black Sea.

As a result, Turkey’s geographical location near about three-quarters²⁵ of the world’s discovered oil and gas resources, complemented by the fact that it is home to the Trans Anatolian Pipeline, the central part of the Southern Gas Corridor, on its territory, recommends it as an important transit corridor of Caspian energy resources in Europe. This is an important opportunity for the EU to secure its energy needs at a better price and to diversify its sources of gas imports, reducing its energy dependence on Russia, which in 2013 supplied about a third²⁶ of Europe’s gas import.

Although an older EU concern, the reduction of the EU’s energy dependence on Russia has become more important following the crises caused by Moscow’s halting of Ukraine’s gas supply during the winters of 2006 and 2009, with fears of repeating similar situations being expressed also amid the current conflict between Ukraine and Russia, which significantly affects the EU and calls into question Russia’s status as a reliable supplier, all the more so as energy is increasingly used as a tool for exerting pressure by the Russian actor. This is also expressed in the Energy Union Strategy, which aims to strengthen sustainability, competitiveness and energy security by addressing five lines of effort: “energy security, solidarity and trust; achieving a fully integrated European energy market; energy efficiency in support of demand moderation; decarbonisation of the economy and research, innovation and competitiveness.”²⁷

²⁴ ***, “Producția și importurile de energie”, *Eurostat*, 2020, URL: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Energy_production_and_imports/ro accessed on 09.06.2021.

²⁵ Tamás Szigetvári, “EU-Turkey Relations: Changing Approaches”, in *Romanian Journal of European Affairs*, vol.14, no. 1, 2014, URL: http://rjea.ier.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/articole/RJEA_2014_vol14_no1_art3.pdf, accessed on 15.03.2021.

²⁶ ***, “Russian gas imports to Europe and security of supply-factsheet”, *Clingendael International Energy Programme*, 2013 URL: <https://www.clingendaelenergy.com/files.cfm?event=files.download&ui=9C1DEEC1-5254-00CF-FD03186604989704>, accessed on 09.06.2021.

²⁷ ***, “A Framework Strategy for a Resilient Energy Union with a Forward-Looking Climate Change Policy”, *EUR Lex*, 2015, URL: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2015:80:FIN>, accessed on 09.06.2021.



However, even though the EU's efforts to achieve an integrated energy market are consistent, this is not accomplished yet, which shows that only certain Member States can benefit from the energy resources transported through the Southern Gas Corridor. Although Ankara and Athens have resumed talks on differences over the exploitation of hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean, the relationship with Cyprus remains tense. So one question that needs to be answered is whether the energy independence contribution that Turkey could possibly bring can compete with the effects produced within the Union by the conflicts that Turkey has with some Member States, with the EU expressing its total solidarity with Athens and Nicosia in condemning Turkey's illegal actions in the Mediterranean and the Cypriot issue.²⁸

Another advantage of Turkey's integration could be the increase of EU's military force at regional level, especially after the withdrawal of the United Kingdom, in the context of an increasing development of the security and defence side. Turkey has one of the largest armies at regional level and is the second largest military force within NATO, surpassing Germany and France. While NATO remains the primary guarantor of European security, the EU could thus become a more robust player, more able to provide regional security in complementarity with NATO, with greater bargaining power in relations with the East, a more significant threat deterrent and a broader sphere of influence. Also, in the context of a Russian Federation that promotes an increasingly aggressive foreign policy with the aim of restoring the sphere of influence formerly held by the Soviet Union, Turkey's contribution, as an EU Member State, to achieving a balance of power at regional level could be significant, which would allow EU to change the way relations with Russia is approached. Turkey has proven several times that it has a bargaining power to resolve conflict situations with major regional actors such as Russia and even Israel, an eloquent example of how to solve the aviation incident that brought down the Russian SU-24 plane.

But in order for this to become a reality, it is necessary for Turkey to stop the foreign policy currently promoted which reveals a derailment from the European path to Russia and China, especially when they have the same interests, and is causing confusion and concern in the EU, increasingly calling into question Turkey's status as a reliable partner. If at first we could talk about mutually beneficial Turkey-Russia economic relations in the areas of trade, tourism and investment, the last few years reveal an increase in Turkey's dependence²⁹ on the economic relationship with

²⁸ ***, *Rezoluția Parlamentului European din 19 mai 2021 referitoare la Rapoartele Comisiei pe 2019 și 2020 privind Turcia*, European Parliament, 2021, URL: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0243_RO.html, accesed on 09.06.2021.

²⁹ Horia Ciurtin, "Un echilibru (economic) fragil: Turcia, Rusia și cealaltă hartă strategică", *New Strategy Center*, 2017, p. 12, URL: <http://newstrategycenter.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/2017->



Russia, especially in the energy sector, which presents it as a risk factor for Europe and can explain to some extent Ankara's closeness to the Russian actor. Moreover, the controversies caused within NATO by the acquisition of the S-400 air defence system, as well as NATO's intention to build a military pipeline to transport fuel between Alexandroupolis and Mihail Kogălniceanu to supply Allied bases in Bulgaria and Romania, thus avoiding transit through the Turkish-controlled Bosphorus Strait, are to reinforce the downward trend of Turkey's credibility within the Alliance.

However, Ankara is of particular importance to both NATO and the EU, in its strategic position at the confluence of the Balkans, the Middle East and Central Asia, representing the bridge and negotiator between the West and the East, and, if it returns to the European trajectory, can be a stronghold against Russia and Iran. From this point of view, Zbigniew Brzezinski captures almost perfectly the role of Turkey's strategic pivot at regional level: "Turkey provides stability in the Black Sea region, controls access from this direction to the Mediterranean, counterbalances Russia in the Caucasus, still provides an antidote to Muslim fundamentalism and serves as a southern support point for NATO."³⁰ Its role is supported by the fact that it lies at the border of threats that cause major concerns at EU level such as terrorism, drug and arms trafficking, migration, and it may, if necessary, be a basis for launching preventive action against these types of threats. In this respect, an eloquent example is Turkey's role in reducing the number of migrants arriving in Europe, as well as managing a number of refugees on its territory which reached 3,691,333 in December 2019³¹, and in 2021, reaching 3,988,411³², contributing decisively to reducing the pressure that a wave of migration of such proportions would exert on the EU.

Even though "the EU's relative share of Turkey's external trade has decreased (the EU share in Turkish exports has fallen from 50% in 2018 to 48.5% in 2019 and, in terms of imports, has decreased from 36.25% to 34.2%), amid the growing number of Turkey's failure to comply with its obligations under the EU-Turkey customs union"³³, Turkey's trade and investment relations remain important in the EU market, with the Turkish State being EU's fifth³⁴ largest partner, while the EU

Iunie-%E2%80%93H.-Ciurtin-%E2%80%93Turcia-Rusia-si-cealalta-harta-strategica.pdf accesed on 11.06.2021.

³⁰ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Marea Tablă de Șah*, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, București, 2000, p. 60.

³¹ Mirela Atanasiu, "Politica externă a Turciei – între Est și Vest", în *Impact strategic*, nr. 3-4/2019, București, 2019, p. 105.

³² ***, "Transnational Issues", *The World Factbook*, URL: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/turkey/#transnational-issues>, accesed on 11.06.2021.

³³ ***, "Comunicare din 2020 privind politica de extindere a UE", *EUR-Lex*, 2020, URL: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0660>, accesed on 11.06.2021.

³⁴ ***, „Relațiile UE-TURCIA: între cooperare și tensiuni”, Parlamentul European, URL: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/ro/headlines/world/20170426STO72401/relatiile-ue-turcia-intre>



is Turkey's largest export market. A development of the customs union would also benefit both sides and allow the creation of an improved regulatory framework for investment, an increase in employment in both the EU and Turkey, and keep Turkey within the limits of the EU regulatory framework.³⁵ However, this is now difficult to achieve due to the actions taken to block some EU Member States and Turkey's increasingly non-compliance with obligations arising from the customs union. Another aspect to consider is that in Turkey the majority of population is young³⁶, able to work, which could complement the necessary labour needs of the EU, with the ageing of the population within the Union being a reality of the present. However, we must recognise that developments over the past year reveal a new approach to Turkey in international relations, with regional aspirations surpassing those of the past. At the level of the international community, Turkey is perceived as a problematic state, with internal challenges related to human rights violations, the affectation of the rule of law, the limitation of freedom of expression, along with a foreign policy that is increasingly moving away from European values (Turkey's degree of alignment with the PESC is 14%³⁷) and provocative actions against some EU Member States. In this respect, the EU-Turkey relationship and eventual accession to the Union would mean that the EU would take on all these problems, thus putting the whole European project at risk.

Moreover, within the EU there are strong voices, such as Germany and France, that would prefer an EU-Turkey relationship only in the court of economic and security cooperation, considering that Turkey is not suitable to become a full member of the EU. In this respect, according to opinion polls, there is "Turkish-scepticism on land, with only 17% (France) and 26% of the population (Germany) expressing in favour of Turkish Muslims joining European construction".³⁸ In addition, it is the German Conservatives who have proposed the concept of an EU-Turkey strategic partnership, replacing accession with a form of cooperation only in the economic and security fields³⁹, while France opposes integration by calling into question the European Union's limited ability to integrate such a different state as a model of

cooperare-si-tensiuni accesed on 16.03.2021.

³⁵ ***, *Raport referitor la Rapoartele Comisiei pe 2019 și 2020 privind Turcia*, European Parliament, 2021, URL: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2021-0153_RO.html, accesed on 13.06.2021.

³⁶ ***, "People and society", *The World Factbook*, URL: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/turkey/#people-and-society> accesed on 11.06.2021.

³⁷ ***, *Raport referitor la Rapoartele Comisiei pe 2019 și 2020 privind Turcia*, *op. cit.*

³⁸ Bogdan Mureșan, "Dinamica relațiilor UE-TURCIA", in *Microstudii IER*, no. 33, European Institute of Romania, Bucharest, 2016, p. 28, URL: http://ier.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/publicatii/Working_Paper_nr.33_Dinamica_relatiilor_UE-Turcia.pdf, accesed on 16.03.2021.

³⁹ Călin Felezeu, Radu Gabriel Safta, *Turcia contemporană între moștenirea kemalistă și Uniunea Europeană*, CA Publishing, Cluj-Napoca, 2011, p. 150.



democracy , traditions and mentality.

The beginning of 2021 presents an attempt on both sides to normalise relations. In this respect, the importance of strengthening dialogue and cooperation between the EU and Turkey is underlined in the discussions on the relationship with Turkey at the Foreign Affairs Council, on 25 January 2021.⁴⁰ On the other hand, the Turkish President wishes to normalise relations with the EU and resume negotiations: “it is our priority to make 2021 a successful year for EU-Turkey relations. We can achieve this if we have a long-term vision, far from prejudice and misunderstanding.”⁴¹

Conclusions

In conclusion, the tensions manifested in recent times between the two actors reveal that the option of Turkey’s full integration into the EU is unviable in the near future. The Cypriot issue will remain a difficult obstacle to address and resolve, which is matched by the opposition of the Member States with whom Turkey continues to maintain conflicting relations.

The most probable evolution of relations is aimed at further development of economic relations by liberalising trade in services and the exchange of agricultural products, updating the Customs Union Agreement and allowing Turkey access to the single market. With regard to security and defence cooperation, Turkey will maintain its support for the EU as a NATO member, with the central effort aimed at strengthening cooperation to combat terrorism, although there will continue to be difficulties of cooperation in the other areas created in particular by the failure in solving the Cypriot problem.

With regard to political-diplomatic relations, subject to developments in the international security environment, the two actors will officially maintain an open dialogue and will not allow tensions to deepen to a level that will not allow the resumption of relations in certain areas in the future in order to achieve certain strategic objectives and interests. EU will seek to find new solutions for another way of approaching Turkey that will restore it to the Western trajectory and counter Turkey’s drift trajectory towards Russia. At the same time, Turkey, which is beginning to feel the sanctions imposed by the EU and the US, is aware that access to the market offered by the EU is essential to economically relaunch, as are the EU funds for the management of refugee situations under the Migration Agreement.

⁴⁰ *** , *Consiliul Afaceri Externe*, European Council, URL: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/meetings/fac/2021/01/25/>, accessed on 15.03.2021.

⁴¹ *** , “Președintele turc Erdogan declară că vrea să „repună pe șine” relațiile Turciei cu Uniunea Europeană”, *Agerpres*, URL: <https://www.agerpres.ro/politica-externa/2021/01/12/presedintele-turc-erdogan-declara-ca-vrea-sa-repuna-pe-sine-relatiile-turciei-cu-uniunea-europeana--641666>, accessed on 15.03.2021.



However, the future of relations remains difficult to predict, with the EU more determined than ever to pursue its objectives set out in the Global Foreign and Security Policy Strategy, while Turkey creates uncertainty and causes real concerns in the international community through the new foreign policy promoted and the growing derailment towards authoritarianism.

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