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Not A Tabula Rasa

A Historical and Critical Look into the Migration Policies of Turkey

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ACMRL Migration Law Series

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Not A Tabula Rasa

A Historical and Critical Look Into the Migration Policies Of Turkey

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Contents

1. Introduction.....	12
1.1. An Overview.....	12
1.2. Research question and sub-questions	17
<i>Historical development</i>	18
<i>Deep securitisation of human mobility</i>	18
<i>EU funding and externalisation</i>	18
<i>Border practices and human cost</i>	18
1.3. Summary of the articles.....	19
1.4. Methodology.....	24
An overview of methodologies employed in this study.....	25
1.5. Positioning within the literature	33
Epistemological contribution	33
Methodological contribution	35
Deep securitisation	37
2. A Tapestry of Change and Continuity: The Long-Term Development of Ottoman and Turkish Migration Policies	42
2.1. Introduction	42
2.2. Methodological Framework	44
2.1.1. Cases	45
2.1.2. Periodisation.....	45
2.3. Ottoman Era	48
2.4. Formative Years.....	51
2.4.1. Medz Yeghern (Armenian Genocide).....	55
2.4.2. 1923 Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey	56
2.5. Republic Era	59
2.6. Conclusion.....	65
3. Deep securitisation and asylum and migration system in Turkey	70
3.1. Introduction	70
3.2. Legal framework and policy shifts before and after the Syrian crisis	72
3.3. Theoretical Framework: Migration, Security and the Securitization Theory 73	
3.3.1. What was Securitisation, again?	73
3.3.2. Chicken & Egg vs the Securitisation & Desecuritisation	74

3.3.3. Deep Securitization	75
3.4. Methodology	77
3.4.1. Scope, time frame and data sources.....	77
3.4.2. Qualitative Historical Analysis.....	78
3.5. Turkey and deep securitization of human mobility.....	79
3.5.1. Historical Background	80
3.5.2. Kurdish Refugee Crisis in 1991	82
3.5.3. Syrian Refugee Crisis in 2011	84
3.5.4. The desecuritisation attempt.....	87
3.6. The failure of de-securitisation and Deep Securitisation	90
4. Financing externalisation: The role that EU Funds Play in Shaping the Turkish Asylum and Migration Policies	98
4.1. Introduction	98
4.2. Methodology	100
4.3. Turkish Migration and Asylum Policy History	101
4.3.1. Transition Period: 1990s.....	103
4.3.2. The Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP)	104
4.3.3. Post-Deal (2016 to 2023).....	106
4.4. EU Policies: From externalisation to asylum as containment.....	108
4.5. Financial Instruments in Turkey	112
4.5.1. Facility for Refugees in Turkey.....	114
4.5.2. The impact	116
4.6. Conclusion.....	119
5. Border policies and migrant deaths at the Turkish-Greek border	124
5.1. Introduction	124
5.2. Methodology	128
5.3. The development of migration management policy in Turkey	130
5.3.1. 2000-2005: A period of growth and foundational reform	132
5.3.2. 2005-2007: A period of stalling and divergence from the EU	135
5.3.3. 2007-2016: A period of incoherent pluralism.....	136
5.4. The development of border management	139
5.4.1. Irregular migration between Turkey and Greece circa 2012	140
5.4.2. The arrival and impact of FRONTEX	142
5.4.3. National operations and political attitudes toward immigration	146
5.5. Border deaths between Turkey and Greece	148
5.6. Conclusions	152

6. Concluding Remarks: A Legacy of Migration Policies	157
Revisiting the research questions and chapter contributions	157
The Historical Continuum of Migration Policies	159
The Role of Securitization.....	160
External Pressures and Turkey’s Role as a Global Actor	160
The Human Cost of Migration Policies	161
An Afterthought on the Decolonial Positioning of This Study.....	168
Bibliography	171
Summary	199

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Introduction

1.1. An Overview

Migration has been a defining feature of Turkey's historical and political landscape, particularly given its geographic position at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. As a successor state to the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish Republic inherited not only the territories but also the complex legacies of population management, displacement and migration policies that had shaped the region for centuries. While recent migration events, such as the influx of Syrian refugees following the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, have garnered significant international attention, especially from the Global West, the roots of Turkey's migration policies stretch back much further. They are deeply embedded in historical experiences that reflect both the empire's multi-ethnic governance and its attempts at nation-building through demographic engineering.

This thesis argues that the migration policies of modern-day Turkey are not a result of recent political developments alone, nor are they simply responses to contemporary crises. Rather, they are shaped by a long continuum of practices and ideologies that have evolved from the Ottoman period to the present. As Chapter 2 shows, the Ottoman Empire, spanning more than six centuries, developed sophisticated mechanisms to manage its diverse populations, including policies of forced displacement, colonisation, and the regulation of religious and ethnic communities. These strategies were not only used to consolidate imperial control but also to ensure social cohesion and political stability in a multi-ethnic and multi-

religious state. This imperial experience of managing mobility has left a lasting impact on the Turkish Republic's approach to migration and demographic challenges.

The legacy of Ottoman population policies is particularly notable in the ways forced displacement was used as a tool of governance. During the empire's expansive period, forced migrations were employed to resettle populations in newly conquered territories, such as in Cyprus following the island's conquest in 1571, when the Ottomans relocated groups from Anatolia to solidify control. Forced migrations were also a tool for dealing with internal threats, as exemplified by the resettlement of tribes or ethnic groups that challenged the central authority. The Ottoman administration's pragmatic approach to managing its diverse population through these policies was institutionalized through mechanisms like the millet system, which allowed different religious communities to govern themselves in exchange for loyalty and tax contributions to the state. This system played a critical role in managing the empire's diversity, ensuring that various ethnic and religious groups were incorporated into the Ottoman state without requiring full assimilation, a strategy that helped maintain social order and imperial control for centuries.

The late Ottoman era witnessed the rise of Turkish nationalism and a growing emphasis on defining and consolidating a distinct Turkish identity, while earlier pluralistic traditions were increasingly challenged. These historical precedents of demographic management continued into the early years of the Turkish Republic. Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I and the subsequent (forced) population movements caused by the Balkan Wars, the newly established Turkish state inherited a nation in flux. Ethno-religious homogenization became a key goal for the state, especially through the experiences of population exchanges, such as the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which formalized the compulsory exchange of Greek Orthodox Christians in Turkey and Muslims in Greece. This exchange aimed to create more ethnically homogeneous nation-states both in Greece and Turkey, a stark departure from the Ottoman model of governance, which had embraced ethnic

diversity within an imperial framework. The shift toward ethnic nationalism and homogenization was also marked by the violent displacement of Armenians during the Medz Yeghern¹ (Armenian Genocide), which remains one of the most significant and controversial episodes of forced displacement in Turkish history.

The 1934 Resettlement Law further codified the Turkish Republic's approach to migration, emphasizing the need to "Turkify" regions by settling populations deemed to be culturally or ethnically Turkish. This policy extended the Ottoman-era strategies of using migration as a tool for nation-building, but with a focus on ethnic and religious homogeneity. The ruling elite, many of whom had served under the Ottoman Empire, viewed the demographic makeup of Anatolia as central to the security and identity of the new republic. Non-Turkish minorities, including Kurds, Armenians, Circassians, and Albanians, were seen as potential threats to national unity, and forced migrations continued to be used as a means of controlling these populations.

Both in the Ottoman and Republican periods, the demographic composition of the population was central to regime security, though the logic underpinning population management shifted over time. In the Ottoman Empire, demographic strategies were characterized by a pluralistic approach, where governance relied on balancing diverse ethnic and religious groups to maintain imperial stability. The millet system, forced relocations and the settlement of Muslim refugees were all tools to ensure control over contested regions and to reinforce loyalty to the state. In the transition to the Turkish Republic, demographic policies took on a distinctly ethno-nationalist character, where homogenization -rather than balance- became the primary means of securing the state. The belief that demography equaled security remained constant, but the mechanisms of enforcement changed with population exchanges, forced assimilation, and resettlement policies targeting non-Turkish groups. Migration and mobility, both voluntary and forced, have thus consistently

¹ The Armenian term for events of 1915-1917 genocide, which translates as "Great Crime".

been seen as instruments of political stability and security, revealing a fundamental continuity in state logic despite ideological and structural transformations.

This historical continuity is crucial for understanding how modern Turkey navigates issues of migration, displacement and asylum. From the resettlement policies of the early Turkish Republic to the securitization of migration flows in the 21st century, Turkish policymakers have consistently viewed human mobility through a lens of national security, identity building and preservation, and state sovereignty. Turkey's deep-seated view of migration as a security issue is evident in its handling of refugee flows, particularly during periods of regional instability, as is made clear in Chapter 3.

A telling example occurred in 1991 when hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Kurds fled to Turkey during the Gulf War. Wary of the ethno-national implications of admitting so large a Kurdish population, the Turkish government delayed opening its borders and housed the arrivals in heavily guarded camps. This response reflected a broader concern over demographic balance and the potential threat to Turkish sovereignty posed by a large influx of Kurds.

The Syrian refugee crisis of 2011 further underscored this complex relationship between migration and security. The conflict, rooted in a complex interplay of political repression, economic hardship and sectarian tensions, destabilized the region and created a massive outflow of refugees. Initially, Turkey adopted an open-door policy, welcoming millions of Syrians fleeing the conflict. However, this policy quickly shifted as the Turkish government became concerned about the long-term implications of hosting such a large refugee population, particularly given the ethnic and sectarian diversity of the refugees. The construction of border fences and the establishment of "safe zones" within Syrian territory to prevent further influxes of refugees highlighted Turkey's evolving migration policy, which has always been influenced by concerns over security, demographic engineering and, national identity.

Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis present critical contemporary case studies that underscore the importance of the broader historical and analytical approach outlined in earlier chapters. They emphasize how understanding Turkey's migration policies requires integrating current events within a continuum shaped by historical legacies, domestic legal structures and geopolitical dynamics.

Chapter 4 examines contemporary migration practices within Turkey, focusing on how they operate in the context of pre-existing migration and asylum laws and policies. By tracing these practices back to their historical and legal roots, this chapter demonstrates that Turkey's migration policies are not merely reactive to modern crises but are deeply embedded in long-standing strategies of governance and population management. This perspective challenges the perception of recent developments as standalone phenomena, showing instead how they are extensions of an established tradition of migration policy shaped by Turkey's unique historical and legal frameworks.

Chapter 5 investigates border deaths, emphasizing the necessity of a comprehensive and multi-faceted analysis. This chapter critiques the tendency to attribute outcomes such as these solely to the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, a narrow view that obscures the broader and longer timeline of Turkey's migration management. It argues that a balanced understanding must incorporate Turkish legal frameworks and policy priorities over time, demonstrating that the 2016 Statement was but one moment in a longer, two-sided negotiation process. Without this historical perspective, analyses risk portraying the agreement as the primary cause of current dynamics, overlooking the layered and reciprocal evolution of policies between Turkey and the EU.

In this context, Turkey's migration policies cannot be seen as a *tabula rasa*, or an empty slate, shaped only by recent events such as its European Union accession process or the Syrian refugee crisis. Instead, they are deeply intertwined with a historical legacy that has informed the state's long-term objectives of demographic

control and national security. By examining the historical trajectory of Turkey's migration policies, this thesis offers a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how the past continues to shape contemporary approaches to migration. Turkey's experiences with migration are not merely reactive responses to crises; they are part of a long-standing tradition of managing human mobility as a tool of governance, national security and state-building.

This thesis maintains that both internal factors, like historical traumas and the perceived necessity of ethnic and religious homogeneity for national security, and external factors, such as EU pressure and international agreements, continue to shape Turkey's migration policies. Through this multi-dimensional analysis, the thesis aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Turkey's migration policies and decision making process of the ruling elite.

1.2. Research question and sub-questions

This thesis is based on the premise that Turkey's migration policies cannot be understood as a recent or purely reactive phenomenon. The overarching research question guiding the study is therefore:

How the long-term Ottoman and Turkish practices of forced displacement, demographic engineering and the securitisation of human mobility shaped the contemporary architecture of Turkey's migration and asylum regime?

To address this question, the thesis is organised around four interrelated sub-questions. Each sub-question corresponds to one of the article-chapters and examines a specific dimension of the problem:

Historical development

How did Ottoman and early Republican policies of forced displacement and population management develop over time and what continuities and ruptures can be identified between these earlier practices and the migration policies of today's Turkish Republic? This question is addressed in Chapter 2, which provides the historical and conceptual foundations of the thesis.

Deep securitisation of human mobility

How can the concept of *deep securitisation* help explain both the attempts at de-securitising forced migration in the period 2002–2011 and the subsequent failure of these efforts during the Syrian refugee crisis? This is the focus of Chapter 3, which connects Turkey's migration and asylum system to long-standing existential anxieties and security imaginaries.

EU funding and externalisation

In what ways do European Union funding instruments for migration and asylum interact with Turkey's historically rooted migration policies and contribute to the externalisation of EU border control? Chapter 4 examines how EU financial instruments and the projects they support operate within the pre-existing institutional and historical context.

Border practices and human cost

How are these long-term patterns of securitisation and demographic engineering reflected in contemporary border policies and migrant deaths at the Turkish–Greek border? Chapter 5 addresses this question by linking historical legacies and contemporary migration governance to the concrete human consequences at the border.

Taken together, these questions operationalise the core claim that Turkey's migration policies are *not a tabula rasa* but are embedded in a long historical continuum. They provide the conceptual and empirical threads that connect the different chapters into a single, coherent argument.

1.3. Summary of the articles

Each chapter of Not A Tabula Rasa aim to contribute to this broader understanding of Turkey's migration policies, by examining different historical periods, key events and thematic dimensions. Through detailed case studies and theoretical frameworks, the thesis focuses on the historical and political forces that have shaped Turkey's contemporary migration strategies, ultimately challenging the notion that these policies emerged in response to external factors alone. The chapters provide a nuanced exploration of the ways in which Turkey's migration policies have evolved over time, shaped by both internal dynamics and external pressures.

Two of the empirical chapters are based on previously published, peer-reviewed articles. Chapter 4 reproduces a co-authored article (Ulusoy et al., 2019), and Chapter 5 reproduces a single-authored article (Ulusoy, 2025). Both chapters are included in their published form. Full publication details are provided in the footnotes and bibliography.

Chapter 2: A Tapestry of Change and Continuity: The Long-Term Development of Ottoman and Turkish Migration Policies

This chapter serves as the foundation of the thesis, introducing the core argument that Turkey's migration policies are not the product of modern challenges alone but are deeply rooted in the country's historical experiences. It outlines how Turkey's policies towards migration have been shaped by its Ottoman past, where a mix of demographic management, wars and political transitions laid the groundwork for contemporary practices.

The chapter provides an in-depth analysis of several key historical moments, such as the Medz Yeghern (Armenian Genocide) and the 1923 population exchange between Greece and Turkey, highlighting how these events were not merely instances

of forced displacement but were pivotal in shaping Turkey's approach to migration. The ethno-religious composition of the population was seen as key to state security and sovereignty, and the Ottoman and Turkish states employed a number of techniques, including forced migration, to manage this composition. The chapter discusses how these moments were driven by concerns over maintaining an ethno-religious balance, territorial integrity and national security.

Furthermore, it traces how the Ottoman Empire's policies of resettling and managing diverse populations influenced the Turkish Republic's stance on migration, viewing it as a tool for demographic engineering and national stability. By examining how policies developed from the Ottoman era through the formative years of the Turkish Republic, this chapter sets the stage for understanding why contemporary migration policies continue to prioritize security, ethno-religious composition, and state sovereignty. The reader is introduced to the long-term historical factors that still influence Turkish migration policies today, underscoring the central thesis that these policies are far from being shaped by recent crises alone and techniques dating back to the Ottoman era are now used in the new ethno-nationalistic context.

Chapter 3: Deep Securitisation and the Asylum and Migration System in Turkey

In this chapter, author delves into the theoretical framework of securitization, explaining how migration in Turkey has evolved into a national security issue. The chapter discusses the process of securitization, which refers to the reframing of migration as an existential threat to the state, rather than merely a social or economic challenge.

The author argues that the Turkish state's responses to migration have been heavily shaped by its historical experiences, particularly the traumatic events that followed the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, such as the wars, mass population displacements and the establishment of a new republic. These experiences instilled a

deep-rooted fear of demographic change and threats to national unity, shaping how migration is perceived through a securitised lens.

The chapter explores the period from 2002 to 2011, during which Turkey's ruling elite attempted a process of de-securitization; reducing the perception of migration as a security threat. However, this effort failed with the onset of the Syrian refugee crisis which re-triggered securitization. The Syrian refugee influx, compounded by Turkey's concerns over ethnic and political stability, particularly regarding the Kurdish issue, led to the re-framing of migration as a pressing national security concern. The article then shows how this securitization process not only shapes domestic policies towards asylum seekers and refugees but also influences Turkey's foreign policy, particularly in relation to its neighbours and the European Union. This chapter provides a critical examination of the securitization theory, using Turkey as a case study, and deepens the reader's understanding of how historical traumas continue to shape contemporary policy decisions.

Chapter 4: Financing Externalisation: The Role That EU Funds Play in Shaping the Turkish Asylum and Migration Policies

The fourth chapter analyses how European Union funding instruments interact with Turkey's migration and asylum regime. It takes the 2013 Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) and the establishment of a civilian migration administration as a major institutional turning point and examines how EU financial support has been channelled into projects designed to support this legal and administrative framework. The chapter shows, however, that the process of Europeanisation has had only a limited effect on migrant and refugee rights. By tracing how key LFIP provisions and the temporary protection regime have been applied in practice and by distinguishing between the legal situation of Syrians and non-Syrians, it argues that formal convergence with EU norms coexists with restrictive implementation on the ground. The chapter further explores the implications of the

2016 EU–Turkey Statement, demonstrating that the increasing reliance on financial incentives fostered a shift from normative convergence to pragmatic containment and a selective Europeanisation in which norms relating to control and deterrence were prioritised over those concerning human rights and long-term integration.

The article critically analyses how Turkey’s position as a perceived country for migrants aiming to reach Europe has been leveraged by Turkish policymakers to secure significant funding from the EU. The chapter explores the complex dynamics between Turkey and the EU, highlighting how migration has become a tool for both parties to achieve their strategic objectives. For Turkey, this has meant aligning certain migration policies with EU standards, even as it grapples with internal demographic challenges and security concerns.

The chapter also discusses the ways in which the externalization of migration control has shaped Turkey’s domestic policies, pushing the government to balance EU demands with its own national interests. The analysis highlights the ethical and humanitarian implications of such externalization, particularly how financial incentives from the EU have led Turkey to implement restrictive policies that may prioritize border control and security over the welfare of migrants and refugees.

The chapter concludes by examining the long-term consequences of the EU–Turkey Statement, including the pressures it places on Turkey’s asylum and migration systems. The article argues that while the financial benefits from the EU have helped Turkey manage the immediate refugee crisis, the externalization strategy has also entrenched a securitised approach to migration, complicating efforts to reform asylum and refugee protections in the country.

Chapter 5: Border Policies and Migrant Deaths at the Turkish-Greek Border

The final chapter brings the reader to the frontlines of Turkey’s migration management, focusing on the Turkish-Greek border, one of the most politically

charged and tragic sites of the European border policies, with a particular emphasis on the increasing number of migrant deaths along the Turkish-Greek border.

The chapter traces the history of border management between Turkey and Greece, exploring how historical tensions, political relations and Turkey's role as a gatekeeper for Europe have shaped these policies. It highlights how the securitization of migration has resulted in increasingly militarized borders, where migrants attempting to cross into Greece face dangerous conditions, often resulting in loss of life. The article critically examines the human toll of these policies, emphasizing how the focus on security and border control has led to ethical and humanitarian crises.

The chapter also addresses the political implications of Turkey's border policies, particularly in relation to its negotiations with the EU. The EU-Turkey Statement is revisited in this context, showing how the externalization of migration control has placed additional pressure on Turkey to manage its borders rigorously, often at the expense of human rights. This analysis addresses the challenges Turkey faces in balancing its responsibilities as a host country for millions of refugees and its role in securing Europe's external borders.

By focusing on the human costs of Turkey's border policies, this chapter provides a sobering conclusion to the book, reminding readers of the ongoing humanitarian crisis that continues to unfold at Turkey's borders and calls for greater attention to the ethical and humanitarian dimensions of migration management.

Taken together, these four chapters form a cumulative and coherent narrative rather than four separate case studies. Chapter 2 provides the historical and conceptual foundations by reconstructing the *longue durée* of Ottoman and Turkish migration policies and practices of population management. Chapter 3 translates these historical insights into a conceptual framework of deep securitisation and shows how long-standing existential anxieties shape the contemporary asylum and migration system. Chapter 4 then places this historically grounded regime in a

broader European context by examining how EU funding instruments and externalisation policies interact with -and often reinforce- existing institutional and legal structures. Finally, Chapter 5 brings the analysis to the level of concrete border practices and human lives by exploring migrant deaths at the Turkish–Greek border. Read in sequence, the chapters move from deep history to present-day governance and from internal state logics to external border practices, thereby answering the overarching research question.

1.4. Methodology

This thesis explores the complex and deeply rooted nature of Turkey's migration policies, tracing their development from the Ottoman era to the modern Republic of Turkey. The book argues that contemporary migration policies in Turkey are not just reactions to recent external events, such as the Syrian Civil War or the EU-Turkey agreement of 2016, but are instead deeply intertwined with the historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire and its long-standing strategies for managing human mobility.

Due to this complexity, this study employs a multidisciplinary approach to explore the development of Turkish migration policies over six centuries, integrating historical analysis with case study research. The methodology is rooted in a diachronic approach which allows for the examination of migration policies across different historical periods, highlighting both continuity and transformation. This approach is complemented by a qualitative assessment of key historical events that have shaped Turkey's migration policies.

The methodological framework is innovative in its combination of historical and contemporary perspectives, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how Turkey's migration policies have been shaped by long-term historical factors as well as more recent political developments. This approach also facilitates a critical

examination of how these policies have been influenced by broader processes of decolonisation and externalization, which are central to the book's analysis.

An overview of methodologies employed in this study

Multi-Disciplinary Approach

This thesis employs a multi-disciplinary approach, integrating insights from history, law, and migration studies to analyse the evolution of Turkish migration policies. This approach is necessary due to the extensive timeframe covered, over six centuries, and the lack of comprehensive scholarly work addressing this period's impact on current policies. Given Turkey's unique position at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and the Middle East, its migration policies cannot be understood as reactions to recent external events alone. Rather, as this thesis argues, Turkey's current policies are deeply rooted in its Ottoman heritage, which has shaped its approach to human mobility, citizenship, and population management.

By adopting a historical lens, this study highlights how Ottoman practices, such as the millet system and forced displacement for purposes of colonisation or punishment, laid the foundation for a securitised approach to migration, long before securitization became a prominent feature of European migration policies. While migration and population policies already served state security in the Ottoman Empire, the shift towards an ethno-nationalist definition of the state transformed their primary aim. This legacy continued into the Turkish Republic, where migration and population policies became tools for demographic engineering, particularly in the aftermath of events like the Medz Yeghern and the population exchanges with Greece.

This historical perspective challenges the notion that Turkey's migration policies are reactive to recent events like the Syrian refugee crisis or its European Union accession process, showing instead that they are the product of long-standing concerns about national security, ethnic composition, and the maintenance of state sovereignty.

Furthermore, the legal frameworks governing migration in Turkey, both during the Ottoman era and in the modern Republic, have consistently reflected these concerns. From the Ottoman Empire's early migration decrees, which sought to manage population dynamics and exert control, to the Turkish Republic's Resettlement Law of 1934, migration policies have consistently prioritised shaping the demographic, ethnic and religious composition of the population.

In addition to history and law, this thesis draws on migration studies to explore how Turkey's migration policies have been influenced by external pressures, such as European Union integration and international refugee conventions. However, as argued throughout this work, these external factors have been secondary to Turkey's internal priorities. For instance, Turkey's ongoing negotiations with the EU over migration management, epitomised by the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, must be seen not just as a product of international diplomacy but as part of a broader historical trend in which the Turkish state has used migration as a policy tool and statecraft. This aspect of Turkey's migration policy is not new; it is a modern extension of Ottoman practices where migration flows were managed to serve the strategic needs of the empire.

Overall, this multi-disciplinary approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of the continuity and transformation of Turkish migration policies, emphasizing that Turkey's migration governance is not a tabula rasa, but rather a deeply entrenched system shaped by centuries of historical experience, legal frameworks, and socio-political strategies aimed at controlling human mobility for the preservation of the state.

Diachronic Research Strategy

The diachronic research strategy (Widdersheim, 2018) provides the primary methodological framework for this study, focusing on the chronological development

of migration policies over time. This approach offers a longitudinal perspective, allowing for a detailed examination of how migration policies have evolved from the Ottoman Empire to the modern Turkish Republic. Rather than offering isolated snapshots of specific events, the diachronic method highlights the continuity and shifts in Turkey's migration strategies over centuries. Diachronic analysis, with its emphasis on tracing change and continuity over time, necessitates elements such as defining cases, establishing selection criteria, identifying multiple events as cases, employing uniform methods for describing and comparing cases, and adopting an approach to explain trends or patterns. By examining specific historical moments within a broader chronological framework, this study aims to uncover long-term trends and developments in migration policies.

Through this strategy, the research traces the influence of major historical events, such as the forced displacement of Armenians, the 1923 Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey and the 1934 Resettlement Law, on the country's demographic and political landscape. These events are not viewed merely as responses to immediate crises but as part of a broader, long-term strategy of state-building and national security. The diachronic approach reveals recurring patterns in migration policies, such as the use of forced migration for demographic engineering—a practice originating in the Ottoman Empire that still resonates in Turkey's contemporary policies, especially in response to refugee crises like that of Syria.

This strategy also illuminates the lasting impact of historical traumas, such as the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, on Turkey's current migration policies. By examining these events through a diachronic lens, the research demonstrates how the Turkish state's approach to migration is deeply embedded in its institutional memory, shaped by concerns over national security, territorial integrity, and ethnic diversity.

In sum, the diachronic approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of Turkish migration policy as an evolving continuum, shaped by centuries of political, social, and legal transformations. This method demonstrates how past solutions are

repurposed in response to new challenges, reflecting enduring concerns over maintaining a cohesive national identity and secure borders.

Case Study Research Principles

Complementing the diachronic strategy, this thesis incorporates case study research principles (Gerring, 2007, 2017) to ground the historical analysis in specific, concrete examples of forced migration. This method enables a focused examination of key instances that represent broader trends and significant policy shifts. The selected cases are divided into two categories: those reflecting the “zeitgeist” of specific periods and those associated with major events that left lasting legacies on Turkish migration policies.

The first group of case studies, discussed mainly in the Chapter 2, drawn primarily from the Ottoman era, illustrates how migration policies were used to manage diverse populations and maintain imperial control. Examples like the forced relocation of ethnic and religious groups under the millet system show how migration policies were pragmatically employed to strengthen territorial control, punish rebellious groups or achieve demographic balance. These early cases provide insights into the adaptive and pragmatic nature of Ottoman governance and its influence on the modern Turkish state's approach to managing ethnic diversity and population movements.

The second group of cases focuses on pivotal events such as the Medz Yeghern and the 1923 Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey. These cases demonstrate how migration policies transitioned from inclusive strategies under the Ottoman Empire to more exclusionary, nationalistic approaches during the early Turkish Republic. By using the crucial case method, this research highlights how these events served as turning points, setting the stage for more securitised and ethnocentric migration policies aimed at creating a homogeneous nation-state.

Moreover, the case study approach underscores how Turkey's migration policies have historically fluctuated between inclusion and exclusion, shaped by both domestic priorities and external pressures. For example, the open-door policies of the Ottoman Empire, which welcomed displaced populations such as the Sephardic Jews, were later replaced by restrictive, nationalist policies favouring ethnic Turks and Sunni Muslims. The analysis of these shifts highlights the role of migration policies as instruments of demographic engineering, reflecting broader state objectives.

Chapter 5 employs a case study and qualitative analysis approach to examine Turkey's border policies and their humanitarian impact, particularly focusing on migrant deaths along the Turkish-Greek border. This case study was chosen due to the border's significance in European migration flows and its role as a critical point of tension between Turkey and the EU. The chapter traces the evolution of Turkish border management policies, exploring how they have been shaped by both internal security concerns and external pressures, including the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement. Primary sources such as legal documents, government reports and international agreements are analysed to understand the shifts in policy over time.

By integrating both diachronic and case study research approaches, this thesis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the forces driving continuity and change in Turkey's migration policies. It demonstrates that these policies are not reactive or ad hoc, but part of a broader historical continuum where forced migration has been consistently used as a tool for state-building, demographic engineering and safeguarding national security.

Qualitative Policy and Financial Analysis

Furthermore, Chapter 4 examines the role of external funding in shaping Turkey's asylum and migration policies with a focus on funding from the European Union (EU). It draws on documents and interview data collected during the ASILE H2020

research project between 2021 and 2022, supplemented by analysis of official agreements, monitoring reports and the financial audit reports of the (inter)governmental agencies involved in EU aid. The chapter treats the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement as a pivotal moment in EU-Turkey relations and analyses how financial instruments, in particular the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRiT), have shaped Turkey's migration management. This evidence clarifies the financial and political dimensions of migration policy externalisation.

The analysis is primarily qualitative. It combines a review of EU funding mechanisms, official documents, and legislative changes to Turkey's asylum framework with 25 semi-structured interviews conducted between June and October 2021 with respondents from governmental, international and non-governmental organisations involved in the preparation and implementation of EU-funded programmes. The chapter assesses how these financial instruments have affected Turkey's migration infrastructure, with attention to capacity building and refugee integration. Drawing on this material, together with secondary academic and policy sources, it argues that external funding has reinforced a securitised, containment-oriented approach rather than supporting long-term integration.

In conclusion, the combined methodology allows for a deep analysis of Turkish migration policies, illustrating how historical experiences and specific case studies inform the state's long-standing approach to managing human mobility. This approach not only traces the evolution of migration policies over time but also positions them within a larger historical, political, and security-driven framework.

A Note on Terminology and Historical Context

This thesis is careful in its use of terminology, particularly in distinguishing between legal and historical interpretations of terms such as “refugee” or “migrant”. This careful attention to language reflects the author's commitment to avoiding anachronisms which could lead to misunderstandings or misrepresentations of

historical events. Rather than applying contemporary legal definitions that may not align with the context of earlier periods, the author chose the broader and more historically accurate term “forced displacement” to describe various forms of human mobility instigated by state authorities. This choice is not only methodologically rigorous but it also allows for a more nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in migration, displacement, and state interventions across different eras.

By employing the term “forced displacement”, the author ensures that the analysis encompasses all forms of state-driven human movement, whether it be resettlement for colonisation, population transfers for security purposes or expulsions resulting from ethnic or religious conflicts. This terminology broadens the scope of inquiry and avoids the limitations of modern classifications, which often carry specific legal implications, such as those established by the 1951 Refugee Convention². The book’s approach acknowledges that while modern-day labels like “refugee” or “migrant” have clear legal meanings, they may not be suitable for describing similar phenomena in earlier historical contexts where such frameworks did not exist.

Moreover, the choice of terminology is not merely a technical decision; it carries ethical implications. The author deliberately avoids terms such as “illegal migrant”, which have the potential to dehumanize individuals. Instead, by adopting victim-centered language such as “Medz Yeghern” (the Armenian term for the genocide, which translates as “Great Crime”), the book seeks to emphasize the human element at the heart of migration studies and honour the victims of forced displacement, ensuring that their suffering is neither minimized nor overlooked.

In avoiding degrading or politically loaded terms, the author aims to elevate the dignity of those who have been displaced and to ensure that their stories are told in a manner that respects their humanity. This sensitivity in language reflects a broader methodological commitment to approaching migration not just as a political

² United Nations. (1951). Convention relating to the status of refugees (United Nations Treaty Series, Vol. 189, pp. 137–221). <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/1951-refugee-convention-1967-protocol.pdf>

or legal issue, but as a deeply human one. This study underscores that migration policies, both historical and contemporary, have real, often devastating impacts on individuals and communities, and thus, the terminology used to describe these events must reflect that reality with compassion and precision.

Why Turkey? Case selection and broader relevance

Turkey is not chosen as a case study simply because it has recently become central to European migration debates. It is analytically valuable because it combines features that are rarely found together and that are particularly suitable for studying path dependency and deep securitisation in migration law.

First, the Ottoman Empire and its successor state, the Turkish Republic, offer exceptional historical depth and continuity in state practices of population management and forced displacement. From early imperial resettlement policies to the institutionalised demographic engineering of the Republican period, successive regimes have treated the control of human mobility and the shaping of population composition as core instruments of statecraft. This long-term perspective makes it possible to observe how ideas, legal tools and administrative practices are transformed yet remain recognisable across centuries.

Second, Turkey exemplifies the transition from empire to nation-state in a context marked by war, territorial loss and mass violence. The thesis shows how imperial repertoires for governing religious and ethnic diversity were reworked into modern nation-building projects that aimed at creating a more homogeneous population. This makes Turkey a particularly revealing case for understanding how historical traumas and state-formation processes shape migration law and policy.

Third, Turkey occupies a strategic position in contemporary migration regimes. It is simultaneously a country of origin, transit and destination, and a key partner in the European Union's externalisation of border control. This multiple positioning

allows the thesis to analyse how domestic historical legacies interact with external pressures and incentives, especially those stemming from EU migration and asylum policies.

Finally, the insights derived from the Turkish case have broader relevance beyond this specific national context. Many post-imperial and semi-peripheral states grapple with similar tensions between historical legacies, nation-building projects and external demands. By tracing the long-term development of migration policies in Turkey and their interaction with contemporary European governance, the thesis contributes to wider debates on how past experiences of empire, violence and demographic engineering continue to shape migration law and policy in the present.

1.5. Positioning within the literature

This study makes three contributions to the existing literature. The first is epistemological (section 1.5.1); the second is methodological (section 1.5.2); the third is more limited and concerns a specific theoretical issue (section 1.5.3). The three are connected but distinct. The first concerns what counts as relevant knowledge in the study of Turkish migration policy; the second concerns the kind of analysis that follows from it; the third concerns a particular conceptual tool that the analysis makes available.

Epistemological contribution

The first contribution is epistemological. A large part of the literature analyses Turkish migration and asylum law and policy primarily as a response to external influences, notably the European Union and the Syrian war. While this perspective is valuable, it misses a key point: the role of centuries of administrative practice in both the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic. In much of this work, this history and its impact are

erased or treated as of only limited relevance, as if contemporary law and policy emerged from a *tabula rasa*. The dominant tendency is therefore to present Turkish migration and asylum policies as reactive and externally driven, rather than as embedded in a longer trajectory of institutionalised practices of rule, categorisation and control. By contrast, the long-term analysis developed in this thesis restores this historical depth and demonstrates how these earlier administrative practices continue to shape present-day migration and asylum policies.

This study situates itself at the intersection of migration studies, historical analysis and securitization theory, contributing to the body of literature that examines the deep historical roots and long-term evolution of migration policies. Rather than viewing migration policies as isolated responses to contemporary events, this research traces their development from the Ottoman Empire to the modern Turkish Republic, demonstrating how migration has persistently functioned as a political tool for population management, state consolidation, and security governance. By situating modern migration policies within this broader historical continuum, this study reveals how long-standing governance strategies, including demographic engineering, forced displacement and ethnic restructuring, continue to shape Turkey's approach to migration today.

Historically, scholars have explored Ottoman migration policies and their role in demographic engineering, highlighting the strategic use of population movements to consolidate control, balance demographics, and secure territories. The practice of *sürgün* (forced relocation) and the settlement of Muslim refugees in the 19th century exemplify migration as a state tool to address geopolitical shifts circumstances (Inalcik, 1997; Karpas, 1985). These policies helped manage the empire's diverse population and maintain order, especially in contested regions (Barkey, 2008).

This research analyses the continuity of population management strategies into the Turkish Republic, where migration policies shifted from imperial pragmatism to

ethno-nationalist goals. The concept of *imperial pragmatism*³ (Paiva, 2024) in the Ottoman Empire reflected a flexible approach to managing the empire's vast ethnic and religious diversity. This pragmatism often aimed at maintaining stability and loyalty rather than enforcing a singular identity. However, a significant shift began in the late Ottoman period as the state increasingly moved toward policies that prioritised ethno-national identity. Late Ottoman population exchanges and forced migrations, such as those involving Armenians and Greeks, foreshadowed the Republic's efforts to "Turkify" its population (Akçam, 2012; Üngör, 2011a). The 1923 Population Exchange with Greece exemplified state-driven demographic reshaping, removing Greek Orthodox Christians and resettling Muslim Turks (Yıldırım, 2007). Similar strategies targeted Kurdish and other ethnic minorities in the 1930s, showing continuity from late Ottoman to Republican policies (Dündar, 2008a).

By exploring the historical continuum of these practices, this thesis demonstrates how the Ottoman legacy of population management influenced the Turkish Republic's ethno-nationalist policies. The pragmatic, multiethnic strategies of the Ottoman Empire were transformed into the homogenizing strategies of a modern nation-state, highlighting both continuity and adaptation in the use of migration as a political tool.

Methodological contribution

The second contribution is methodological and closely related to the first, though distinct from it. Whereas the epistemological contribution concerns what counts as relevant knowledge, the methodological contribution concerns the kind of analysis that is carried out. The multidisciplinary approach adopted in this thesis, which combines legal, historical and political analysis, is better able to make sense of current

³ Imperial pragmatism describes a strategic approach where empires prioritised practical considerations - economic, military and political - often adapting their policies to local realities rather than strictly adhering to ideological principles, to maintain and expand power.

configurations of Turkish migration and asylum law and policy than approaches that assume these are predominantly short-term responses to external events.

Contemporary migration studies often focus on current policies or recent historical developments, overlooking the deep, long-standing roots that shape modern migration strategies (de Haas, 2021). *Not A Tabula Rasa* offers a crucial long-term historical perspective, tracing the evolution of Turkish migration policies back to the Ottoman Empire, a period characterized by complex governance and demographic management. This study examines historical practices like the millet system, forced resettlements for colonial purposes, and ethnic engineering during the Ottoman Empire's dissolution, revealing how these practices laid the foundation for Turkey's present-day policies.

This long-term view challenges the prevailing notion that Turkey's migration policies are primarily responses to recent events, such as the Syrian refugee crisis (Ihlamur-Öner, 2013) or EU accession requirements (Aka & Özkural, 2015; Dudden & Ustun, 2017). While much migration scholarship emphasizes these contemporary factors, framing Turkey's policies as humanitarian responses or short-term geopolitical strategies (N. E. G. Aras & Şahin-Mencütek, 2015; Aydın & Kirişçi, 2013; A. Kaya, 2021; Okyay & Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2016; van Heukelingen, 2021), this work disrupts this narrative. It argues that these policies are not unprecedented innovations but rather part of a long-established continuum of governance practices rooted in the Ottoman era. By situating modern migration policies within this broader historical context, the study demonstrates that the roots of these strategies lie in centuries of experience managing human mobility, ethnic diversity and demographic engineering. It reveals how legacies of Ottoman rule, including the management of minority populations and the strategic use of forced migration for political and territorial control, continue to influence the Turkish Republic's approach to migration today.

In the context of contemporary migration policies, the study engages with works on Turkey's role in the European migration management framework,

particularly following the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement. These studies highlight the externalization of EU migration policies, where Turkey serves as a critical buffer state managing migration flows toward Europe (A. Kaya, 2021; H. Kaya, 2020; Sert & Türkmen, 2017). This research contributes to this discourse by examining how historical legacies of securitization influence Turkey's contemporary role in the EU's migration strategy, with a specific focus on how EU funding mechanisms shape internal policy decisions.

Deep securitisation

While the concept of securitisation has been widely applied to migration (Bigo, 2002; Huysmans, 2000), Abulof's concept of *deep securitisation* (2014) has not yet been systematically explored in this field. This is a more limited, but nonetheless important, contribution of this thesis. It builds on the theoretical framework of securitisation developed by Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (Buzan, Ole Wæver, et al., 1998) and applies it specifically to Turkey's migration policies. Drawing on Abulof's notion of deep securitisation, the study extends this concept to the Turkish context, analysing how the Turkish state has historically framed migration as an existential security threat.

Introducing the concept of deep securitisation into the analysis of Turkish migration and asylum policy makes it possible to understand the long-term entanglement of migration governance with questions of state security, regime stability and demographic control. By linking this theoretical framework to Turkey's historical experiences with forced displacement, the thesis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how migration policies are constructed and maintained as security issues in both historical and contemporary contexts. Moreover, the analysis suggests that one way of understanding current political developments in North-West Europe is to consider whether migration is increasingly subject to processes of deep securitisation there as well.

Ultimately, this study positions itself within a multidisciplinary framework that bridges law, historical analysis, migration theory and security studies, offering a longitudinal perspective that enriches the existing literature on Turkey's migration policies and their broader geopolitical and domestic implications.

02

A Tapestry of Change and Continuity: The Long-Term Development of Ottoman and Turkish Migration Policies

2.1. Introduction⁴

Migration in and across Turkey has increasingly attracted societal and academic interest in recent decades, particularly since the Syrian Civil War broke out in 2011 and caused millions of people to seek refuge in Turkey. During the past decade Turkey has also overhauled its migration and asylum legislation with a view to accession to the European Union (EU), while the agreement reached with the EU in March 2016 has resulted in cooperation between the EU and Turkey becoming one of the most intensely debated topics in the field of migration management and externalisation. It is tempting, therefore, to interpret and discuss Turkish migration policies in the light of these current issues and as a consequence of migration flows or international relations.

Any such discussion, however, would be misleading and one-dimensional as far from being a *Tabula Rasa*, or empty slate, and rather than evolving in a vacuum, Turkey's current migration policies are deeply rooted in its history and interwoven into traditions dating back centuries. Over time, Anatolia, situated at the crossroads

⁴ Author would like to thank to Isabella Leroy and Judith Kraamwinkel for helping to define the methodology of this research and members of the Amsterdam Centre for Migration and Asylum Law (ACMRL) for providing invaluable feedback on an earlier draft of this paper.

between East and West, has been at the heart of several empires, including the ancient Greek, Byzantine, Persian, Seljukian and Ottoman empires. Coming from a wide range of cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds, with complex administrative traditions, the rulers of these empires developed strategies and policies for the people migrating to and across their territories. Today's migration policies are therefore shaped as much by this long-term heritage as by short-term events such as the possibility of EU accession or the arrival of Syrian refugees.

This article argues that the experiences and policies of the Ottoman Empire have had a fundamental impact on human mobility and migration policies of the Turkish Republic since its establishment in 1923. This historical perspective is vital for understanding the major long-term concerns of the Turkish state in the field of migration. While the numbers of refugees and Turkey's financial and political gains have attracted considerable discussion and attention, this article argues that these have not been of primary concern for Turkish policymakers. On the contrary, these elements are probably playing a considerably less significant role than many experts assume, and policies of the Turkish Republic are instead following common characteristics and principles dating back far further into history. This historical perspective also shows that the impact of human mobility on demography – not just in terms of numbers of people, but also their ethno-religious backgrounds – is a major long-term concern for the state, not just for governments or politicians of a more temporary nature.

The article provides a broad and longitudinal overview, both regionally and periodically, of how Turkish migration policies have developed since the Ottoman era. In doing so, it aims to contribute to filling a gap in the scholarly literature on the history of migration in modern-day Turkey and its ability to explain the shaping of contemporary migration policies.

The next section explains the methodology used to select and analyse the historical developments.

2.2. Methodological Framework

Developing a methodology suitable for understanding and analysing some six centuries of forced migration and its impact on contemporary policies required a multi-disciplinary approach, while the lack of scholarly literature and research on how migration policies developed over such a long period necessitated the use of more than one research strategy. Accordingly, the methodology used in this research is based on case study research principles (Gerring, 2007, 2017) combined with a diachronic research strategy including features of both history and case studies. (Widdersheim, 2018). The following section provides an overview of the research methodology and details the reasons and justifications for the case selection strategy, as well as the periodisation.

Research based on historical case studies can tend to provide a snapshot-like understanding of a phenomenon limited to a specific period and circumstances. While this approach is useful and important for delineating the research and providing an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, it does not provide the longitudinal perspective of the issue that this article aims to do. To understand the development and transformation, as well as the continuity, of migration policies over six centuries, a diachronic approach is therefore needed.

The diachronic analysis requires elements such as the definition of a 'case', selection criteria, more than one event that can be understood as a 'case' over time, methods for describing and comparing cases in a uniform way and an approach to explain trends or patterns.

In line with these requirements, an in-depth literature review was initially conducted. The first selection of literature included works of classical Ottoman historians, while the second included works of scholars from a wide range of academic disciplines writing on the intersection of migration, migration policies and history.

Based on this in-depth literature review, criteria for the case selection and periodisation were then defined (see the explanations below). Each historical case selected was first discussed within the context and background of the period in order to understand its origins. The cases were then discussed in relation to the other periods in order to understand the policies' impact in the subsequent periods, as well as how they transformed and continued.

2.1.1. Cases

Two historical groups of cases of forced displacement were selected, with the first of these comprising cases reflecting the context of the specific period and being examples of the *zeitgeist* in order to provide a better understanding of the period and context.

The second group comprised cases usually situated during or after a significant event such as war and that impacted on the lives of hundreds of thousands and sometimes millions of people. The criteria for selecting the second group of cases were that the event should: a) be a forced displacement, b) involve active participation of Ottoman or Turkish officials, and c) contain significant elements of continuation or trigger a change in policies. A qualitative assessment of the relative crucialness of each case was conducted, with the 'crucial case' method (Gerring, 2007, pp. 115–122) being instrumental for selecting the historical cases.

2.1.2. Periodisation

Providing a detailed overview of the development and deployment of migration policies since the beginning of the Ottoman Empire is a challenging task. As one of the longest ruling royal families in history, the Ottoman dynasty and empire lasted for more than six hundred years, while their heir, the Turkish Republic, is celebrating its centenary in 2023. To overcome this challenge, three distinctive eras – a) the Ottoman era, b) the formative (and transformative) years, and c) the Republic era – were

identified, based on the literature review. As well as each of these eras being analysed separately, their impact on the next era is also highlighted.

The **Ottoman era** starts with the establishing of the Ottoman Empire and covers roughly 500 years, during which the ruling elite developed migration policies and also definitions of citizenship. As will be discussed in the subsequent sections, the policy definitions and how these policies were implemented were detailed and pragmatic and followed a common understanding on the part of the ruling elite.

One of the most chaotic periods in European and Middle Eastern history between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries can be defined as the **formative (or transformative) years** of migration policies within the context of this article. During this period, which started in 1839 with the *Tanzimat* (Imperial Reform) Edict and ended in 1934 with the Turkish Resettlement Law, the traditional policies of the empire were fundamentally changed or transformed. The period also saw two crucial and unprecedented events of forced migration that laid down the characteristics of the migration policies subsequently applied in the Republic, while also seeing the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the establishing of the Turkish Republic.

Finally, there is the **Republic era**, when experiences, learnings and understandings gained in the previous periods – and especially during the transformative years – guided the new Republic's elite in shaping the migration policies applying today. This section of the article briefly analyses four important events of forced migration to highlight the impacts of the previous eras.

It should be noted that the literature reveals different approaches being adopted regarding periodisation. Dündar (Dündar, 2008b) describes two periods of migration in the Ottoman Empire: extrovert policies, focusing on colonisation, until the 1683 Siege of Vienna and introvert policies, focusing on survival, after that date. Kale (Kale, 2014, p. 255) also uses the same periodisation. Both approaches would

seem to oversimplify the periods and overlook the changes that occurred in the nineteenth century. Tekeli, (Tekeli, 1994) on the other hand, provides a more detailed periodisation and identifies six periods, seeing the sixteenth century as the first period and the period during which Ottoman Empire institutions (and migration policies) were in their most mature phase. The second period is the eighteenth century, when the institutions of the Ottoman Empire started decaying. This is then followed by the third period, the nineteenth century, when the nation states started to form. The fourth period covers the years between 1912 and 1922, when the empire was engulfed by war and crisis, while the fifth period covers the first years of the newly established Turkish Republic. Finally, there is the sixth period 'extending from 1950 to 1990, [and which] includes the efforts toward planned development and the formation of a welfare state under a democratic regime.' (Tekeli, 1994, pp. 202–203)

Another challenge in discussing how migration and migration policies developed during the Ottoman era is the lack of scholarly attention and study afforded to the topic. While forced migration in the Ottoman Empire has attracted increased attention and focus in recent years, these studies have been 'mostly phenomenologically or regionally fractured.' (Illriike Freitag et al., 2011, p. 1) This article aims to provide a broader and longitudinal overview, both regionally and periodically, of the development of migration policies and their impact on modern-day policies.

As far as terminology is concerned, there are also fundamental differences between legal scholars and historians, with the latter tending to use terms such 'refugee', 'migrant' or 'deportation' quite liberally, interchangeably and inconsistently. To overcome this issue, this article uses the term 'forced displacement' to cover all forms of human mobility forced by authorities. Choosing this term was also a way to overcome the problem of identifying people as 'refugees' centuries before the term had been defined. Lastly, it is always important, and indeed crucial, not to fall victim to a type of 'categorical fetishism', (Apostolova, 2015) where we

forget, whether as authors, researchers or humans, that we are talking about human beings and not just about terminology.

2.3. Ottoman Era

The history of the Ottoman Empire itself starts with the story of a migrant. Like any other powerful dynasty in history, the early days of the Ottoman Empire are surrounded by myths and stories about a 'chosen' family destined to lead and create an empire. The reality, however, is more mundane: Osman, the founder of the Ottoman dynasty, was a migrant, a member of a family forcibly uprooted from western Central Asia to Anatolia by Mongols in the early thirteenth century. He and his small tribe went on to lay the foundations of one of the biggest empires in history, spanning six centuries and controlling lands across three continents.

Situated at the crossroads of eastern and western civilisations, the ruling elite of the Ottoman Empire became familiar, from the very beginning, with and adopted the state traditions of the many different cultures they encountered. Navigating their survival through a highly complex and diverse ethnic and cultural geography, the Ottomans built a state system that combined both Islamic and Christian traditions, and Byzantine and Seljukian statesmanship. (Kale, 2014, p. 253) This was also reflected in the way that the notion of 'citizenship' was applied. Toynbee (1974) argued that the Ottoman Empire did so in a similar way to its predecessors, the Byzantine and Roman Empires. The Roman Empire was rather 'generous in giving citizenship to foreigners and in opening up opportunities for those naturalized [Romans] to use their abilities to their own and to the [Roman] Empire's advantage.' (Toynbee, 1974, p. 23). Thus, newcomers in the Ottoman Empire were accepted rather easily into the society as a way of exercising power.

There was, however, one fundamentally new aspect in the way citizenship was applied in the Ottoman administration: the use of the millet system. Inspired by Islam but also by old traditions of Byzantium, the millet was a complex system for structuring the status and social, economic and political relations of minority religious communities among themselves, as well as with other communities and the Ottoman administration. The system gave the various communities powers, albeit limited, to regulate their internal and external affairs, while also ensuring they were protected by the sultan.⁵

The millet system was crucial for establishing and later sustaining a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural empire. Of course, this was not the specific aim of the Ottoman rulers, but rather an administrative decision to create manageable groups of people in a manner requiring minimal resources from the central authority. And, as this article shows, using the ideas of Roman citizenship in combination with the millet system indeed proved to be a means of managing a highly complex society.

Examples

While examples of forced population movements and policies in the early Ottoman era are many, they can each be categorised as having one of the following objectives: colonisation, punishment or international relations.

The first example is the forced resettlement of groups from Anatolia to newly conquered territories for colonisation purposes. After conquering the island of Cyprus in 1571, the Ottomans introduced the millet system there, stating, according to the Deportation Decree of 24 September 1572, that ‘one family out of every ten in the provinces of Anatolia, Rum (Sivas), Karaman and Zülkadriye was to be sent to Cyprus’ in order to rehabilitate and provide security on the island. The deportees were

⁵ For detailed information on the millet system, see (Blumi, 2013; Chatty, 2010; Inalcik, 1997; Karpas, 1982; Kawtharani, 2018)

to be chosen from peasants and craftsmen who would be exempted from paying taxes in their new settlement for two years. (Inalcik, 1954, p. 123)

Another use of forced resettlement can be seen in the transferring of problematic local *aşirets* (tribes) to other regions as punishment. As Barkan (Barkan, 1953) details, sending whole tribes and ethnic or religious groups to different parts of the empire was a common practice. An interesting example, which also highlights the extent of the sultan's power, was the exiling of an ethnic Tatar tribe from Iskilip (in central north Anatolia) to Rumelia (the Ottoman territories in the Balkans).⁶ This happened in 1418, when Sultan Mehmed Çelebi⁷ was travelling from Samsun to Bursa (the first capital of the Ottoman Empire) and encountered a Tatar tribe living in the meadows near Iskilip. After the tribe's leader, Minnet Bey, failed to visit and pay respect to the sultan, the latter ordered that the tribe should be exiled to territories now in Albania or Bulgaria.(Barkan, 1953, pp. 209–211)

Forced displacement practices during the Ottoman era were not only internal displacements. On the contrary, there were several forced displacements to or out of the empire that had a particularly significant impact from a perspective of international relations and societal change.

One of the best-known cases of a forced displacement that had a significant impact on international relations and societal change for many centuries is the expulsion of Jews from the Iberian Peninsula. Following the fall of Granada, the last Muslim dynasty in Spain, Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon issued the Alhambra Decree of 31 March 1492. (Shaw, 1991, p. 14) This decree ordered that all Jews should be expelled from the Crowns of Castile and Aragon within four months, with the result that around 200,000 – 300,000 Jews left the Iberian Peninsula in 1492. (Chatty, 2010, p. 39; Shaw, 1991, pp. 14–15) While the exact numbers of Jews that emigrated to Ottoman Empire territories is unknown, Ottoman tax registers show

⁶ A term used for the European part of the Ottoman Empire, roughly the Balkans.

⁷ Fifth Sultan of the Ottoman Empire.

8,070 Jewish households (56,490 people) being present in Istanbul in 1535. (Shaw, 1991, pp. 37–38) Indeed, Sephardic Jews, *Sefarad* in Turkish, became one of the most influential minorities in the Ottoman Empire and ‘played a tremendous role in the economic life of the Ottoman Empire’. (Shaw, 1991, p. 86)

While displacement during the Ottoman era was also caused by environmental issues such as drought and famine, (Ertem, 2017, p. 164) these cases were generally initiated by the state or the administration, and represented attempts at population or demographic engineering (Şeker, 2013) directly linked to the security of the state. And, as in all states, any security-related topic could be expected to be tightly and extensively regulated or examined by statesmen. This security-oriented approach probably explains why both the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic had an early and advanced understanding of migration and migration policy.

2.4. Formative Years

Background

This was a time when the structure and policies that had supported and strengthened Ottoman society since the late thirteenth century began to dissolve and prove unable to respond to the rapid changes in the social, economic, and political domains of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While Western countries evolved from mercantile societies to imperialistic powers and finally capitalist structures, the system in the Ottoman Empire remained rigid and based on outdated economic models. (Karpat, 2010, pp. 48–49) Then, as nation-state formation gained momentum in the Balkans in the 1870s (Şeker, 2013, p. 5), accompanied by a series of devastating conflicts such as the Crimean War (1853–1856), the Russo-Turkish War (1877–78), the First Balkan War (1912–13) and the First World War, the Ottoman Empire witnessed an unprecedented and tremendous forced displacement both across and within its borders.

Policies

From the early nineteenth century onwards, the threat of collapse increasingly forced the Ottoman Empire's ruling elite to act and reform. This, together with rising ethnic nationalism and the effects of the French Revolution towards the end of the eighteenth century, triggered a wave of unrest and movements pushing for independence in the Balkans. One of the solutions, in the eyes of the elite, was to redefine Ottoman citizenship.

In 1839, therefore, the sultan agreed to sign the Imperial Reform Edict as part of the *Tanzimat* reforms.⁸ This edict limited the powers of the sultan and, for the first time, provided some citizenship rights to 'his subjects'. (Tanör, 2013) This represented a major change in the understanding of citizenship because, before the edict, individuals had been seen, like goods, as the property of the sultan. In the *Tanzimat* Edict, by contrast, the sultan undertook to ensure the security of Ottoman citizens' lives, honour and property, regardless of their ethnic and religious backgrounds. While the millet system had previously provided some rights and protection for non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire, the *Tanzimat* Edict and the subsequent reforms of the civil and criminal codes, and especially the declaration of the Ottoman Nationality Law in January 1869, defined and formalised both the citizenship and rights of all subjects. It should be noted that the Ottoman Empire was an early adopter of the concept of nationality legislation that gained momentum during the nineteenth century (Hanley, 2016, p. 277) and that combined elements of *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis* by granting citizenship both to children of Ottomans and to those born in Ottoman domains. (Akcasu, 2021, p. 1113)

During this period, the idea of 'Ottomanism' was introduced as a counterweight to the internal ethnic nationalistic movements that had been gaining ground. Under

⁸ This edict marked the start of an era commonly known as the *Tanzimat*. A diverse series of reforms was enacted during this period, ranging from secularisation in Ottoman civil legislation and the introduction of national identity cards in 1844 to the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1858

Ottomanism, all individuals in the empire were to be equal subjects regardless of their religion or language,⁹ with the millet system being seen as a crucial part of this unity and equality among the millets being emphasised. The impact of Ottomanism can be seen throughout the reforms in this period, with the Ottoman elite's awareness of the multi-religious and multi-ethnic society that they had to manage leading them to see Ottomanism as a way to create a common ground for unity.

A striking example of the impact of Ottomanism on migration policies can be found in the decree published by the Tanzimat High Commission on 9 March 1857, which was also approved by the sultan. (Kale, 2014, 2015; Karpas, 2010, p. 153) According to this decree, 'Any person who is not a subject of the Sultan but promises to obey the rules and laws ... is welcome in the Ottoman Empire.' The decree guaranteed land for agriculture and exemption from tax and military obligations, while new subjects were also free to exercise their religious beliefs and could get permission to build a place of worship if one was not already present in the place they settled. This very liberal act attracted attention in Europe, Africa and even America. The British consulate in Cyprus, for example, requested 130,000 acres of land for 300 Irish families, while 2,000 families of German origin made applications to the Ottoman representatives in Odessa. (Karpas, 2010, pp. 153–156) Owing to the increased pressure they faced in Russia, the biggest beneficiaries of these policies were, however, Jews from Russia after 1882. (Tekeli, 1994, p. 213) The liberal immigration policy that the Ottoman elite adopted helped to offset the effects of the various wars on the Ottoman economy and military powers, with empty lands being reutilised, and unpopulated regions being settled in newly established villages.

While the *Tanzimat* was short-lived and Ottomanism was not adopted by the masses, both were part of a larger movement that aimed to reform all parts of the Ottoman Empire and that continued until the latter's dissolution. However, initial

⁹ Interestingly, language was used as an ethnic identifier on many occasions during this period in the Ottoman Empire.

ideas of unity under the Ottoman identity and revival of the millet system were unable to withstand the brutal realities of a collapsing empire and the emergence of nation states on three continents.

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the forced migration of Muslims from lost territories into the remaining Ottoman domains became a mass exodus. About 1.8 million Tatars and 1.5 million Circassians, for example, crossed the north-eastern border with Russia and moved into Anatolia during the nineteenth century, (Karpas, 2010, pp. 163–171) while Akgündüz (Akgündüz, 1998, pp. 99–100) estimates that between 1793 and 1913 (roughly the nineteenth century) some 5-7 million Muslims migrated to Ottoman territories from newly formed Balkan countries in the west. It should be noted that these numbers do not include the forced displacement of many other minority groups to and across Anatolia. Together with the arrival of millions of people between the Russo-Turkish War and the Balkan Wars, these movements resulted in the population of the Ottoman Empire reaching approximately 40 million by 1908. (Baklacioğlu, 2017)

Around the 1870s, Ottomanism was replaced by Islamism, with the unstoppable decline and foreseeable collapse of the Ottoman Empire leading the elite, and especially the new Sultan Abdülhamit, to see Islam (Karpas, 2010, pp. 343–349) as a solution to ensure survival. After years of political fighting, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) finally seized power in the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and went on to rule the Ottoman Empire until the latter's collapse in 1918. The CUP's agenda was pan-Islamist, pan-nationalist and authoritarian and aimed at surviving the collapse of the empire by 'Turkifying' the remaining Ottoman lands.

Within the context of migration policies, these turbulent years can be seen as a formative period, when the elite chose various routes, ranging from libertarian Ottomanism to chauvinistic pan-Turkism, in an attempt to modernise all parts of the government and society, and avoid dissolution of the empire. Naturally, the ideological approach of the governing bodies directly influenced the policies on

population, citizenship and mobility or migration. It may be contradictory or illogical, however, to see U-turns in these policies; they should rather be seen as final – and almost hopeless – attempts to survive within the *zeitgeist* of the era. And these contradictions are especially true for two very important events of forced displacement that shaped not only the Ottoman Empire and the new Turkish Republic, but also the entirety of world history in more than one domain. These events were the Armenian Genocide and the 1923 Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey.

2.4.1. Medz Yeghern (Armenian Genocide)

Between 1915 and 1917, millions of Armenians were forcibly displaced from their homes across Anatolia to Syrian cities by the CUP, the ruling party in the Ottoman Empire at the time. (Akçam, 2004; Özsu, 2015; Suny et al., 2011; Üngör, 2011b)

Armenian Genocide; *Medz Yeghern*¹⁰ (the Great Evil Crime) according to Armenians, and the ‘Events of 1915’ according to Turks, is a longstanding and highly politicised problem that continues to affect relationships between Armenia and Turkey today. This forced displacement of Armenians resulted in mass deaths, with estimations ranging from 600,000 to 1.6 million. As well as the humanitarian tragedy, the *Medz Yeghern* also had an impact on international humanitarian and criminal law. Indeed, the term ‘genocide’ was first coined by the Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin in 1944 after reading about the *Medz Yeghern*.

It is interesting, however, that many scholars fail to see the Armenian genocide as also a brutal forced displacement initiated by the rulers of a failing empire and an attempt (as rationalised by the perpetrators) to secure the eastern borders and stabilise the region through ‘homogenisation’. This approach marked a complete change from

¹⁰ Throughout this article, the author uses *Medz Yeghern*, the term used by the victims of this crime. Within the context and limitations of this article, ongoing genocide discussions will also be disregarded, with only the policy of forced displacement being discussed.

the traditional policies of the Ottoman Empire, where migration policies were neither aimed at homogenising a particular region nor ethnocentrically motivated. As Tekeli notes, this period was ‘the years when the Ottoman Empire changed its supranationalistic outlook and nationalism gained strength,’ (Tekeli, 1994, p. 214) while Baklacioğlu describes the era as being when ‘the multicultural liberal immigration policy was slowly replaced by nation-building policies.’ (Baklacioğlu, 2017, p. 14)

Medz Yeghern was the first major event in a long-term policy change. Ignited by the mass influx of Muslims to Anatolia at the end of the Balkan Wars, the ruling elite in the Ottoman Empire adopted a new approach, which initially aimed to change the ethnic and religious structure of the strategically important regions and then to achieve a total ethnic restructuring of Anatolia in favour of a Turkish and Muslim nation. (Şeker, 2013) Whereas, until the end of the nineteenth century, the ruling elite had seen ‘the nation’ as meaning the Ottoman nation, consisting of a multitude of different ethnic and religious communities or millets, the nation, as crystalised by the *Medz Yeghern*, now comprised Muslim Turks, and the land was Anatolia.

These definitions were set by the ruling elite at the end of the Ottoman Empire. As will be discussed in the next section, however, these policies were clearly inherited by the newly established Turkish Republic for one simple reason: the founding elite of the Turkish Republic comprised the elites of the Ottoman Empire themselves.

2.4.2. 1923 Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey

While Greece already declared independence from the Ottoman Empire as early as 1822, it was the First World War (1914–1918) and the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922) and subsequent peace treaties that shaped the borders and relations of present-day Greece and Turkey. By the time the borders were finally drawn, however, there were still millions of ethnic Turks, or Muslims, living in Greek territories and, similarly,

millions of ethnic Greeks, or Christians, still living in Turkey, especially in the western coastal cities of Anatolia. The Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations, one of the most defining events for the process of nation-building in both countries, was signed in Lausanne on 30 January 1923. This exchange involved expelling Anatolian Greeks to Greece, and Muslim Turks and Muslim Greeks to Turkey. (Long, 2008)

The 1923 Population Exchange was a unique and innovative instrument that provided an internationally accepted and sanctioned framework for mandatory displacement of millions of people. Indeed, the implementation of the Convention and the ‘unmixing of peoples’¹¹ were seen by many as an important contribution to the ‘long-term stability of the Aegean through the nationalisation of political power structures and thus the exclusion of difference.’ (Long, 2011, p. 236)

The population exchange was formulated and agreed between the Turkish and Greek governments and part of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. While some scholars attribute the idea of a population exchange between Greece and Turkey to Nansen,¹² it had initially been proposed by the Ottoman and Greek elites ten years earlier, in 1914. (Hirschon, 2003, p. 42; Yildirim, 2016, pp. 62–63) And while Nansen made important humanitarian and diplomatic contributions, both during the *Medz Yeghern* and the 1923 Population Exchange, it was the Greek prime minister, Venizelos, and the Ottoman ambassador in Athens, Galip Kemali Bey, who discussed the possibility of a voluntary population exchange of Greeks and Turks in May 1914. (Dündar, 2008b, p. 217; Özsu, 2014, p. 55) This meeting between Greeks and Ottomans was motivated by attempts at demographic engineering on both sides. On the Anatolian side of the Aegean Sea, Ottomans were intensifying their persecution of Armenians in the east and seeking to reduce the economic and political power of the Greek communities in

¹¹ The term ‘unmixing of peoples’ was attributed to Lord Curzon in his reflections on the Balkan Wars. (Chatty, 2013)

¹² For a detailed discussion of Fridtjof Nansen’s involvement in the Population Exchange, see (Ross, 2015)

the west.¹³ Meanwhile, the picture was no brighter for Turks and Muslims on the Greek side of the Aegean Sea, who faced an active campaign of forcible displacement and dispossession. (Karakasidou, 1997)

While this first attempt, and similar initiatives such as a proposed population exchange between Turkey and Bulgaria in 1913, failed, Özsu underlines that they ‘played an important role in the development of a corpus of legal precedents in respect to the management of large-scale displacement.’ (Özsu, 2014, p. 57)

The 1923 Population Exchange is also a clear example of the migration and population policies of the former Ottoman Empire being adopted by the new ruling elite in the Turkish Republic. As discussed previously, the migration policies of the Ottoman Empire changed dramatically during the final years of the empire, with the abandoning of imperialistic elements such as using displacement as a tool for colonisation. Instead, policies aimed at creating a Turkish and Muslim nation state in Anatolia were adopted. And, according to this agenda, Anatolian Greeks, as Armenians before them, had to leave. The newly established Turkish Republic clearly followed this formula. As will be discussed in the next section, policies in the Republic era were shaped primarily by the ethnic and religious backgrounds of the displaced groups, all with the aim of protecting the Muslim and Turkish nation state that had been made possible with the help of *Medz Yeghern* and the 1923 exchange.

Osman and his children had inherited, learned and benefited from the diverse religious and cultural state traditions of the Byzantine and Seljukian empires. As discussed above, these traditions had helped the Ottoman rulers to form a robust society that lasted for centuries. However, the ruling elite in the newly found Turkish Republic, the direct heir of the Ottoman Empire, inherited a trauma, with the decades-long wars on all fronts and massive displacements to, across and out of Anatolia

¹³ See (Dündar, 2008b), 2008 for a detailed account of secret Ottoman activities against the Greek population during this period.

leaving the new society in a state far distant from that of its ancestors and which can best be described as ‘deeply securitised’. (Abulof, 2014)

2.5. Republic Era

Population engineering and the related displacement policies were instrumental, as discussed earlier, in shaping the demographic structure of Anatolia. As the heart of the Ottoman Empire, Anatolia had hosted many different ethnic and religious communities during the final years of the empire. While some of these communities came or were brought to Anatolia because of Ottoman policies, many of them had been living there long before the Ottoman Empire was founded.

For the elites, it would not be possible to build a nation if Anatolia had to be shared with Greeks and Armenians, two socio-economically powerful, non-Muslim and non-Turkish groups. Their displacement, therefore, was a matter of the ‘national security of a future nation’. This nation state, the Turkish Republic, was thus shaped and built on the foundations of these experiences and learnings.

In 1934, almost ten years after the modern-day Turkish Republic was founded, the formative and turbulent century of Turkish migration policies finally ended with the adoption of the Resettlement Law. Seeing the forced displacement as an instrument and part of the policy toolbox for ensuring national security and solidifying the Turkish nation state thus became the core of the institutional approach that still prevails today.

The following section discusses the impact and results that the transformative years had on the migration policies of the modern-day Turkish Republic. These policies will be discussed by examining selected cases of forced migration and

highlighting certain common characteristics so as to provide a better understanding of them.

The 1934 Turkish Resettlement Law ('the 1934 Law')¹⁴ was not a revolutionary piece of legislation. As Jongerden notes, some elements of the Law represented a 'continuation of practices from the 1910s, the final years of the Ottoman period when nationalism had already occupied the political imagination.' (Jongerden, 2007, p. 178) But it was a period-defining law that provided a framework for 'homogenising' Anatolia.

A closer look at the 1934 Settlement Law reveals how legal categories were used to formalise and operationalise demographic engineering. Articles 3 and 4 differentiated between those who could be settled as "people of Turkish culture" and those deemed undesirable or harmful to national unity. Articles 6 and 7 granted the government broad powers to designate settlement zones and to move populations within and across these zones, turning internal relocation into a routine instrument of governance. Articles 9, 11 and 12 further detailed the conditions under which certain groups could be excluded from particular regions, have their settlements dissolved or be compelled to move. Taken together, these provisions created a legal architecture that normalised the selective inclusion, exclusion and displacement of groups on the basis of perceived cultural and security considerations (Ülker, 2008).

The 1934 Settlement Law must also be understood in conjunction with the 1928 Citizenship Law¹⁵, which defined who could belong to the political community and under what conditions. While citizenship was formally framed in territorial and legal terms, the implementation of both laws reflected and reinforced a hierarchy between groups considered fully compatible with the desired national identity and those viewed as suspect, expendable or only provisionally tolerated. The combination of

¹⁴ 1934 Turkish Resettlement Law (Law no: 2510) <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/arsiv/2733.pdf>.

¹⁵ 1928 Citizenship Law (Law No. 1312)

https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc006/kanuntbmmc006/kanuntbmmc00601312.pdf

citizenship rules and settlement powers allowed the state to shape not only who was recognised as a citizen, but also where citizens and non-citizens were allowed to live, work and reproduce their communities (Ülker, 2008). This legal framework laid important foundations for later regulations on foreigners, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons in Turkey.

The 1934 Law of the newly established Turkish Republic introduced an approach that was completely different from the migration policies of the Ottoman Empire. Aiming to increase the density of the 'culturally Turkish population' within the country's borders, Article 4 of the 1934 Law forbade people who did not belong to the Turkish culture, as well as anarchists, spies and gypsies, from emigrating to Turkey, while Article 10 designated 'zones' to Turkify and provided a legal basis for the government to forcibly displace minorities from these zones.

After *Medz Yeghern* and the 1923 Population Exchange, the Anatolian population became predominantly Muslim, increasing from 60% in the 1820s to 98% after 1923. (Jongerden, 2007; Zürcher, 1998) Having consolidated its power, the ruling elite of the Turkish Republic then decided it was time to deal with the Muslim, but non-Turkish minorities in the society. As well, therefore, as the Circassians, Albanians and Abkhazians, the 1934 Law targeted the Kurds.

Kurds had been exempted from being a 'national security issue' during the previous 'transformative period' for several reasons: while they were not ethnic Turks, they were predominantly Muslim and were not socially, politically or economically as powerful as the Armenians and Greeks. Initially, therefore, they were not seen as constituting a threat. However, this changed immediately after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, when their oppression by the Turkish ruling elite, which had been going on for decades, resulted in Kurds becoming one of the biggest populations of internally displaced persons in the world.

The Kurds, an ethnic group without a state, are currently estimated to number some 40 million people, mainly spread over four neighbouring countries: Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Kurdish independence movements against the Turkish (Turkey), Arab (Syria and Iraq) and Persian (Iran) states are often seen as a common threat by these countries and have been brutally suppressed for decades.

The Kurdish influx from Iraq to Turkey in 1991 is a clear example of human mobility being seen as a national security issue in the domain of forced migration policies. Afraid of any demographic changes in the region, the Turkish government initially did not open its borders to almost half a million Kurds fleeing Saddam Hussein and instead deployed security forces to prevent them from entering its territory. (Ihlamur-Öner, 2013, p. 197)

Just before the influx, the Ankara Branch Office of UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, emphasised that the Turkish government was highly likely to cite the 'ethno-national threat' as a reason for not opening its borders. (Long, 2010, p. 21) And although Turkey ultimately agreed to provide shelter following international pressure and assurances, it kept the refugees in camps established near the border and returned them as soon as the no-fly zone was announced.

As discussed in the previous sections, policymakers in the collapsing Ottoman Empire saw forced migration as a national security issue. Today's Republic has followed in the footsteps of the Ottoman elite by continuing to regard human mobility as being within the security domain. And like all security-related issues, it has to be managed by the bureaucracy and kept out of reach of political and public involvement.

A direct consequence of the state's understanding of forced migration as an issue to be dealt with in the security domain has been the tendency to create a legal and political vacuum. For decades, no comprehensive legislation or publicly available policy principles on the issue existed in the Turkish Republic. However, this certainly

did not mean an absence of policy on forced migration. On the contrary, policymaking and the managing of migration were simply left to bureaucratic elites and security forces, such as the police or coast guards, from the establishing of the Republic onwards. (Wissink & Ulusoy, 2016, p. 130)

I argue that this vacuum – which is intentional and relates to the experiences of the *Medz Yeghern* – has two purposes: an attempt to avoid guaranteeing any legal, political or socio-economic rights to forcibly displaced people in any future mass influxes and an attempt to protect policymakers against accountability. In the absence of defined migration policies and legislation on asylum and migration,¹⁶ this has meant that the state's response to the arrival of migrants would not be bound by existing national regulations and hence the state could not be held liable. This legal and political vacuum has thus enabled security concerns to prevail over human rights concerns. (Wissink & Ulusoy, 2016, p. 130)

This vacuum became especially visible in the late 1980s, on Turkey's western borders. In 1989, the Bulgarian government started to issue 3-month tourist visas to ethnic Turks in Bulgaria as part of its 'freedom of travel' campaign. This campaign resulted from ongoing unrest between the Bulgarian government and ethnic Turks, with around 300,000 ethnic Turks leaving Bulgaria in mid-1989. (Karpat, 2010, p. 408) This event, while being the biggest movement of people since the first decade of the Turkish Republic, did not trigger any internal policy or legislative action on the Turkish side. Although Bulgarian Turks were provided with initial support by humanitarian aid organisations in Turkey, no other systematic support was provided. (İçduygu et al., 2014, p. 154) In some cases it took decades for Bulgarian Turks to be naturalised and settled in Turkey. As Geray notes, (Geray, 1989, p. 11) 'the Turkish government just watched' the problems of migrants from a distance.

¹⁶ The first ever Turkish Law on Asylum was not introduced until 2014.

The traditional Turkish migration policy principles seemed to have changed in 2011, when the Turkish government adopted an open door policy for refugees from the Syrian Civil War. And although this policy was gradually phased out and Turkey ended up building a fence at the Syrian border to stop the influx, its initial welcoming of refugees from a neighbouring country with a significant Kurdish population and without any international pressure was quite surprising.

This should not come as a surprise, however, if we take into account how Turkish policymakers have seen forced migration as an instrument not only for use in internal affairs, but also in the foreign policy domain. As Okyay details, Turkish policymakers had two specific core interests (Okyay, 2017, p. 834): their interest in becoming an actor in a possible post-Assad regime in Syria and their interest in keeping Kurdish power in the region under control. While this marked a clear change in the longstanding anti-irredentist approach (Oran, 2004) in Turkish foreign policy, it also underlines how the policy elites saw the influx as a policy tool, with their aim being to use this 'opportunity' for political gains in the region and to take action against an existential threat.

The tendency to understand this policy approach as a bargaining or blackmailing strategy (Tsourapas, 2019) against 'western powers' may, therefore, be an oversimplification. The policies that Turkey and other countries in the region deployed for the Syrian refugees were all in line with their own political interests and histories. While they sought resources and support from the global north, these countries' main aim was to navigate through a highly complex, ethno-religious political environment.

The 2011 influx of Syrians thus highlighted an important characteristic of Turkish migration policy, and one operating within the dimensions of foreign policy. (Wissink & Ulusoy, 2016) It showcases how the Turkish elite understands and sees forced migration and displacement as elements that can be used in international relations, and this understanding probably stems from experiences during and after the Balkan

Wars, when the Ottoman Empire lost almost all its European territories (Rumelia), mainly due to the demographic structures in those regions. Ethnic Turks and Muslims were a minority in Rumelia and the Ottoman elites realised that 'mixing people', as they had done for the previous six hundred years, was not serving to secure the region.

Learning from the past experiences, the Turkish Republic followed an intentionally predictable foreign policy in the region until the early twenty-first century. The aim of this quite conservative foreign policy approach was to keep the current national borders intact (i.e. Turkey's own borders and also those of neighbouring countries such as Iraq, Iran and Syria) and not to encourage (or even discourage) minorities (including Turks) from mobilising in any way in the region.

This foreign policy approach is also useful for explaining why Turkey kept a low profile during the influx of Bulgarian Turks in 1989 and employed a strict containment and repatriation policy (Altıok & Tosun, 2020) in the 1991 influx of Iraqi Kurds: as both these influxes had the potential to cause further unrest among the region's minorities, the Turkish Republic intentionally sought to avoid triggering or encouraging the Turkish minority in Bulgaria and similarly Kurds in Turkey.

2.6. Conclusion

In 1923, the Ottoman Empire, which had been an absolute monarchy in which the Osman dynasty had held power for more than 600 years,¹⁷ was dissolved and succeeded by tens of new states from the Balkans to North Africa. However, it was the Turkish Republic that was regarded as the empire's direct heir. And while the Turkish Republic, as a secular, democratic¹⁸ nation state, contrasts quite starkly with its

¹⁷ The last Ottoman sultan, Mehmed VI (reign: 1918–1922), was a direct patrilineal descendant of the first Ottoman sultan, Osman I (d. 1323).

¹⁸ Initially one-party rule, which evolved into a multi party parliamentary democracy.

predecessor, we should keep in mind that the Republic inherited all the central governmental institutions of the empire.

Most importantly, those in the founding elite, as well as the newly established Turkish Republic's bureaucrats, were born, educated and trained in the Ottoman Empire. Almost all those people had been in the civil or military ranks of the empire during its final years. Soldiers had gained experience fighting in the Balkans, the Middle East and the Caucasus, while civil servants had witnessed the invasion of the then capital city, Istanbul. And most members of these elites had experienced the changes in migration and population policies, while sometimes also being involved in implementing or even initiating them. From that perspective, the transition and inspiration from the Ottoman policies are entirely natural and should not be seen as in any way surprising.

The formative years between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries fundamentally changed the understanding of human mobility among the elites of the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic. In navigating mass influxes to, across and out of Anatolia, policies became more security-oriented and aimed at creating a nation both ethnically and religiously homogenic.

For the past century, the elites in the Turkish Republic have followed in the footsteps of the state's founders. Highly alert to any forced migration issue and afraid of demographic changes in the country, they have adopted restrictive, security-oriented policies that, owing to the legal and political vacuum created, have seldomly been discussed by the public.

Today, Turkey's migration policies are studied in only limited contexts, such as in the context of the impact of the Europeanisation process or their position within the externalisation of European migration policies. While these are certainly very important and fundamental discussions, they do not include longitudinal perspectives in which experiences and ethno-religious aspects play significant roles.

This article set out to highlight how the migration policies of the modern-day Turkish Republic have been shaped not only by today's understandings, but also by yesterday's experiences. In other words, these modern-day policies carry with them the traumas of the past, which have been reshaped in reaction to current issues. Discussing these policies without considering the past will therefore result in only one-dimensional and misleading understandings.

03

Deep securitisation and asylum and migration system in Turkey

3.1. Introduction

In 2011, only a few weeks after the Syrian Civil War broke out, thousands of Syrian refugees came to the Turkish borders seeking shelter. Subsequently Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared an 'open door policy' for Syrian refugees. Refugee camps were established along the border for hundreds of thousands (soon to be millions) of refugees.

The Turkish response towards the Syrian refugees was surprising, given the fact that Turkey followed a very different policy towards more than 300,000 Iraqi Kurds who came to its borders fleeing from Saddam Hussein after a failed uprising in 1991. At that time, Turkey did not open the borders for Kurdish refugees for days. Moreover, even after opening the borders, under the pressure of the international community, it did not allow refugees to leave the heavily guarded camps and sent them back to Iraq as soon as it could.

However, the open-door policy in 2011 did not live long, and Turkey not only closed the borders but also built long fences along the Syrian border in the following period. Even more, Turkish army established a 'secure zone' within the Syrian territory to stop refugees entering Turkey and return the Syrian refugees in Turkey.

This short-lived open door policy is an ‘anomaly’ in the Turkish migration policy history and widely debated within the international politics, foreign policy as well as migration studies. Among several other explanations, the desecuritisation of forced migration during the first years of the AKP governments seen as the main cause of this anomaly by scholars.

While there is a general acceptance within the literature that de-securitisation process took place in Turkey between 2002-2011, these discussions are generally focusing on the Europeanisation aspect of the period. However, one must also take into account that, due to domestic and regional developments and political agenda of the AKP governments, human mobility and ethno-politics lost its prominent place in the security agenda of Turkey during this period.

On the other hand, Turkish society and the bureaucracy¹⁹ understands the human mobility and demographical changes as an existential threat since the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 (due to the traumas related to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire). Turkey is engulfed in a deep-securitization state within the forced migration domain since the establishment. Therefore the de-securitization process of the AKP government failed in 2011 with the Syrian refugee influx to Turkey.

This article seeks to explain the process and reasons behind the desecuritisation that occurred between 2002 and 2011, and its subsequent failure in the face of a crisis. This analysis is conducted within the framework of Uriel Abulof’s concept of deep securitisation, specifically applied to the Turkish context.

¹⁹ The tension between the AKP governments and the security bureaucracy continued until the second decade of the AKP rule when AKP, and Erdogan, could finally have the full control of the administration.

3.2. Legal framework and policy shifts before and after the Syrian crisis

The shifts described in this chapter were not only discursive but were also reflected in changes to the legal framework and in the everyday practice of migration governance. During the 2000s, a period often described more generally as one of de-securitisation and a decreasing prominence of ethnopolitics, successive reform packages and administrative changes moved Turkey's migration and asylum system closer to a civilian and more rights-oriented model (Pinar Bilgin, 2007; Tolay, 2012). The creation of a specialised migration administration, the gradual elaboration of procedures for international protection and efforts to align legislation with European standards all signalled a departure from an earlier, predominantly security-driven approach. These legal and institutional developments did not erase deep-seated anxieties about territory and population but they did create new spaces for treating asylum and migration as fields governed by administrative law rather than solely by security considerations.

The Syrian refugee crisis exposed both the possibilities and the limits of this de-securitising trend. On the one hand, the adoption of specific legal instruments for Syrians -most notably the temporary protection regime- formalised a commitment to providing protection and basic rights on a large scale²⁰. On the other hand, the implementation of these instruments and the subsequent adjustments to them, reflected a gradual return to framing large-scale human mobility as an existential threat. Restrictions on registration in certain provinces, the tightening of internal mobility, the increased use of administrative detention and deportation (ECRE, 2023,

²⁰ 'Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Interior Presidency of Migration Management - Temporary Protection in Law on Foreigners and International Protection', n.d. <<https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection-in-law-on-foreigners-and-international-protection>> [accessed 22 October 2025]

pp. 145–155) and a growing emphasis on public order and security concerns all point to a re-securitisation of migration governance in practice (Mert Pekşen, 2023).

These dynamics played out differently for **Syrians and non-Syrians**, who fall under distinct legal regimes. While Syrians were placed under temporary protection -with its own rights and limitations-, non-Syrians have had to navigate international protection procedures and other residence categories (Ineli-Ciger, 2017). The selective use of legal statuses and the differentiated access to rights and services that followed, will illustrate how the same deep-seated security concerns can be channelled through different legal pathways. By briefly tracing these institutional and practical shifts, the chapter shows that deep securitisation is not only visible in political discourse but is also embedded in legislation and administrative practice before and after the Syrian crisis.

3.3. Theoretical Framework: Migration, Security and the Securitization Theory

3.3.1. What was Securitisation, again?

In his book *People, States and Fear*, Barry Buzan compiles various definitions of security from scholars (Buzan, 1991). Among these definitions, one particularly striking perspective comes from Laurence Martin: “[Security is] the assurance of future well-being” (Martin, 1983). While this definition’s simplicity is elegant, it also conceals a potential danger; it is remarkably broad. The very expansiveness of the scholarly concept of security consistently adopted by the ruling elites to strategically frame and present specific issues as existential threats to their audiences. This process of framing and securitizing certain matters is known as the securitization process.

Balzacq (2010) defines securitisation as “*a set of interrelated practices, and the processes of their production, diffusion, and reception/translation that bring threats into being*” (Balzacq, 2010). The securitisation process takes an issue which is out of security domain and puts it in the security domain. Taking a non-security related topic and defining it, problematizing, analysing, discussing and finally formulating solutions for this topic in the security context is the very basic process of securitisation. After this process, once-upon-a-time non-security related topic can become and serve as an existential threat for the state.

Since the idea of security is defined in different ways in different societies within the societies’ own contexts, this definition is also open to change in time and circumstances. While this ‘broadening of the definition’ allows societies to mobilise their capacities and resources for the newly identified threat(s) to their *future well-being*, it also has the effect of militarisation of the responses and the *assurances*. Furthermore, securitisation process does not need address a societal need. As Wæver states “... something is a security problem when the elites declare it to be so” (Wæver, 1995).

3.3.2. Chicken & Egg vs the Securitisation & Desecuritisation

Defining desecuritisation process is less straightforward when compared to the securitisation process. However, interestingly, the securitisation theory was initially emerged in a desecuritisation period and according to Balzacq and Guzzini ‘*It all started with ‘desecuritisation’*’ (Balzacq & Guzzini, 2014).

According to Wæver, the core of the desecuritisation in the Central Europe during the end of the Cold War was the German *Ostpolitik* (Wæver, 1995). Starting from 1969, with the new German Chancellor Willy Brandt, the (western) German foreign policy took a new approach. Employing confidence-building measures such as signing of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and recognition of the boundaries which

were the result of the Second World War (Guzzini, 2015), German government succeeded to utilise diplomacy and politics rather than security-oriented competition. This move, according securitisation scholars, was an attempt to 'desecuritize' the Cold War divide in Europe (Balzacq & Guzzini, 2014; Guzzini, 2015; Wæver, 1995). Ultimately, the desecuritisation attempt of the Ostpolitik was successful according to Wæver. He notes that as a result of the Ostpolitik, Eastern European ruling elites limited their use of the security speech acts during the 1980s. This limitation contributed to the modification of the Eastern societies and systems which in the end made possible the radical changes of 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe (Wæver, 1995).

Following the historical development and example of the *Ostpolitik*, desecuritisation can be defined as removing a security-related issue from the security agenda of a society. The desecuritisation can take place by "shifting of issues out of emergency mode and into the normal bargaining processes of the political sphere" (Buzan, Wæver, et al., 1998). This very definition makes it very hard to trace and identify the desecuritisation process. The evidence that is needed to prove and analyse the desecuritisation process is the absence of act of speech itself. As Aras and Karakaya Polat describe it 'We need to see (or hear) nothing to suggest that an issue has been desecuritized.' (B. Aras & Karakaya Polat, 2008).

3.3.3. Deep Securitization

The concept

As the definition suggests, securitisation starts with a 'securitisation move' and that securitisation move requires a topic or a domain that was not in the realm of security before this securitisation move starts. Simply, an issue which is already in the security agenda of the society cannot be securitized. This issue does not need to be a security related issue in nature such as identity or religion.

But what if a non-security related issue engulfs a whole society as an “existential threat” in long term? Abulof (2014) starts from this question and introduces the term ‘deep securitisation’ (Abulof, 2014). According to Abulof, deep securitisation is the state of being of a society after a ‘prolonged and widespread public discourse on probable and protracted threats to the very existence of the nation/state’ (Abulof, 2014).

Drawing on the example of the Israeli State, Abulof contends that Jewish society grapples with what some term a ‘siege mentality.’ Specifically, the collective memory and trauma of the Holocaust have arguably fuelled a sense of collective angst (Abulof, 2014, p. 403). Despite their differences, both Israel and Turkey share common historical traumas from their formative periods, which significantly shaped their identities.

The Israeli state emerged after World War II, involving massive human mobility as hundreds of thousands of Jews migrated from various parts of the world, while Palestinians were uprooted from their own lands. In a parallel historical context, the conclusion of World War I saw a similar pattern of migration and displacement in Turkey. Millions of ethnic Turks, driven by the tides of war and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, relocated to Anatolia. This large-scale movement resulted in the displacement of millions of Armenians, Greeks, and other ethnic minorities who had previously called these lands home.

At the heart of both Israel and Turkey’s national narratives is the shared experience of migration to their respective ‘homelands.’ This migration was not a peaceful process but was accompanied by the upheaval and displacement of other ethnic groups. Both nations, in their formative years and even today, perceive themselves as being encircled by hostile forces.

This shared history of migration, displacement, and perceived external threats has significantly shaped the national identities and policies of both Israel and Turkey. It has influenced their domestic politics, their relationships with their neighbours, and their standing on the global stage.

The existential threat

When the concept of threat assumes such prominence, a natural question arises: What constitutes an existential threat? How does a mere “threat” permeate an entire society, and how do we discern when a society views it as existential?

This article argues that the answer lies in history. A society’s historical trajectory, particularly its struggles in nation-building and its collective responses to pivotal events, provides a crucial understanding—a kind of “blueprint”—of what that society perceives as an existential threat.

The process of becoming a nation, often mythologized in a society’s narrative, offers valuable insights into the challenges faced while forging a national consciousness (Anderson, 2016). For Turkey, the focal point of this discussion, attaining national consciousness did not hinge on a specific date or event, such as an independence war or a declaration of republic. Instead, it unfolded as a transformation from an imperialistic empire to a nation-state. The early decades of the 20th century witnessed the collapse of the multicultural and ethnically diverse Ottoman Empire, giving rise to the Turkish nation-state with its Sunni Muslim identity.

In essence, these historical processes illuminate how societies grapple with threats, adapt, and construct their identities in the face of existential challenges.

3.4. Methodology

3.4.1. Scope, time frame and data sources.

In this study, the Syrian refugee crisis serves as a focal point, with a particular emphasis on the de-securitisation efforts preceding it. The analysis is confined to the time span from 2002 to 2016, providing a structured framework for investigating the events and dynamics leading up to the crisis. The chosen timeframe allows for a comprehensive examination of the political, social, and international developments

that contributed to the de-securitisation process attempt and its failure, offering valuable insights into the complexities surrounding this critical period.

The data for this research was collected from secondary sources, including newspapers, official documents, scholarly articles, and reports from think tanks and research centers. As a first step to identify and understand the changes and motivations of the Turkish ruling elites, the author will examine the speeches of these individuals on human mobility, migration policies, and ethno-politics towards Syria.

A major daily Turkish newspaper, *Hürriyet*²¹, and its English version, *Hürriyet Daily News*²², archives between November 2002²³ and March 2016 are used for discourse analysis²⁴. The discourse analysis period starts in November 2002 with the election victory of the AKP and the establishment of the first AKP government. It includes the first major Syrian refugee influx to Turkey and the declaration of an 'open door' policy towards Syrian refugees by the Turkish authorities and ends with the EU-Turkey Statement when the open door policy and desecuritisation process became obsolete. The analysis aims to identify crucial points of change and evolutions of foreign policy approaches within the discourses of ruling elites.

3.4.2. Qualitative Historical Analysis

In this study, comprehensive analysis is conducted on historical developments within the political and governmental domains to understand the desecuritisation process that unfolded in the bilateral relations between Turkey and Syria. The analysis is confined to the period between 2002 and 2016, focusing specifically on Turkish

²¹ Hurriyet Newspaper; <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr>

²² Hurriyet Daily News [www. http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com](http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com)

²³ First AKP government formed by Abdullah Gul on 18 November 2002

²⁴ Key official documents, such as authorities' official calendars, meeting notes, press releases, and other related official documentation that documented the relations between 2002-2011 (prior to the Syrian refugee crisis), have been largely removed from the governmental websites in both Turkey and Syria. This removal of historical records from the public domain necessitated the author to resort to publicly accessible newspaper archives for research.

developments. Employing a qualitative historical analysis method, author aims to map these multifaceted developments and understand their influence on each other.

Historical researches focus on the cause and effect relationship between historical developments and aims to understand and interpret the outcomes in this context. As Thies (2002) notes, qualitative historical analysis method 'suggests an examination of the presence or absence of certain qualities or attributes in some phenomenon of interest' (Thies, 2002). Following Thies's definition, this article employs, qualitative historical analysis method together with the discourse analysis, in its examination of the presence (or absence) of certain qualities, namely *acts of speeches* of securitisation theory in bilateral relations between Turkey and Syria.

3.5. Turkey and deep securitization of human mobility

The following section aims to provide an overview of the complex history of human mobility within the borders of modern-day Turkey, with a particular focus on the profound societal and political impacts of two major forced population movements; Medz Yeghern (Armenian Genocide) and Greek-Turkish Population Exchange.

Since the establishment of the Republic in 1923, Turkey has grappled with the legacy of these forced displacements, which have become enshrined in the national psyche. The collective trauma experienced has influenced Turkey's stance on immigration, minority rights, and its own diaspora, shaping policies and public discourse alike.

And significantly, the securitization of human mobility in Turkey can be traced back to these events, which have introduced a persistent sense of vulnerability and defensiveness regarding population movements. The ruling elites' approach to

managing human mobility has often been characterized by stringent policies and a focus on national security, reflecting the enduring impact of historical traumas.

3.5.1. Historical Background

Anatolia has historically been a pivotal nexus for diverse empires, including the ancient Greeks, Byzantines, Persians, Seljuks and Ottomans. This region, rich in cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, has seen its rulers craft various strategies and policies to manage the migration and settlement of peoples.

The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire after the World War I, gave rise to numerous new nations stretching from the Balkans to North Africa. Among these, the Turkish Republic emerged as the principal successor. Despite its marked differences from the Empire, being a secular and democratic nation-state, the Republic inherited all the central administrative structures of its predecessor.

Crucially, the founding fathers and bureaucrats of the Turkish Republic were products of the Ottoman Empire, having been born, educated and trained within its system. These individuals held civil or military positions during the Empire's twilight years, with soldiers engaged in conflicts across the Balkans, Middle East and Caucasus, and civil servants bearing witness to the occupation of Istanbul. Many of these elites were not only observers but also architects and enforcers of the shifting migration and population policies. Thus, the continuity and influence of Ottoman policies on the Republic are both logical and unsurprising.

The period from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century was transformative in shaping the elite's perception of human mobility within the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic. Confronted with large-scale migrations into, out of, and through Anatolia, the policies evolved to prioritize security concerns and the formation of an ethnically and religiously homogeneous nation.

The Medz Yeghern was one of the most important forced displacement events in the early twentieth century and had profound impact on how society and policy makers saw human mobility from a purely security perspective.

From 1915 to 1917, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) orchestrated the forced displacement of Armenians to Syria, resulting in the deaths of 600,000 to 1.6 million people. This event not only represents a humanitarian catastrophe but also influenced international law, inspiring the term 'genocide.' The Medz Yeghern marked a departure from the Ottoman Empire's traditional migration policies, shifting towards nationalism and ethnic homogenization. This policy change, initiated during the Balkan Wars with the influx of Muslims to Anatolia, aimed to create a Turkish and Muslim nation, contrasting with the previous Ottoman concept of a nation composed of diverse ethnic and religious groups. These policies, established by the Ottoman elite, were inherited by the founding elite of the Turkish Republic.

1923 Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey is another pivotal event in the nation-building processes of Turkey. Following the First World War and the Greco-Turkish War, the exchange was formalized in Lausanne to relocate millions of ethnic Greeks from Turkey and Muslims from Greece, aiming to create ethnically homogeneous states. This exchange reflected a shift in the Ottoman Empire's migration policies towards nationalistic goals, a legacy continued by the Turkish Republic. The policy was part of broader demographic strategies, including the persecution of Armenians and Greeks in Anatolia and the displacement of Muslims in Greece. The exchange is seen as contributing to the Aegean's stability while nationalizing political structures and eliminating ethnic and religious diversity.

The ruling elite of the Turkish Republic, having consolidated its power, turned its attention to Muslim, non-Turkish minorities within society after the foundation of the Republic. The 1934 Law targeted groups such as the Circassians, Albanians, Abkhazians, and especially, Kurds. Initially, the Kurds were not considered a threat due to their distinct identity and relative lack of social, political, and economic power

within the Ottoman Empire. However, after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, their oppression by the ruling elite led to them becoming one of the largest populations of internally displaced persons globally.

The Kurds, an ethnic group without a state, number around 40 million people across neighbouring countries: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Kurdish independence movements have been suppressed by these countries, viewing them as a common threat. For instance, the influx of Kurds from Iraq to Turkey in 1991 exemplifies how human mobility can be perceived as a national security issue in forced migration policies, prompting the Turkish government to initially close its borders to prevent their entry.

3.5.2. Kurdish Refugee Crisis in 1991

The national security related fear and reluctance to lift the geographical limitation were obviously attached to the ethnic background of a possible refugee mass influx to Turkey. Having the biggest Kurdish population as the largest minority in Turkey and surrounded by the Kurdish populations in Syria, Iraq and Iran along its southern border, Turkish ruling elites long see the possible refugee influxes from these regions as a national security threat. Keeping the geographical limitation, in that sense, provided Turkish governments to avoid the responsibility under the 1951 Convention to possibly hosting these refugees.

This possibility actually realised in 1991 when hundreds of thousands Kurdish refugee poured to the Turkish border from North Iraq. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Kurds, afraid of Saddam Hussein's reprisal after a failed uprising and Halabja Massacre in their mind (where Hussein used chemical weapons and killed more than four thousand civilians in Halabja village in Iraq in 1988) left their homes and seek shelter in neighbouring countries. Seeing these refugees as a national security threat, Turkey closed the border, 'leaving the refugees stranded on the Turkish-Iraqi border'

(Long, 2012). Few of the Kurdish refugees were allowed to enter Turkey however they were treated as “guests” without any formal legal protection (Kirişci, 2014a). Long (2012) underlines that the border closure examples in history are ‘often motivated by fear about the demographic impact of an ethno-national refugee flow’ (Long, 2012). Turkish ruling elite in 1991, already identifying the human movements as a national security threat (Wissink & Ulusoy, 2016), reacted with security-driven reflexes and closed the borders causing up to a thousand Kurds die each day (Minorities at Risk Project, 2004). They were housed in south eastern Turkey and treated as “guests” without any formal legal protection

As a direct outcome of the 1991 Kurdish refugee crisis, Turkish authorities introduced the 1994 Regulation on Asylum.²⁵ It must be noted that the purpose of the 1994 Regulation was not safeguard the rights of refugees or fulfil the Turkish state’s obligations under the 1951 Convention. The regulation was aimed to take full control of the refugee determination process and limit the UNHCR’s involvement in the process (Kirişci, 2002). The 1994 Regulation on Asylum was the main legal document available until the new Law of Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) which was adopted in April 2013 and came in force one year later in 2014. While security and identity based concerns were the main casual factors of the 1994 Regulation on Asylum (İçduygu & Keyman, 2000), EU membership process and need to adopt the EU legislation was the driving force behind the new law (Soykan, 2012). The LFIP was welcomed positively by scholars as the rights and statues of refugees were guaranteed for the first time in Turkish asylum history (Soykan, 2012) and meeting the requirements of set by the EU (Kirişci, 2012). However the newly established Turkish and civilianised asylum and migration system faced an unexpected mass refugee influx starting 2011.

²⁵ Full name of the Regulation is The Regulation on the Procedures and Principles Related to Mass Influx and the Foreigners Arriving in Turkey either as Individuals or in Groups Wishing to Seek Asylum either from Turkey or Requesting Residence Permits with the Intention of Seeking Asylum from a Third Country.

3.5.3. Syrian Refugee Crisis in 2011

The Syrian Civil War in 2011 triggered one of the biggest human movements in recent history. More than 5 million Syrians became refugees in neighbouring countries and 7 million Syrians became IDPs (Internally Displaced People) since the start of the Civil War. This human movement caused humanitarian crisis not only in the neighbouring countries but also in the extended regions such as Europe.

Since the start of the Syrian Civil War, Turkey followed an unexpected policy towards Syrian refugees. The Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan declared an “open door policy” for Syrian refugees (Hürriyet DN, 2011) and since then more than 2.7 million Syrian refugees have sought shelter in Turkey (UNHCR, 2024). However, 20 years earlier, Turkey followed a totally different policy towards more than 400 thousand Kurds who came to its borders fleeing from Saddam Hussein. In 1991, Turkey did not open the borders for Kurdish refugees for days (Long, 2012). And even after opening the borders, under the pressure of the international community, it did not allow refugees to leave the heavily guarded camps and sent them back as soon as it could.

Scholars mainly attribute the significant change of the asylum and migration policies in Turkey to the ongoing Europeanisation process (Aydın & Kirişçi, 2013; Baklacioğlu, 2009). However, this may be over simplified and one-dimensional approach to understand the changes after the Syrian refugee crisis in 2011. While EU membership negotiations provided a suitable climate for change, developments at the individual and domestic level also directly affected the migration policies through desecuritisation. To understand the change in the migration policies in Turkey, especially its open door policy for the Syrian refugees in 2011, a more holistic approach is needed.

In May 2011, following the Arab Spring and the first signs of the civil war, first group of Syrian refugees arrived in Turkey. Initially the groups were small and some

returned back to Syria believing the situation was stabilised. At the end of the 2011 there were only 8.000 Syrian refugees in Turkey and still there were no sign of a mass influx (İçduygu, 2015). However starting from mid-2012, after the ceasefire talks collapsed between the opposition groups and the Syrian government, more than 20 thousand Syrians seek refuge in Turkey monthly (Baban et al., 2017; İçduygu, 2015).

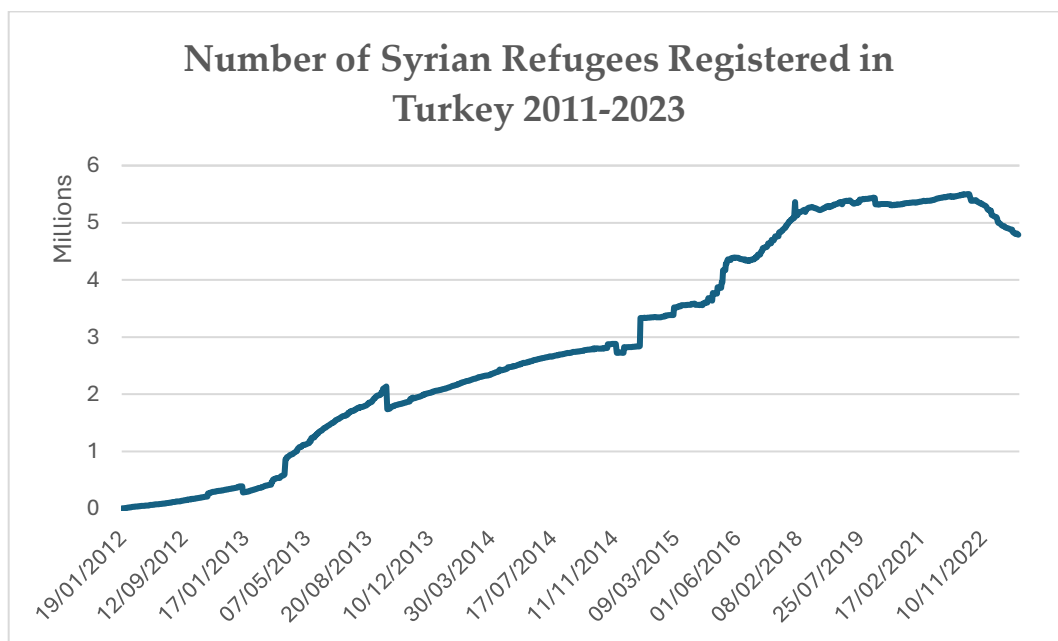


Figure 1: Number of Syrian Refugees Registered in Turkey 2011-2023. Source: (UNHCR, 2024)

Initially, the Turkish government hosted the refugees in camps near the border, a similar practice that was also witnessed in 1991 Kurdish Refugee Crisis. Furthermore Turkey also called the Syrian refugees as “guests”, as the Kurdish refugees back in 1991 (Kirişci, 2014a). Guest is a term which has no meaning or provides no guarantees in national or international law. However, the crucial difference between 1991 Kurdish influx and 2011 Syrian influx was the “open door” policy. As early as June 2011, just weeks after the first Syrian refugees arrived in Turkey, Erdoğan said “At this point, it is out of the question for us to close the doors.” (to the Syrian refugees) (Hürriyet DN, 2011). This position was repeated by senior governmental officials including Davutoğlu.

The open door policy was a significant change in Turkey's policy regarding mass influxes. As mentioned above, Turkish ruling elite, military and security circles long see the mass refugee influx from Southern neighbours as a national security threat. This perception is the primary factor in long standing geographical limitation to the 1951 Convention. And all of a sudden, while keeping the geographical limitation, Turkey opened its doors to Syrian refugees which is strikingly against (in the opposite direction of) the traditional Turkish foreign policies as well as migration and asylum policies.

There are different components and reasons for adopting the open door policy towards Syrian refugees in 2011. First one is Turkey's policy of grandeur (Demirtas-Bagdonas, 2014) or positioning itself as a saviour (Memisoglu & Ilgit, 2016). Efforts in constructing an image as a saviour are especially visible in Erdoğan's speeches where he asserts Turkey's moral superiority in responding the Syrian refugee crisis (Daily Sabah, 2015). Second reason is the initial hope among the Turkish elite that the Syrian Civil War would not last long and open door policy will have positive effect on the future of relations between Turkey and Syria (Memisoglu & Ilgit, 2016). Turkey's deputy prime minister Numan Kurtulmuş addresses this hope directly; 'Syrian refugees might be seen as a financial and social burden right now but they would be a subsection in Turkey's project of increasing the brotherhood ties and regional integration' (Hürriyet, 2015).

However, these reasons may be an outcome of a deeper element of the Turkish foreign policy which became prominent since 2002. Ruling elites speeches' and positioning themselves (and Turkey) as the natural leader of the region because of its geographical and cultural ties in the region, can be seen as an outcome of Neo-Ottomanism. As Memisoglu and Ilgit (2016) points out 'Turkish officials' persistent use of religious or cultural references in addressing the refugee crisis' (Memisoglu & Ilgit, 2016) while avoiding to mention the ethnic background of refugees is strikingly in line with the Neo-Ottomanist ideas of the ruling elite.

As an outcome of Neo-Ottomanism, idea of forging a union within the region based on religious and cultural ties, an ethnic based policy naturally had no space in Turkish foreign policies. Domestic developments such as the needs of economy and regional developments such as the *de facto* Kurdish independent state paired with the Neo-Ottomanist visions of the new Turkish elites. Subsequently, the mass influxes, once seen as a national security threat, became an issue of political domain.

3.5.4. The desecuritisation attempt

As mentioned in the theoretical framework section, desecuritisation is understood in this article as the broadening of the boundaries of normal politics (B. Aras & Karakaya Polat, 2008). While Wæver defines security as national security (Wæver, 1995) and securitisation as an act of speech, desecuritisation can be defined as the absence of the act of speech of an issue in the national security context. The evidence that is needed to prove and analyse the desecuritisation process is the absence of act of speech itself. As Aras and Karakaya Polat describe it 'We need to see (or hear) nothing to suggest that an issue has been desecuritised'(B. Aras & Karakaya Polat, 2008). In fact, the absence of phenomena poses challenges for data collection; one cannot easily identify and trace what is not said. The literature reveals(Hansen, 2012) two ways in which this can be dealt with: First, the absence of securitisation as an act of speech can be identified in comparison with earlier speeches that did give evidence of securitisation. Second, the rise of 'normal' topics in speeches, that is topics outside of the security realm, provides evidence for desecuritisation. In this way, the act of speech of the ruling elites is used to analyse the desecuritisation process.

Ahmet Davutoğlu has been a particularly important figure in the Turkish Foreign policy decision-making process since 2002. First as a theorist then as an advisor and finally as a decision maker, Davutoğlu not only influenced the policies but also shaped it from the first hand. It can be argued that his "*strategic depth*"

doctrine attempted to replace the Kemalist principles of the foreign policy during the first decade of the 2000s. And this doctrine includes a very important fact for the desecuritisation discussions of the Turkish foreign policy as well as the migration policies; his deprecation to the notion of nation-state (Murinson, 2006).

When Erdoğan became Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu became his chief advisor on foreign policy. However, Davutoğlu's role as an advisor was far beyond of providing day-to-day counsel to the newly appointed prime Minister. He became the *"source of strategic thinking and ideological support for the new foreign policy based on the Islamist roots of the current government."* (Murinson, 2006). Aras underlines the influence of Davutoğlu and notes that *"Davutoğlu's vision is likely to have a widespread impact on the culture of national security and geopolitics in Turkey" already in 2009.* (B. Aras, 2009) As a Neo-Ottomanist, Davutoğlu was more focused on Turkey's "soft power" rather than ethnic background related issues such as "Kurdish question" (Taşpınar, 2008). He welcomes a united Muslim "ummah"²⁶ and sees it as an ideal geopolitical structure (Murinson, 2006). Therefore it is not surprising that after the initial normalisation of relations between Turkey and Syria, Kurdish issue hardly find a place in both countries agenda during high level meetings of two countries' ruling elites. And when it [the Kurdish issue] was discussed, it was related to the territorial integrity of Iraq.

The summer of 2003, especially July 2003, witnessed the first steps of a significant change in the Turkey- Syria bilateral relations. After downgrading the tension on several topics, the Turkish and Syrian leaders focused on stabilising the relations and deepening the cooperation. The first signs of this new direction were already visible in the summer of 2003. During his visit, Syrian Prime Minister Mero agreed to open a Syrian Consulate in Gaziantep (a Turkish border city) and Turkish Defence Minister announced that the landmines between two countries would be cleaned (Hürriyet

²⁶ Ummah; (Arabic) People, community. Generally used as Muslim community. Oxford Dictionaries. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/umma>

DN, 2003a, 2003b). The landmines were placed more than 50 years ago. Similarly, local authorities and trade unions on both sides of the border held meetings and organised visits for further cooperation on tourism, trade and investment opportunities.

Following the normalisation steps between two countries, the AKP government's aspiration to become a peace-broker in the region deepened relations between Turkey and Syria. In his article '*Turkey's Mediation: Critical Reflections From the Field*', Davutoğlu who was foreign affairs advisor to Erdoğan at that time, gave a detailed account of Turkey's efforts previous to launching the indirect talks between Syria and Israel in 2008 (Davutoğlu, 2013). Already in the beginning of the 2004, while speeches of Abdullah Gül and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan mainly focused on economic relations between two countries, Erdoğan also voiced the possibility to be a mediator between Syria and Israel (Hürriyet, 2003; Hürriyet DN, 2004). As Davutoğlu recalls, the actual process and preparations for the mediation started as early as 2005, three years before it was publicly known (Davutoğlu, 2013).

Some scholars argue that the desecuritisation process of the Kurdish issue is an outcome of the EU membership process (B. Aras & Karakaya Polat, 2008; Çakmak, 2016). However, while this argument may be valid, it also underestimates the importance of developments at the individual and domestic level on policy decision making process.

Starting from 2004 leaders of both countries paid visits to each regularly. The Syrian Prime Minister Bashar al-Assad's visit in 2004 also facilitated the signing of a long waited bilateral trade agreement (Phillips, 2012) between two countries (Hürriyet DN, 2005). Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan returned al-Assad's visits in the following year. All visits were crowned with bilateral agreements between two countries. However, after Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's phone call to al-Assad in 2003, to thank Syria's cooperation in Turkey's fight against PKK, the Kurdish issue was practically out of the table between two countries. A problem which shaped two countries relations for decades and their foreign policies

were absent from their meeting notes all of a sudden. Remembering Aras and Karakaya Polat's description 'We need to see (or hear) nothing to suggest that an issue has been desecuritized.' (B. Aras & Karakaya Polat, 2008), we saw (and heard) nothing.

The desecuritisation of the Kurdish issue was not a strategic objective of Turkey's ruling elite, but rather a byproduct of their personal convictions. The ruling elites' decisions were heavily influenced by Neo-Ottomanist ideas, which prioritise the religious and cultural identities of societies over their ethnic backgrounds.

The adoption of Neo-Ottomanist ideas was not merely an ideological shift, but also a pragmatic choice for the ruling elites. This approach allowed them to navigate complex socio-political landscapes with greater flexibility. Historically, Turkey has adhered to a policy of non-intervention and passivity in the Middle East since the establishment of the Turkish Republic. However, this tradition encounters limitations when issues related to the Kurds or other ethnic groups are securitised.

By embracing Neo-Ottomanism, the Turkish ruling elites were able to successfully alter their foreign policy and desecuritize the Kurdish issue, albeit for a brief period.

3.6. The failure of de-securitisation and Deep Securitisation

The ethnic and religious diversity of the region, especially that of neighbouring countries, has been a crucial factor in shaping the policies and principles of the Turkish Republic. The so-called dual threats - political Islam and the Kurdish separatist movement (B. Aras & Karakaya Polat, 2008, p. 496) - have had a significant impact on Turkey's policy of non-intervention in the region and its diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries. Perceiving the region as a breeding ground for conflict (Dal, 2012, p. 247), the Turkish ruling elites harboured fears that religious and ethnic

conflicts in the region could overflow and destabilise Turkey. In a nation where approximately 18% of the population is of Kurdish descent, Kurdish movements in neighbouring countries such as Iraq and Syria were seen as a national security threat, even being labelled as a 'threat to the survival of the state' (Tank, 2005, p. 70).

On the other hand, the developments after 2002 at both the domestic and regional levels created an environment conducive to the desecuritisation of the Kurdish issue. This reduced the role of ethno-politics and reshaped Turkey's bilateral relations with Syria. The active and increased involvement of civil society in the foreign policymaking process, the influence of the EU membership process, and the combination of political stability with economic developments paved the way for a significant normalisation of the ethnic issue and a shift in how human mobility was perceived by the ruling elite. With this desecuritisation background, Turkey adopted a liberal approach towards border control and reception of refugees in the early stages of Syrian refugee influx, as discussed above.

Turkey's policy responses to the mass migration of Syrians can be summarized into four phases (Şahin-Mencütek et al., 2023, pp. 52–57). During the first phase between 2011 and to mid-2012 Turkey implemented an unconditional "open-door policy" welcoming all Syrian nationals fleeing from conflict. This policy was driven by domestic and foreign geopolitical policy concerns, such as presenting itself as a powerful country in the region and contributing to the solution of humanitarian problems through diplomacy. The open-door policy marked a significant departure from the closed-border approach that was witnessed just 20 years earlier at the Iraq border. Personally welcoming the Syrian refugees in Akçakale, a small town on the Turkish-Syrian border, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan wore Arab outfits while promising that the *"people of [Turkey and Syria] will walk together into the future, joining forces."* in 2012 (Hürriyet DN, 2012).

At the second phase (mid-2012 to mid-2015) the assertive foreign policy was replaced with internationalisation through diplomatic channels, particularly seeking

intervention from the UN Security Council. However, due to the failure of these attempts, Turkey's insulation increased, and isolationism started. İbrahim Kalın, foreign policy adviser to Erdogan famously used the phrase "*precious loneliness*" (Hürriyet DN, 2013) during this period, accepting the increasing isolation of Turkey in the international society. Furthermore, this period is characterized by a steady emergence of securitisation discourses due to the sheer volume of displaced people crossing the border. While the open-door policy officially continued, increased border security and construction of fences and walls (Hürriyet DN, 2015) along the Syrian-Turkish border aimed to curb the number of Syrian refugees entering Turkey.

With the third phase, between mid-2015 and 2019 the "open-door" policy gradually turned into a reluctant approach, and it evolved into deterrence and, in particular, return. The elements of the widely discussed EU-Turkey Statement in 2016 provides a better understanding of the period's priorities for Turkey; external financial and political support, tightening borders, deterring refugees and migrants from entering Turkey and the EU. Furthermore, the last part of the Statement provided a glimpse of the policy direction that Turkey aimed to take; establishing safe zones in northern Syria to return Syrian refugees.

And finally, the fourth phase, which commenced in 2019, was characterized by the prevalence of restrictive border policies and discourses centered on repatriation (Gökalp-Aras & Şahin-Mencütek, 2019). During this period, Turkey significantly tightened its border controls, adopted a range of new restrictive measures and initiated the construction of a 764-km "security wall" along its border with Syria. The declaration made by Erdoğan in mid-2017, stating that "*...Turkey will not allow the foundation of a Kurdish state on its southern [Syrian] border*" (Hürriyet DN, 2017), exemplifies the new approach adopted by the Turkish authorities during this period. The (official) end of the open-door policy and the return of the ethno-politics to the Turkish political scene occurred almost simultaneously. Erdoğan and the leaders of the AKP, moving themselves from the neo-Ottomanist discourses, forged a political

alliance with the ultra-nationalist party, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). As mentioned earlier, Neo-Ottomanism promoted the idea of forging a union within the region based on religious and cultural ties. Therefore, forming a political alliance with the state-centric MHP not only signalled the return of the ethno-politics to the political scene but also announced the end of the desecuritisation era. The traditional restrictive and security-oriented policy making approach was once again in power.

In the case of 2011 Syrian refugee influx, Turkey's response to mass influx was significantly different from the 1991 Kurdish influx. Turkey adopted an open door policy and provided shelter for millions of refugees from Syria. However, the collective traumas experienced during the formation of the modern Turkish Republic led both the public and policymakers to be deeply securitised and to view human mobility as potential sources of existential threats. This perspective was deeply ingrained in the national psyche and influenced the country's approach to regional politics and diplomacy for decades.

Highly alert to any forced migration issue and afraid of demographic changes in the country, the founding elite of the Turkish Republic adopted restrictive, security oriented policies. These measures were rarely subjected to public scrutiny or debate, largely due to a prevailing legal and political vacuum. This heightened state of securitization fostered an environment that made it exceedingly difficult, if not outright impossible, for any meaningful desecuritisation process to take root.

The AKP elites challenged the founding principles of the nation-state, which envisioned a Turkish and Sunni Muslim nation. However, these challenges were not widely embraced by the general populace. While Erdogan enjoyed extensive support in Turkey, the aspiration of him and other AKP elites for an ummah - a Muslim nation transcending ethnic boundaries - was seen as an existential threat by the society. The AKP government's attempts at desecuritisation encountered inherent limitations. These constraints became glaringly apparent when ethno-politics once again assumed a central role in the national and foreign political discourse.

Following a period characterised by desecuritisation and a decrease in the prominence of ethnopolitics, in the face of a crisis, the policies gradually reverted to their original state, framing human mobility towards Turkey as an existential threat once again. In this context, one could argue that a re-securitisation did not actually occur post-2011. Rather, the policy-making simply reverted to its default state of deep securitization.

04

Financing externalisation: The role that EU Funds Play in Shaping the Turkish Asylum and Migration Policies²⁷

4.1. Introduction

The financial instruments of the European Union, specifically the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT), have been significant tools in shaping Turkey's migration policies. Established as the financial instrument to deliver on the EU's commitment under the EU-Turkey Statement and with the primary objective of managing the refugee crisis, the FRIT has been instrumental in providing financial aid to Turkey, thereby influencing its approach towards migration and asylum policies.

Since 2015, the Syrian Civil War has led to a significant influx of refugees into Turkey, making it host to the largest refugee population in the world. This sudden and massive influx posed significant challenges to Turkey's existing migration and asylum framework, necessitating a comprehensive and effective response.

In this context, the FRIT emerged as a crucial mechanism after 2015, providing much-needed financial support to Turkey to manage the crisis. The funds from FRIT have been used in various sectors, such as education, health, infrastructure, and socio-

²⁷ This chapter is based on an article previously published as: O. Ulusoy, "Financing Externalisation: The Role That EU Funds Play in Shaping the Turkish Asylum and Migration Policies," *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies* 23(1) (2025): 91–103, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2024.2407156>

economic support for refugees. This has helped not only address the immediate needs of the refugees but also their long-term integration into Turkish society.

However, the impact of FRIT funds extends beyond immediate humanitarian assistance. It has significantly influenced the way Turkey formulates and implements its migration policies. The availability of FRIT funds has slowed down the development of long-term, structural policies and led to permanent temporariness (Şanlıer, 2023, p. 45).

Moreover, the FRIT has also influenced Turkey's cooperation with the European Union on migration issues. The EU-Turkey statement of 2016, which was hailed as a game-changer by Merkel, was aimed at ending irregular migration from Turkey to the EU and supporting Syrian refugees in Turkey (Dimitriadi et al., 2018). However, the statement did not provide migrants with decent and legal opportunities to move but rather changed the nature of cooperation between the EU and Turkey and legitimised migrants as a bargaining chip in international relations (Okay & Zaragoza-Cristiani, 2016).

This article aims to delve deeper into the impact of FRIT funds on Turkish migration policies. It seeks to explore how these funds have shaped Turkey's response to the refugee crisis, the changes that have been brought about in its migration and asylum policies, and the implications of these changes for the refugees and for Turkey. Through this exploration, the article hopes to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between international aid, national policies, and the lived realities of refugees.

This article will start by providing an overview of the migration policies in Turkey and the EU, as well as their relations since the 2000s. It will then detail the EU financial instruments in Turkey, including the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT), which is a mechanism for managing funding to support refugees and host

communities in Turkey. Finally, the article will discuss the impact of this assistance on the Turkish migration system, as well as on migrants and refugees in Turkey.

4.2. Methodology

This article is based on the analysis of documents and data collected during the ASILE H2020 research project between 2021 and 2022. The ASILE project²⁸ studies the interactions between emerging international protection systems and the United Nations Global Compact for Refugees (UN GCR), with a particular focus on the role of the European Union. Adopting an interdisciplinary perspective, it examines the characteristics of international and country-specific asylum governance instruments and arrangements and their compatibility with international and regional human rights and refugee laws.

Within the research project, the author was a member of a research team responsible for conducting the research on Turkey. Between June – October 2021, a total of 25 interviews were held with respondents working for governmental, international, and non-governmental organisations working on migration issues, and an in-depth literature review was conducted (Ovacik et al., 2022, p. 15).

Except for one, all interviews were conducted online due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic at the time of the research. Interviewees were selected from governmental, international and non-governmental organisations that have different degrees of involvement in the preparation and implementation of EU-Turkey Instruments on migration and asylum. Out of 25 interviews, nine respondents are

²⁸ <https://www.asileproject.eu/>

from governmental organisations, eight work in international organisations, and eight are involved in non-governmental organisations²⁹.

Official documents and press releases since the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement were the starting points for the document review. However, the most important and in-depth data was extracted from monitoring and financial audit reports of the (inter)governmental agencies involved in the financial aid. Finally, ever-growing academic literature focusing on the linkage between externalisation and financial aid was also included in the literature review.

The ASILE research on Turkey collected and analysed data focussing on the political, legal, and financial instruments and programmes through which the EU and Turkey have cooperated in the field of migration and asylum between 2015 and 2021. In this article, only financial instruments and their impact on the Turkish migration system will be discussed.

4.3. Turkish Migration and Asylum Policy History

In 1951, Turkey was one of the first nations to sign the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (hence, the 1951 Convention). Turkey not only actively participated in the drafting of the Convention (Weis, 1990) but also became a member of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (ExCom), which was established in 1958 by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) [Resolution 672 (XXV)]. The 1951 Convention was the first international agreement that defined the word "refugee" and outlined the rights and responsibilities of refugees and nations.

²⁹ A further detailed methodology on data collection during the Covid-19 pandemic period, complete questionnaire as well as the (anonymized) list of interviewees can be found on https://www.asileproject.eu/d5-2_wp5-turkey-country-report-final/

Turkey is one of four countries to retain the 'Geographical Limitation' clause of the 1951 Convention, despite having participated in the drafting and signing of the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol (Baban et al., 2017, p. 1). According to this clause, Turkey declares that it would extend its legal duties solely to "European asylum-seekers" under the 1951 Convention. Non-Europeans are granted temporary protection, but neither long-term residency nor refugee status is permitted in Turkey. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was charged with processing the asylum petitions of non-Europeans in Turkey and coordinating their relocation to third countries.

Turkey's reasons for maintaining the geographical restriction are multifaceted. The worry of a huge inflow threatening the economic and social-cultural structure of the south-east areas of Turkey is one of them, as is the "[Turkish officials'] fear Turkey becoming a dumping ground for irregular migrants apprehended in the European Union." (Kirişci, 2002, p. 20). Nonetheless, "national security" is perhaps the most crucial cause. According to Kirişci (Kirişci, 2002, p. 9), military and security circles in Turkey are adamantly opposed to lifting the territorial limits of the 1951 Convention.

The Turkish approach to national security may be understood in light of the nation-building process that began with the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 (Cizre, 2003; Karaosmanoglu, 2000). Greece claimed independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1822; nevertheless, the First World War (1914–1918) and the Greco–Turkish War (1919–1922) established the borders and the relations of modern-day Greece and Turkey. The population exchange between Turkey and Greece that followed the Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations, signed in Lausanne on January 30 1923, was one of the most defining events in the process of nation-building. The exchange entailed the deportation of Greeks from Anatolia to Greece and Greek Muslims to Turkey (Long, 2008). Clearly, the forced population exchange separated national security interests and human rights. Long (Long, 2008) underlines that important political elites viewed the exchange as a

contribution to the “long-term stability of the Aegean through the nationalisation of political power structures and hence the exclusion of diversity” as a result of the “unmixing of peoples.” The ‘successful’ execution of the Lausanne Treaty allowed the Turkish government to conduct nation-building reforms without the fear of internal minorities or external actions connected to their protection (Oran, 2007). Due to the intimate relationship between migration and national security issues (İçduygu & Aksel, 2013), the control of migration was delegated to bureaucratic elites and security forces, such as police and coast guards. In the absence of asylum and migration legislation, their responses to the entry of migrants would not be governed by current norms, and thus, they would not be accountable (Wissink & Ulusoy, 2016).

Turkey maintained this “legislative gap” until the mid-1990s, when two mass influxes forced Turkey to draft its first piece of legislation on asylum.

4.3.1. Transition Period: 1990s

Beginning in the 1990s, Turkey had two significant refugee influxes, one from Iraq and the other from the Balkans, as a result of the Yugoslavian Civil War (Kirişci, 2004). However, the Turkish government, consistent with its policy since the founding of the Turkish Republic, has resisted offering any long-term protection to these refugees and only granted ad hoc, temporary solutions. On the other hand, these two mass influxes, but especially the presence of the Iraqi Kurds, forced Turkey to draft its first asylum-related legislation piece (Wissink & Ulusoy, 2016).

The 1994 Regulation on Asylum is the first Turkish legal regulation drafted particularly for asylum-related concerns. With this law, the government formalised a procedure they had begun applying to non-European asylum seekers in July 1994. This was a significant departure from the former practice in which the UNHCR office in Ankara was the primary authority for determining the refugee status of non-Europeans (Kirişci, 2001, pp. 78–81).

Until 1994, the Turkish asylum policy was governed by the terms of the Law on Settlement (Number: 2510) and the Passport Law (Number: 5682), while the procedure for determining the refugee status of non-European asylum seekers was delegated to the UNHCR office in Ankara. With the implementation of the Asylum Regulation of 1994, a new system, known as the parallel procedure, began to be applied. Despite the absence of an express reference to UNHCR's participation in the rule, the whole procedure was dependent on UNHCR's refugee status determination (RSD) and resettlement efforts. In order to be eligible for resettlement in a third country, a non-European asylum seeker was required to register both with the Turkish government (police) and the UNHCR headquarters in Ankara. Prior to the implementation of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) in 2014, this notion of parallel process was the prevalent practice.

4.3.2. The Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP)

Since the turn of the century, the Turkish migration and asylum system has been undergoing a process of Europeanization. Adoption of the National Program of Action for the Adoption of the EU Acquis (NPAA) in 2001 and the National Action Plan for Asylum and Migration (NAP) in 2005 established a road map for the Turkish government to align its asylum policy and practice with EU standards.

The adoption of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) in 2013 was one of the most significant milestones of the Europeanisation of the Turkish asylum and migration system. This new law, in line with EU regulations, protected essential rights for asylum seekers and refugees in Turkey and cleared the way for the establishment of the Directorate General for Migration Administration (DGMM), a civilian organisation for the management of migration.

In fact, however, the approval of the new law and the establishment of a new civilian authority had minimal effect on migrant and refugee rights in Turkey. After

the enactment of the new law, geographical restrictions continued to be actively implemented. Non-European asylum seekers and refugees were again denied the chance of a long-term solution and placed in legal limbo since they were unable to get refugee status in Turkey and integrate into society due to the limitations.

DGMM, a newly constituted civilian organisation, critically lacked capability and knowledge. In May 2015, the organisation was formally created, and most of its staff had no prior expertise in migration and asylum concerns, while the majority of the remaining officials were from the Turkish Foreigners Police (Ulusoy, 2016). At the end of 2016, more than two years after the law and in the year that the EU-Turkey Statement was announced, supporting entities and processes, such as appeal committees and the country of origin information system, as well as secondary laws, were completely absent or were still in the process of being established (Ulusoy, 2016).

It is crucial to underline that the roadmaps, legislative drafting and adoption processes, and the establishment of the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) were all directly supported by the European Union. This support was not just symbolic but manifested in the form of substantial financial aid and technical assistance.

The Twinning Projects³⁰, in particular, played a pivotal role in shaping the migration and asylum system in Turkey during this period. These projects were not just short-term interventions but strategic initiatives aiming at long-term development and reform. They were instrumental in several key areas, including the development of a national asylum and migration strategy and integrated border management³¹. . Indeed, the majority of these projects had a far-reaching impact that extended beyond their immediate implementation period. Notably, unlike the financial aid provided

³⁰ Review of Twinning in Turkey: Annex to the Main Report. European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations. Last accessed on January 4, 2024; https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2019-01/annexes_to_final_report_review_of_twinning_turkey.pdf

³¹ One example of these project was the establishment of an Asylum and Country of Origin system, with the support of German, Swedish, Danish, and Dutch counterparts

after 2016, these projects were mainly focused on institution building rather than ‘containment’.

4.3.3. Post-Deal (2016 to 2023)

While the EU-Turkey Statement has been widely debated by the public since early 2016, discussions on a comprehensive readmission agreement between Turkey and the EU were initiated by the EU in November 2002 and were formally opened in May 2005³². After four rounds of official discussions, the negotiations were nonetheless stopped in December 2006, when the EU decided to suspend the opening of several chapters with Turkey (Kirişci, 2014b). In December 2009, parties returned to the negotiating table, and in June 2012, after three years of negotiations in Ankara and Brussels, a final document was developed and initiated³³. In December 2013, the final text of the agreement was signed in Ankara³⁴.

However, the long-expected and negotiated readmission agreement did not work as planned. Just like the 2001 Greek-Turkish Readmission Protocol that aimed at the same readmission programme before the agreement, there were no significant readmission practices until the March 2016 EU-Turkey Statement. The failure in practice had multiple reasons, ranging from the political unwillingness to technical difficulties (İçduygu & Aksel, 2014, pp. 350–356).

Just three years before the EU-Turkey Readmission agreement, in 2010, Greece and Turkey reactivated the 2001 readmission treaty they had previously signed. In January 2011, the first group of 40 refugees was readmitted to Turkey, with Greece

³² Proposal for a Council Decision of [...] concerning the conclusion of the Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Turkey on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation, COM/2012/0239 final-2012/0122 (NLE)

³³ Proposal for a Council Decision of [...] concerning the conclusion of the Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Turkey on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation, COM/2012/0239 final-2012/0122 (NLE)

³⁴ Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Turkey on the readmission of persons residing without authorization OJ L 134, 7.5.2014, p. 3–27 http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_internation/2014/252/oj

claiming that they were all Syrian nationals. However, the screening and identification procedure in Turkey following the group's readmission revealed that only three of the forty readmitted migrants were Syrian nationals, while the remainder were from various nations, including a Turkish national³⁵. This was the initial and final attempt to restart the official readmission process between Greece and Turkey.

In 2016, at the height of the extraordinary migration from Middle Eastern and African nations to Europe, European officials, under pressure from the new arrivals, decided to renegotiate the Readmission Agreement with Turkey. After numerous rounds of intense discussions, the EU and Turkey reached an agreement on major practical concerns to minimise irregular migration to the EU on March 18, 2016³⁶. The suggested instruments roughly fall into two categories: a) provisions on an enhanced version of the EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement and b) incentive features to encourage Turkey to sign and execute the deal (Gkliati, 2017, pp. 87–88).

As incentive measures for Turkey, the EU's allocation of substantial financing (up to 6 billion Euros) for refugees in Turkey, the acceleration of the visa liberalisation plan, and the revitalisation of EU membership negotiations were mentioned in the statement. The readmission agreement stipulates three operational steps as part of the 2016 EU-Turkey Agreement. First, Turkey is required to readmit any irregular migrants who crossed into Greece from Turkey. This requirement covers asylum applicants whose asylum petitions were pronounced inadmissible. The second is the relocation of Syrian refugees from Turkey to the European Union. EU is obligated to relocate the same number of Syrian refugees from Turkey as were repatriated from the Greek islands to Turkey, also known as the 1:1 scheme. After the irregular migration route between Turkey and Greece has been 'brought under control', the "Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme" would be launched as the third phase.

³⁵ Author's own account. Author was monitoring the readmission procedures on behalf of a NGO.

³⁶ European Council Press release, EU-Turkey statement, 18 March 2016;
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/>

Since the press release announcing the EU-Turkey Statement in Brussels, The Statement (or the Deal) has generally been seen as a 'questionable externalisation policy' (Andersen, Maria Kristine Kolding; Ferretti; Victor Andreas; Heimstad, 2020) of the European Union. Moreover, while the politicians and drafters of this statement hail the agreement as a successful, game-changer instrument to control irregular migration, the reality in the field is far from being a success.

The statement is criticised for its negative impact on the human rights of migrants and refugees (Ulusoy & Battjes, 2017), the degrading consequences on the international migration law (Helme, 2021), instrumentalising the migrant lives in international politics and policy-making (Carrera et al., 2017), and its self-proclaimed success, which has been questioned by recent research (Tinni et al., 2023).

4.4. EU Policies: From externalisation to asylum as containment

As Turkey's migration policies evolved after the 2000s, the European Union's approach to migration also underwent significant changes. This section explores how the shift from Europeanisation to externalisation within the EU's migration policies, particularly following the EU-Turkey Statement of 2016, reflects broader dynamics of Europeanisation and De-Europeanisation.

Europeanisation refers to the process by which EU norms, policies, and practices are transferred to and adopted by member states and third countries, aligning their domestic policies with EU standards (Lavenex & Uçarar, 2004; Sedelmeier, 2011). Initially, the EU's migration policy aimed to promote the adoption of these standards through instruments like readmission agreements, visa policies, and financial incentives, as part of a broader effort to ensure coherence and legitimacy within the Union.

The externalisation of EU migration policies refers to the strategy of transferring the management of migration to non-EU countries, with the aim of preventing irregular migrants and persons in need of international protection from accessing the territory of the Member States (Moreno-Lax & Lemberg-Pedersen, 2019; Santos Vara & Pascual Matellán, 2021; van Munster & Sterkx, 2006). While the concept is new, as Crisp (Crisp, 2020) underlines, ‘...*the strategy is not particularly new* and has examples since the Nazi regime in the 1930s.’

Initially, the EU’s migration policy aimed to promote the adoption of common standards through instruments, as part of a broader effort to ensure coherence and legitimacy within the EU (Oliveira Martins & Strange, 2019). However, over time, the EU’s strategy shifted towards externalisation—a policy approach where the management of migration is increasingly transferred to non-EU countries.

This shift is driven by the goal of preventing irregular migrants and asylum seekers from reaching EU territory, thereby securing the EU’s external borders. The externalisation approach, while embedded within the broader Europeanisation framework, marks a departure from promoting EU norms towards prioritizing border control and containment strategies.

The EU-Turkey Statement of 2016 is a key example of this shift. While it can be seen as an extension of Europeanisation—encouraging Turkey to adopt practices aligned with EU migration control—it also exemplifies the transactional nature of EU-Turkey relations, where financial incentives are used to secure cooperation on migration management. This reflects a move away from the deeper normative influence of Europeanisation toward a more pragmatic approach focused on immediate security concerns.

It is also important to underline that Europeanisation and externalisation are not necessarily opposites. They can go hand in hand as they are not mutually exclusive and often interact within the broader framework of EU migration governance. As we already experienced that the incentive for Turkey to adopt EU norms (Europeanisation) and externalisation of migration policies have historically worked

together. However, as mentioned above, the emphasis may have shifted in recent years. While the EU's focus on externalisation remains consistent, the importance placed on Turkey's adoption of EU norms appears to have lessened.

De-Europeanisation is evident in this context as Turkey's alignment with EU norms becomes increasingly selective. The transactional relationship fostered by the EU-Turkey Statement emphasizes containment over comprehensive integration and long-term structural alignment with EU standards. This selective Europeanisation undermines the EU's normative power, reducing the impetus for Turkey to adopt EU-driven reforms in areas like human rights and long-term refugee protection.

The externalisation of EU migration policies, while intended to ensure the functioning and legitimacy of the EU's internal migration policy, has been criticized for being inconsistent, ineffective, and detrimental to human rights (Moreno-Lax & Lemberg-Pedersen, 2019; Spijkerboer, 2018; Tinni et al., 2023; Topak & Vives, 2018).

The main criticisms of this approach can be categorized into four themes:

Lack of Coherence and Coordination: The various policy instruments and actors involved in the external dimension of migration often result in conflicting objectives and divergent interests.

Absence of Adequate Safeguards: The transfer of migration control to third countries frequently lacks necessary safeguards, leading to human rights violations, particularly in countries with weak governance.

Imbalance of Power: The power dynamics between the EU and its partner countries often result in the imposition of the EU's agenda without adequately considering the needs of third countries.

Securitisation and Politicisation of Migration: Migration is increasingly framed as a security threat, leading to policies that prioritize containment over the protection and integration of migrants and refugees.

While it was widely criticized, it also became one of the main aspects of the EU's external migration policy framework such as a) the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM)³⁷, which is the overarching framework for the EU's dialogue and cooperation with third countries on migration and asylum issues, b) the EU Agenda on Migration³⁸, which was adopted in 2015 in response to the migration crisis and aimed to provide a comprehensive and holistic approach to migration management, c) the Migration Partnership Framework, which was launched in 2016 as a new way of engaging with key third countries of origin and transit of migrants and finally d) the New Pact on Migration and Asylum³⁹, which was proposed in 2020 as a fresh start on migration in the EU, aiming to build on the previous initiatives and to address the gaps and shortcomings of the current system.

The ongoing evolution of the EU's external migration policies intensified and "...arguably constitutes the most dynamic strand of EU migration policy, especially since the 2015/2016 asylum crisis in Europe." (Niemann & Zaun, 2023, p. 2965). The EU-Turkey Statement can be seen as the 'blueprint' of this new path (Ineli-Ciger & Ulusoy, 2021), and the financial instruments accompanying the statement were the fundamental elements.

This approach, while effective in the short term, contributes to a process of de-Europeanisation by shifting the focus away from long-term normative goals and towards immediate security concerns.

This paper aims to contribute to the Europeanisation and De-Europeanisation literature by providing a critical analysis of the dynamic interplay between these processes in the context of EU-Turkey relations. It positions itself within the ongoing debate by illustrating how the EU's migration policies have evolved from promoting Europeanisation to prioritizing externalisation and containment.

³⁷ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0743>

³⁸ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52015AE4319>

³⁹ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/new-pact-migration-and-asylum_en

The EU-Turkey relationship, particularly post-2016, exemplifies a form of selective Europeanisation that emphasizes security and containment over deeper structural alignment with EU norms. This shift towards a transactional relationship represents a form of de-Europeanisation (A. Kaya, 2021), where the influence of EU norms is diminished in favor of pragmatic, short-term solutions.

By examining the impact of EU financial instruments, such as the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRiT), the following sections highlight the complexities and contradictions inherent in the EU's external migration policies.

4.5. Financial Instruments in Turkey

While collaboration between the EU and Turkey in the field of migration and asylum has a long history, the financial component of this cooperation has significantly increased and shifted since 2015. During the last decade, three major EU funding instruments, the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRiT), and the EU Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis (Madad Fund) have provided substantial funding for asylum and migration-related activities in Turkey. While one of these tools, IPA, was created before 2015, the other two are direct EU responses to the continuing refugee crisis in the region (Ovacik et al., 2022).

The Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) for Turkey was created by Council Regulation (EC) 1085/2006 on July 17 2006, and went into effect in January 2007⁴⁰. In an effort to match Turkish legislation and standards with those of the EU and to “increase the efficiency of the Community’s External Aid,” various current EU programmes and financial support mechanisms were replaced with a single legal framework and instrument. IPA I, which spanned the years 2007 to 2013, was planned

⁴⁰ Council Regulation (EC) No 1085/2006 of 17 July 2006 establishing an Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32006R1085&from=EN>

to give financial aid via five channels (also known as the “components”): transition support and institution building, cross-border cooperation, regional development, human resource development, and rural development⁴¹. Turkey was granted a total of 1,6 billion Euros. Between 2014 and 2020, the following instrument, IPA II, supplied Turkey with funds for capacity building in numerous areas in terms of EU acquis alignment and economic and social integration⁴².

With IPA II, the European Commission has adopted a sector-based framework as opposed to the previous IPA’s component-based structure. This funding sector has become the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT) following the October 2015 EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan. IPA II included funding for capacity building in the field of migration management, such as reception centres and the strengthening of the operational capacities of the Turkish Coast Guard.

The EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis (Madad Fund), established in December 2014, is a humanitarian aid tool for Syrian refugees and their host nations⁴³. The Madad Fund is backed by twenty-one EU member states, together with Turkey and the United Kingdom, and focuses on financing large-scale programs in education, health, socio-economic support, and infrastructure. In January 2022, the total contracted Madad Fund projects amounted to 2.4 billion Euros. As an interesting situation, Turkey is both a donor and a recipient country of the Madad Fund, and 730 million Euros was allocated to initiatives in Turkey concentrating on education, livelihoods, and health.

⁴¹ European Commission - Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/enlargement-policy/overview-instrument-pre-accession-assistance_en

⁴² European Commission, European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Turkey - financial assistance under IPA II https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/enlargement-policy/overview-instrument-pre-accession-assistance/turkey-financial-assistance-under-ipa-ii_en

⁴³ EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian crisis https://ec.europa.eu/trustfund-syria-region/index_en.

4.5.1. Facility for Refugees in Turkey

In October 2015, the EU and Turkey reached an agreement on a Joint Action Plan to “...intensify their support for Syrians under temporary protection and migratory management.”⁴⁴ One month later, in November 2015, within this scope of cooperation, the European Commission announced the establishment of the Refugee Facility for Turkey (later renamed Facility for Refugees in Turkey - FRiT).

The Facility offers “a framework to coordinate the mobilisation of resources made available under both the EU budget and extra contributions from Member States that are integrated into the EU budget as external allocated revenues.” Therefore, the Facility is not a fund in and of itself but rather a coordinating vehicle for resource mobilisation. The Facility encompasses humanitarian and development assistance, supported by several instruments—including the Humanitarian Aid Instrument (HUMA), the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), and the Instrument for Stability and Peace (IcSP)—all of which were consolidated under the umbrella of FRiT after the EU Turkey Statement in 2016. As previously stated, FRiT has a total budget of €6 billion divided into two tranches, and financed initiatives are categorised as humanitarian and development. In addition, the Facility defined six priority areas: humanitarian aid, education, health, municipal infrastructure, socio-economic assistance, and migratory management. Humanitarian help includes providing monthly monetary assistance through the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), as well as facilitating access to health care and education. On the other side, development projects strive to increase infrastructure and capacity through initiatives such as the building of schools and health facilities as well as vocational training and skill development.

The first tranche of €3 billion contracted between 2016 and 2017 included about €1.4 billion for humanitarian aid and approximately €1.6 billion for development-

⁴⁴ European Commission, Fact Sheet – EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan, Brussels, 15 October 2015, <http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-15-5860_en.htm>.

related measures. During the second tranche, the amount committed to development measures climbed substantially to €2 billion, while the amount allocated to humanitarian operations was reduced to €1 billion. Within the FRiT framework, 105 projects or activities were financed in two tranches. Sixty-two of these were classified as “Humanitarian” and 43 as “Development” (European Commission, 2023).

In addition, about half of the available cash under FRiT Tranche 1 was allocated to the initiatives of UN Agencies, such as WFP, UNHCR, and UNICEF. However, during the second tranche, the share of the UN Agencies drastically fell while the foreign organisations (such as the Red Cross), international financial institutions (World Bank) and Turkish authorities (Ministry of National Education) got the main portion of the financing⁴⁵.

The “speed” of the FRiT’s implementation and the concentration of financed groups generated significant challenges concerning transparency, accountability, and the delivery of promised outcomes (Ovacik et al., 2022).

Interviewees emphasized the limited information available during the preparation stage of the FRiT. The majority expressed negative views regarding the overall transparency of the Instrument. For example, Interviewee 12, an international organization representative, asserted that there was a significant lack of transparency related to the design of the FRiT, which they attributed to a political decision driven by the pressure on the parties to act quickly. The focus of the FRiT was not transparent and was not readily available to their organisation or the broader community in Turkey. Information was obtained on an ad-hoc basis, rather than in a systematic and structured manner. This lack of transparency was a source of frustration, as their feedback was not considered, and the only information accessible was what they could find on the website. During the first tranche of the FRiT, the European Union financed two large initiatives under the priority area of migration management. With a combined budget of €80 million, these two initiatives were crucial to executing the

⁴⁵ List of projects funded by the Facility for Refugees in Turkey, as of 28 October 2023: <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/document/download/49484102-739e-407f-888d-fa7d2dc33879>

EU-Turkey Statement from March 2016. The first of the two migration management projects is named “Support to the Implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement of March 18 2016”, executed by the Turkish Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) with a claimed budget of €60 million. The stated goal of the initiative was to “...assist Turkey in the management, receiving, and hosting of migrants, particularly irregular migrants found in Turkey and migrants repatriated from EU Member State territories to Turkey.”

The project comprised the building of a new temporary removal facility, the relocation of irregular migrants and Syrian refugees within Turkey, and the expansion of DGMM’s capability in the area of irregular migration. Due to the limited number of readmissions from Greece to Turkey under the EU Turkey Statement, just one “container” centre with a capacity of 750 was constructed in Cankiri, Turkey. The funding was also intended to support “hosting and accommodating” irregular migrants in “appropriate conditions” by providing financial support for basic health care services, psycho-social services, translation services, food, hygiene, and other facilities essential to daily life and facility security. Lastly, financing was made available to support and expand GO-NET (the Turkish government’s database for migration management) with a database for irregular migration.

The second project was undertaken by IOM in collaboration with the Turkish Coast Guard (TCG) Command and is titled “Improving the Turkish Coast Guard’s Capability to Conduct Search and Rescue Operations.” With a budget of €20 million, the project involved the acquisition of six search and rescue vessels for the TCG, training for TCG personnel, and psychological assistance for TCG personnel to prevent burnout.

4.5.2. The impact

The EU has been the main donor of humanitarian and development assistance to Turkey, especially in response to the Syrian refugee crisis and allocated €6 billion

under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRiT) to support the basic needs, education, health, socio-economic integration and protection of refugees and host communities as detailed above. These instruments have positively improved the living conditions, access to services and social cohesion of refugees and asylum seekers. Innovative and large-scale projects such as ESSN became a lifeline for many and lowered the pressure on local and national governments.

However, the EU's financial mechanism also has significant challenges and negative impacts. These problems are directly connected to the way they were designed and implemented.

As underlined in a report by the European Court of Auditors (ECA), the contracting speed of the Facility compared to other EU Trust Funds is significant (European Court of Auditors, 2018, p. 49). The first tranche of the FRiT, €3 billion, was successfully distributed and made available to the implementers in less than two years. While this fast-forward approach can be justified as it was needed to distribute much-needed aid in the field as soon as possible, this speed also led to a centred decision-making process that excluded many actors and partners. This exclusion led to the limited involvement of civil society and local actors in the design, implementation, and monitoring of the EU-funded projects in Turkey, which reduced the interventions' ownership, sustainability, and accountability.

Indeed, almost all interviewed civil society representatives underlined that their involvement in the designing period of the funding mechanism and guidelines was very limited. According to an international aid organisation representative⁴⁶, in some cases, the implementing institution was pre-determined at the planning phase (Ovacik et al., 2022, p. 36). There is a need for a more participatory and inclusive approach to ensure the representation and empowerment of refugees and asylum seekers, as well as the local authorities and communities, in the decision-making and implementation processes of the EU-funded projects.

⁴⁶ Interviewee TR14, (Ovacik et al., 2022, p. 36)

Another concern is the significant lack of internal monitoring and accountability mechanisms associated with these funds. While national authorities⁴⁷ emphasize the existence of national accountability procedures to address potential violations, an international organization representative⁴⁸ highlighted the absence of a specific system tied directly to EU funding. Both international organizations and civil society representatives⁴⁹ have noted this gap, explaining that they rely on legal, formal, and informal follow-up through trust relationships at the local level. However, as an international civil society practitioner pointed out, because their work focuses on individual refugees rather than systemic issues, they lack direct communication channels with higher authorities to report potential human rights violations. Consequently, these violations or complaints are not systematically reported or addressed. However, the most critical impact of the EU's financial instruments in Turkey has been on the evolution of the Turkish migration and asylum system. As discussed in the previous sections, before the 2015/2016 crisis, Turkey and the EU had some cooperation - albeit slowed down- on issues such as migration management, visa liberalisation, readmission, and resettlement. On the other hand, after the 2016 deal, the nature of the relationship changed from a partnership to a transactional one, where the EU prioritised the containment and deterrence of irregular migration flows over the protection and integration of refugees and asylum seekers (Ovacik et al., 2022; Şanlıer, 2023; Tinni et al., 2023). An interviewee from an international organization described border management as a significant component of both IPA and FRIT, emphasizing that these instruments do not contribute to mobility. They further argued that, in pursuit of containment, the EU is employing a more subtle approach by outsourcing migration control, rather than simply erecting physical barriers⁵⁰. As

⁴⁷ Interviewees TR4; TR7; TR9 ((National and Migration Practitioners).

⁴⁸ Interviewee TR12, (Ovacik et al., 2022, p. 41)

⁴⁹ Interviewees TR18; TR20; TR21; TR22 (Civil Society Practitioners).

⁵⁰ Interviewee TR12, (Ovacik et al., 2022, p. 53)

another interviewee underlined, “...although the [financial] instruments have containment purpose, it is not spoken of to avoid being politically incorrect”⁵¹.

Naturally, this shift undermined Turkey's incentives and prospects to adopt and implement the EU standards and norms on asylum and migration. It reduced the EU's credibility as a human rights actor (van Heukelingen, 2021). As Kaya underlines, “the EU–Turkey Statement is therefore rather an indication of Turkey's de-Europeanization process” (A. Kaya, 2021, p. 366).

4.6. Conclusion

The European Union's financial instruments, particularly the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT), have played a pivotal role in shaping Turkey's migration and asylum policies in the wake of the Syrian refugee crisis. This paper has explored how these financial mechanisms, established as part of the EU-Turkey Statement of 2016, have not only provided essential humanitarian assistance but have also significantly influenced Turkey's broader migration management strategies. The findings indicate that while FRIT and similar instruments have been instrumental in addressing the immediate needs of refugees, they have also contributed to complex and sometimes unintended consequences in Turkey's migration governance.

One of the critical observations is the shift from a cooperative Europeanisation framework to a more transactional relationship between the EU and Turkey, focused on externalisation and the containment of migration. This shift reflects a broader trend where the EU's normative influence has been partially supplanted by pragmatic, short-term objectives. The reliance on financial incentives to secure Turkey's cooperation has, in many ways, led to selective Europeanisation, where only certain

⁵¹ Interviewee TR16, (Ovacik et al., 2022, p. 53)

aspects of EU norms are adopted, while others, particularly those related to human rights and long-term integration, are neglected.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals that the influx of EU funds has, paradoxically, slowed down the development of long-term structural migration policies in Turkey. The availability of substantial financial resources has encouraged a reliance on temporary measures and ad hoc solutions, rather than fostering comprehensive, sustainable policy reforms. This has led to a state of "permanent temporariness," where both refugees and the Turkish migration system are caught in a cycle of short-term fixes without meaningful progress towards lasting solutions.

The lack of robust internal monitoring and accountability mechanisms tied to EU funding has further complicated the situation. While national authorities assert the presence of accountability systems, the absence of specific mechanisms linked to EU funds has been a significant gap, as highlighted by both international and civil society organizations. This deficiency undermines the effectiveness of the financial support provided and raises concerns about the protection of human rights within the framework of these migration management strategies.

In summary, this paper underscores the dual-edged nature of the EU's financial intervention in Turkey's migration crisis. While it has undoubtedly provided much-needed support, it has also reinforced a policy environment that prioritizes containment over integration, and short-term gains over long-term sustainability. The findings suggest that for EU-Turkey cooperation on migration to be truly effective, it must move beyond the current transactional model towards a more holistic approach that balances immediate needs with the development of durable, rights-based migration policies. Only then can the EU and Turkey achieve a migration management system that is both effective and just, serving the interests of all stakeholders, with a primary focus on the people on the move.

05

Border policies and migrant deaths at the Turkish-Greek border⁵²

5.1. Introduction

On March 18, 2016, the European Council and the Turkish authorities released a Statement⁵³ indicating their willingness to increase cooperation to stop irregular migration to Europe. In order “to offer migrants an alternative to putting their lives at risk and break the business model of the smugglers”, member states of the EU and Turkey agreed several action points that became known as the ‘EU-Turkey deal’. These included the provision that all irregular migrants and rejected asylum-seekers arriving in the Greek islands after the cut-off date of 20 March would be returned to Turkey; that for every Syrian returned from Greece another would be resettled directly from Turkey to the EU (with a complex proviso that initially 18,000 would be resettled, followed by potentially another 54,000); and that Turkey would take measures to prevent all irregular migration from Turkey to the EU. The series of meetings that led to this Statement were a response to an ongoing human crisis taking place in the Aegean Sea since the spring of 2015. In 2015 alone, more than 850,000 irregular migrants arrived on Greek islands from Turkey – a sharp increase from

⁵² This chapter is based on an article previously published as: O. Ulusoy, M. Baldwin-Edwards and T. Last, “Border policies and migrant deaths at the Turkish-Greek border,” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 60 (2019): 3–32, <https://doi.org/10.1017/npt.2019.2>. The author, as first author, was responsible for the development of the article, the design of the methodology and the preparation of the initial draft.

⁵³ European Council, *Press Release; EU-Turkey Statement*, 18 March 2016; accessed 3 April 2024, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement>

41,000 in 2014.⁵⁴ Over the same period, more than 800 lost their lives in the Aegean Sea.⁵⁵ 2015 was the deadliest year on record for migrants and refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

The Statement was widely criticized by scholars as representing more of the same disastrous policy-making that created the crisis in the first place (Carrera et al., 2017; Gatti, 2016; Heijer & Spijkerboer, 2016; Roman & Peers, 2016; Ulusoy, 2016; Ulusoy & Battjes, 2017); however, it was hailed as a game changer by politicians and policy makers.⁵⁶ The divergence in reactions to such a development reflects the fundamental difference in understanding of the relationship between policy and deaths that Last identifies in her PhD research (Last, 2018). As Last (Last, 2018) underlines, *“the differences between the understandings of academics and policy-makers relate primarily to control over... the relationship between policies and irregular migration/smuggling”*. While academics argue that irregular migrants die at the borders because of restrictive policies that forced them into irregular travel, policy makers, on the other hand, understand that deaths occur because people try to enter without authorization. Additionally, while academics claim that more border controls increase the risks of irregular travel, policy makers argue that more deaths occur because smugglers act ruthlessly. This is a pattern that long pre-dates the EU-Turkey Statement and relates to academic and policy makers’ reactions to EU border deaths in general, not only those along the Greek-Turkish border. Similarly, Baldwin-Edwards et al. (Baldwin-Edwards et al., 2018) note the massive gap between the highly politicized

⁵⁴ UNHCR, Operational Data Portal Mediterranean Situation/Greece, accessed 15 March 2024, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179>

⁵⁵ IOM, “IOM Counts 3,771 Migrant Fatalities in Mediterranean in 2015”; accessed 3 April 2024 [migrant-fatalities-mediterranean-2015](#)

⁵⁶ European Commission, *EU-Turkey Statement; One Year On*. Accessed 4 April 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2017-03/eu_turkey_statement_17032017_en.pdf ; Hortense Goulard, “Angela Merkel: EU’s Turkey deal a model for North African countries,” *Politico*, 4 April 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/angela-merkel-wants-refugee-migration-deals-with-northern-african-countries-migrants-migration-turkey/>

context of policy-making and the positivist, empiricist worldview of research-led evidence-based policy-making.

While the contemporary discussions on the deaths of migrants in the Aegean Sea are generally focused on the EU-Turkey Statement – notably, its positive and negative effects on migrants, routes, political fallouts and possible future policy directions (Niemann & Zaun, 2018) – little attention is paid to the pre-Statement period.⁵⁷ Furthermore, these policies are mainly discussed from a European viewpoint and within a Europeanisation and securitization perspective among scholars (N. E. G. Aras, 2013; Biehl, 2009; Toğral, 2012). Thus, author's starting point is the conviction that not only EU but also Turkish migration policies and border practices in Greece must be examined over a longer period to understand the development of the situation and the effect of these policies on deaths along the Greek-Turkish border, including during the “crisis” of 2015-2016.

While the 2015-2016 “crisis” was a tragic period that cost many lives, we argue that it is not an isolated or ‘one of a kind’ event. It is, rather, another peak-point in an ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Aegean Sea. As discussed in the following section, increasingly migrants and asylum seekers became stuck in Turkey without legal channels for resettlement to a third country or integration within Turkey. These changes created a sizeable desperate population in Turkey living in legal and social limbo. Previously, this migrant population could be absorbed by the informal economy in Turkey while it was booming. However, when the economy stalled and Syrian refugees arrived en masse after 2011, the migrant population in Turkey lost much of their means of survival and added extra layer of pressure to their already

⁵⁷ With respect to the Greek-Turkish border, notable exceptions are: Martin Baldwin-Edwards, “Migration between Greece and Turkey: From the ‘Exchange of Populations’ to the non-recognition of borders,” *SEER - South-East Europe Review for Labour and Social Affairs* 9, no. 3 (2006): 115–122 www.jstor.org/stable/43293176; Vassilis Tsianos and Serhat Karakaytali, “Transnational Migration and the Emergence of the European Border Regime,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 13, no. 3 (2010): 373–387; Polly Pallister-Wilkins, “The Humanitarian Politics of European Border Policing: Frontex and Border Police in Evros,” *International Political Sociology* 9 (2015): 53–69.

existing precarious (Toksöz, 2018) living and working conditions. This phenomenon has also been observed in the cases of Greece (Baldwin-Edwards et al., 2015) and Spain (Baldwin-Edwards, 2014b), after the imposition of harsh austerity economics within the eurozone crisis – that is, contraction of the informal sector, a resulting unemployment of (irregular) immigrant workers, and ultimately the exodus of a large proportion of the migrant population.

At the same time, the border management practices on the Turkish-Greek border became more restrictive relative to the prior two decades. The arrival of FRONTEX on the Turkish-Greek border in 2006 deeply affected the routes and border crossings between Turkey and Greece. Contrary to the official arguments of EU policy makers and officials, stricter border controls employed by the FRONTEX operations did not ‘stop’ or reduce the irregular crossings from Turkey to Greece. As is discussed below, the routes simply shifted with the FRONTEX operations – first to the sea borders in 2008 (North Aegean region), back to the land border (River Evros) in 2010 with massively increased inflows, and finally (after extensive operations on the land border), back to the sea border in 2013 and thereafter. Despite the “modernization” of Greek border practices – in particular, the removal of landmines in the Evros region by end-2009 – the rate of border deaths actually increased. This is attributed to the greater difficulty in crossing the border, and new dangerous practices used by smugglers and migrants to circumvent changed border management. FRONTEX interventions and assistance to Greece increased the death risks for irregular border crossings, while taking no account of the vulnerability of refugees and other migrants, and failing to engage with the anticipated mass inflow of Syrian refugees that eventually occurred in 2015.

The overarching question investigated in this article is: “What implications have migration and border management policies had for deaths along the EU-Greek-Turkish border?” We first explore the development of Turkish migration management policy leading up to the crisis – taking into account the influence of Turkish accession

to the EU on migration governance and the moderating effects of the Turkish labor market – in an attempt to explain how a particular group of people were exposed to the fatal risks of crossing the Greek-Turkish border. Secondly, we examine border management practices along the physical border – including the Greek government’s anti-smuggling apparatus and the multiple FRONTEX operations – to highlight factors that have contributed to heightening the fatal risks associated with crossing this border irregularly. Finally, we draw these two pieces of the picture together in a discussion of the ‘border deaths’ recorded in Greece by the Deaths at the Borders Database.

5.2. Methodology

This paper presents empirical material from a variety of distinct research projects. The sources and research methods are briefly introduced here for the benefit of the paper; more detailed methodology is available elsewhere (Last et al., 2017; Schaub, 2013).

The section on development of Turkish migration management policy is based on a comprehensive review of relevant policies from 2000 to the EU-Turkey statement in 2016, on the grounds that prior to 2000 there was little, if any, development in this field. Migration management became a popular concept in the 1990s to address observed changes in the form and governance of migration (Kirişci, 2005). The working definition of ‘migration management policies’, for the purposes of this review, includes policies that seek to control, prevent or manage migration before-the-border, at-the-border and after-the-border. In the Turkish context, this comprised entry and visa requirements, border control measures to prevent illegal entry or exit, detention, readmission agreements and deportation regulations. Policies selected as relevant to migration management were mapped on a timeline, which was analyzed using the academic literature on Turkish migration policy to identify the developmental stages presented in the paper.

In the section on border management in Greece, information on people smuggling from Turkey to Greece is derived from interviews conducted by Max Schaub in Greece in 2012 and by Martin Baldwin-Edwards in Athens in November–December 2012 with a number of persons involved with the smuggling business.⁵⁸ The material presented on FRONTEX operations is derived from the agency website and secondary literature as cited. Unlike the previous section, the discussion of border management practices in Greece does not purport to present a comprehensive overview but instead highlights the conception and impact of EU and national border operations in relation to the nature of irregular migration and smuggling across the Turkish-Greek border, prior to the 2015-2016 “crisis”.

The final section on the relation between migration or border management and border deaths relies on the Deaths at the Borders Database (DatBD). The DatBD is the first ‘evidence-base’ of official records of persons who died attempting to cross the southern EU external borders whose bodies were managed in EU Member States (Last et al., 2017). Data were collected from municipal civil registries, cemeteries and coroners’ archives in 2014 and compiled into anonymized, individualized records comprised of 41 variables of procedural and personal information. The database is available open source online, along with summarized and detailed versions of the methodology behind it.⁵⁹ DatBD covers all bodies found on the Greek side of the Turkish-Greek land and sea borders (part of the EU external borders) for the period 1990-2013. Analysis has shown that no source of EU border death data is reliable for mapping trends in deaths or mortality rates over time (Last, 2018), but DatBD represents the minimum number of confirmed deaths that occurred during this period and provides food for thought for the purposes of this article.

⁵⁸ The interviews conducted by Baldwin-Edwards were within a framework of confidential government advisory services concerning irregular migration into Greece over the period 2012-2014; this is the first publication of material collected within that framework.

⁵⁹ See www.borderdeaths.org.

5.3. The development of migration management policy in Turkey

Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic, migration and asylum issues have been dealt with in the national security domain and characterized by an ad hoc, targeted and retroactive approach towards politicized groups of foreigners (Wissink & Ulusoy, 2016). This section will demonstrate the relevance of this national context to discussions on Greek-Turkish border deaths.

Until the 2000s, in line with the Turkish state's traditional approach, policies targeting migrants, asylum seekers and refugees were shaped by a "notion of national identity that relies on the perception of one common Turkish culture" (Memisoglu, 2014). For example, according to the 1934 Law on Settlement (Law No. 2510) – for decades, the primary source of migration law in Turkey – only a person of Turkish descent, who was considered to be attached to Turkish culture and religion, could migrate to and settle in Turkey (Kirişci, 2002). In addition, Turkey maintained the geographical limitation clause of the 1951 Refugee Convention, so that only persons from Europe could claim asylum in Turkey.⁶⁰ Inconsistent and incomplete (Tolay, 2012), legislation and policies on migration failed to acknowledge non-Turkish migrants and non-European asylum seekers.

In December 1999, Turkey's foreign policy vis-à-vis its relations with the EU entered a new period when Turkey was recognized as a candidate for EU accession. EU accession involves a long process of evaluation, negotiation and reform in which various policy fields are brought into line with existing EU law (the *Acquis Communautaire*) to ensure consistency in the event of accession. Migration policy was one such policy field. In contrast with Turkey's traditionally stagnant approach to

⁶⁰ While it participated in the drafting, and signed the 1951 Convention, as well as its 1967 Protocol, Turkey is one of the four countries to keep the 'Geographical Limitation' clause of the 1951 Convention. According to this clause, Turkey declares that it will only extend its legal obligations for the people who are seeking asylum under the 1951 Convention if they come from Europe. Non-Europeans are given 'conditional refugee status' and they are not allowed to stay long term nor provided an integration possibility.

migration, from 2000 onwards, migration policy shifted significantly in its development. These shifts did not take place in a political and economic vacuum at the national level, however. The landslide victory of the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP) in 2002 brought about shifts in governance and Turkey's foreign relations that had repercussions for developing migration policy. Moreover, from 2002, the Turkish economy experienced unprecedented economic growth to the extent that in the period of 8 years, between 2002 and 2010, GDP in Turkey tripled, rising from 238 billion dollars to 771 billion dollars. This period of growth slowed down from 2007-2008 and finally stalled, resulting in a stagnation of GDP per capita at 10,850 US Dollars in 2008 and 10,674 US Dollars in 2022.⁶¹

Taking these factors into account, three periods can be distinguished in the development of Turkey's migration management policy since 2000, each characterized by EU-Turkey relations, national governance and the economic situation in the country: 2000-2005, 2005-2007, and 2007-present day. The development of migration management policy is illustrated in the timeline in Figure 2.

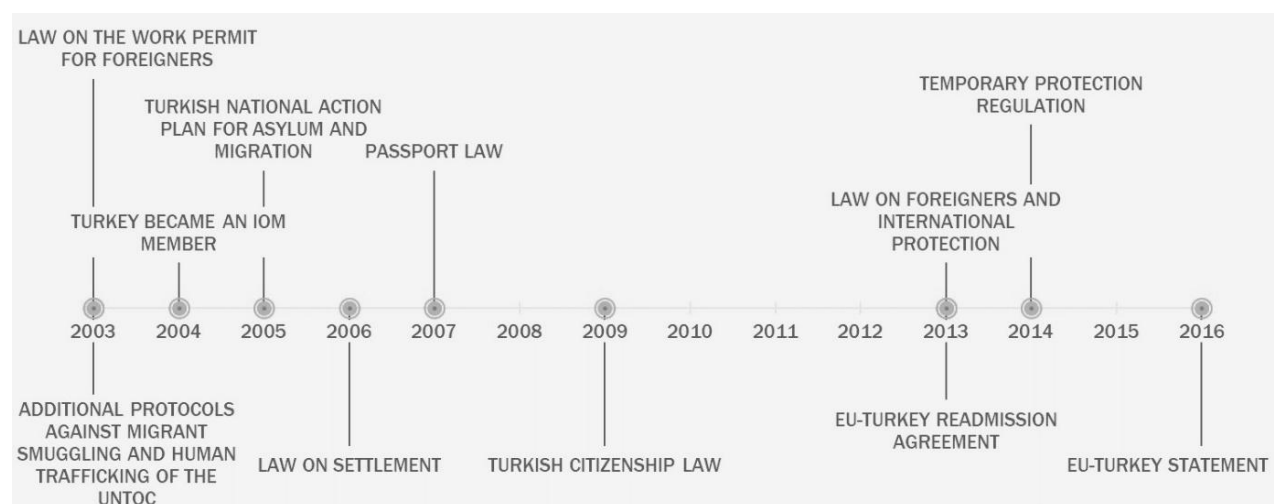


Figure 2: Timeline of Turkish migration management policy, 2000-2016

⁶¹ The World Bank, GDP and GDP per capita (current US\$). World Bank national accounts data and OECD National Accounts datafiles. Accessed 9 April 2024 <https://data.worldbank.org/country/tr>

5.3.1. 2000-2005: A period of growth and foundational reform

Having waited decades for recognition as a candidate for EU membership, Turkey embraced its new relationship with the EU. Between 2000-2005, driven by the government's ambition to join the EU and the accord initially enjoyed in EU-Turkey relations, Turkey began overhauling its legislation and policies (see Figure 2). Among the many policy fields to undergo rigorous reform in this period was migration policy. The National Action Plan in the Field of Asylum and Immigration (NAP) signalled – for the first time in its history – Turkey's ambition to create a comprehensive system of migration management, in accordance with the model actively promoted by the EU and international organizations funded by the EU. In this way, political liberalization and extensive policy reform altered the state's national identity vis-à-vis migration policy, including its conception of the place of foreigners in Turkish society (İçduygu & Aksel, 2013, p. 179) .

Over the period 2000-2005, European-style migration management and border control policies were adopted at a “breath-taking pace” (Tolay, 2012, p. 43) by Turkey. Policy development focused on three aspects in particular: visa requirements, counter-smuggling measures, and readmission agreements. In addition to the adoption of law, policies and operational measures, Turkey embraced the international migration management infrastructure. While it had opened its first office in Turkey in 1991, the presence and relations of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) with Turkey had never been formalized. In 2004, Turkey granted full diplomatic status to the offices of IOM in Ankara and became a full member (Kirişci, 2008, p. 14) of the organization that helped pioneer the EU model of migration management (Ashutosh & Mountz, 2011).

For decades, Turkey had adopted a rather liberal visa system when compared to the EU (Açıkgöz, 2015). This liberal visa system, in general, was an outcome of Turkey's choices in policies regarding foreign relations and/or economic interests rather than using visa policy as a migration management tool (Açıkgöz, 2015, p. 98).

At the end of the Cold War, citizens of former Iron Curtain countries could travel to Turkey easily – taking advantage of relaxed visa obligations (Açıkgöz, 2015, p. 101). This, in turn, created an informal economy and trade between Turkey and these countries and was estimated to be close to US \$9 billion annually in the mid-1990s (Yükseker, 2007, p. 61).

Moreover, the relaxed visa system was not restricted to countries neighbouring Turkey. Citizens of African countries, such as Nigeria which has been on the EU negative list for a long time, could obtain visas for Turkey significantly more easily than for EU countries. As Schapendonk points out, Nigerian nationals could get a student visa for Turkey or enter Istanbul as a football player and continue onward to Europe (Schapendonk, 2013, p. 2868). However, following their rise to power in 2002, the AKP government revised this liberal visa system within the framework of EU accession negotiations, leading to the adoption of a far more restrictive visa regime. In an attempt to harmonize its visa requirements with those of the EU, Turkey introduced visa obligations for nationals from countries on the EU's negative list, including countries in the Middle East, Kazakhstan, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Azerbaijan.⁶²

With respect to counter-smuggling measures, Turkey signed (2000) and ratified (2003) the UN Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the Convention against Transnational Organised Crime. Following the ratification of the Protocol, Turkey made several changes in its national legislation. The Road Transportation Regulation, adopted in 2004, included provisions on the responsibility of carriers for the transportation of irregular migrants.⁶³ In 2005, the Turkish Penal Code was amended and increased fines and gaol time for smugglers.⁶⁴

⁶² European Commission, *Regular Progress Report for Turkey*, 2002, 2003 and 2004.
https://www.ab.gov.tr/123_en.html

⁶³ The Road Transportation Regulation (Official Gazette no 25384 / 25.02.2004), Article 82; According to this regulation, a vehicle used for migrant smuggling will be seized and the transportation permit will be suspended for 3 years.

⁶⁴ According to the amendment, migrant smugglers will be sentenced from 3 to 8 years of imprisonment and will incur judicial fines. The penalty increases by half, if the perpetrators commit the crime by acting as part of an

Finally, starting from 2001, readmission agreements were signed with several countries (Greece in November 2001, Syria in September 2001, Kyrgyzstan in May 2003, Romania in January 2004 and Ukraine in June 2005) and more were drafted and proposed.⁶⁵

While the changes in this period are significant and broad, the political influence of the EU on the development of Turkish migration policy should not be overstated, as Tolay (Tolay, 2012, pp. 44–48) underlines. Not all the measures introduced during this time were effective merely because the political wills of the EU and Turkish government happened to be aligned. For example, the 2001 Greece-Turkey readmission agreement was poorly implemented, with few successful returns (Baldwin-Edwards, 2006). Moreover, there were other forces at play. In this same period, the Turkish economy, including the substantial shadow economy, witnessed unprecedented growth,⁶⁶ increasing the political prominence of aims such as attracting new trading partners and facilitating access to the labour market, and encouraging acceleration of migration management policies.

Quite apart from any political pressure imposed by the EU in this field, the lack of an existing comprehensive migration policy in Turkey and the desire to open up the booming economy and labour market created a bigger need and motivation to the adoption of a European/IOM model of migration management and border control.

Economic growth and its liberal market economy, characterized by informality (İçduygu & Aksel, 2013, p. 179), had another effect on migration management in Turkey. Coupled with the relaxed visa regulations, economic opportunities booming

organization. The Code also includes other coercive sanctions against legal entities involved in immigrant smuggling, such as the confiscation of assets.

⁶⁵ Several readmission agreements were proposed to third countries between 2000 and 2002, such as Egypt, the Russian Federation, Belarus, Georgia, Israel, Sudan, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kirghizstan and Mongolia. (European Commission Progress Report 2002, page 116;

https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB_Iliskileri/Tur_En_Realitons/Progress/Turkey_Progress_Report_2002.pdf)

⁶⁶ Turkish GDP doubled from 273 Billion Dollars to more than 500 billion dollars between 2000 and 2005. (Source: World Bank <https://data.worldbank.org/country/tr>)

in Turkey attracted migrants from neighbouring countries and transit migrants already on the move. In 2003, the Turkish parliament adopted the Law on Work Permits of Foreigners (Law No. 4817) which, together with the accompanying implementing measures, dramatically changed and streamlined the procedures to obtain work permits for foreigners in Turkey. These changes aimed to harmonize work permit procedures with existing EU standards, not to cover the undocumented migrant workers and address their vulnerabilities. Therefore, the changes had limited impact on the regular and irregular migrant population in Turkey and their situation in the labour market. However, as a result of the absorbency of the informal Turkish labour market, the economic situation served as a buffer from the absence of protective legislation for migrants in Turkey.

5.3.2. 2005-2007: A period of stalling and divergence from the EU

After their landslide victory in 2002, the AKP government actively pursued Turkey's intergovernmental relations at the regional and international levels. This initially boosted EU-Turkey relations, and served to support the conclusion of readmission agreements. However, Turkey also developed its national identity at the regional and international levels, which contributed to worsening EU-Turkey relations.

By 2006, EU-Turkey relations started to sour, only months after the accession negotiations began (Narbone & Tocci, 2007) and, as a result, the development of migration management policy lost its pace. Due to the NAP, which was finalized in 2004 and adopted in March 2005⁶⁷, bureaucratic and legislative efforts to harmonize migration policies with EU law continued, albeit at a slower pace. Thus, the new Law of Settlement (Law No. 5543) was adopted in 2006. While changing the discriminatory outdated language of the 1934 text, the Law kept the main logic of understanding

⁶⁷ *National Action Plan of Turkey for the Adoption of EU Acquis in the Field of Asylum and Migration*; Turkish Ministry of Interior Directorate General for Migration Management; <https://www.goc.gov.tr/kurumlar/goc.gov.tr/Yayinlar/UYUM-STRATEJI/Uyum-Strateji-Belgesi-ve-Ulusal-Eylem-Plani.pdf>

migrants as being only from “Turkish culture or origin” (Tolay, 2012, p. 44). However, some of the measures implemented during the first period were reversed or lapsed during this second period.

In the mid-2000s, Turkey’s visa policies changed once again. Moving back to a more liberal visa regime for third countries and diverting from stricter EU visa policies, Turkey lifted visa obligations for several countries on the EU’s negative list. For example, the visa obligations for Azerbaijan, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan were lifted by Turkey in 2006 (Açıkgöz, 2015, pp. 102–103). This change in visa policy was due to different factors: first, the lack of progress in EU accession negotiations stalled the harmonization efforts; secondly with the expansion in its economy, Turkey started to look for new trading and investment partners in the region; and finally, Turkey began aiming for a greater role in regional and international relations. In the light of stalled negotiations, Turkish authorities decided to roll back to the relaxed visa system in order to alleviate these losses. Together, these factors contributed to the divergence from the EU-approved visa regime adopted in the previous period (Açıkgöz, 2015, p. 103).

5.3.3. 2007-2016: A period of incoherent pluralism

From 2007, migration policy began to develop once more, but this time it had two formative influences: the EU model and the Turkish national agenda. On the one hand, Turkey continued on the path established by EU accession negotiations. For instance, a crucial piece of legislation envisioned by NAP – the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (Law No. 6458) (LFIP) – was finally adopted in 2013 by the Turkish parliament.

The LFIP came into power in April 2014 and it grants all basic human rights to migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees in line with EU legislation – including prohibition of torture and ill treatment, extended protection, rights for minors, and

access to legal counselling and a lawyer. The LFIP was drafted in cooperation and collaboration with the civil society, experts, international organizations and was approved by the Turkish Parliament with the support of all political parties represented (Ulusoy, 2016, p. 2).

On the other hand, Turkey reverted to its traditional ad hoc, reactive and securitised approach to migration policy, adopting reactive measures targeting specific groups for exclusion from the territory or from social and economic integration. As Atac and others (Atac et al., 2017) note – citing examples such as pushbacks along the east and west borders of Turkey, the security driven mentality of bureaucracy, “the lack of specific rules applicable to access international protection within the Turkish borders” together with the absence of policies addressing the undocumented irregular migrants in Turkey – discourses of criminalization and practices of control (Atac et al., 2017, p. 12) became significant in this period.

One control measure sought by the EU was the long-discussed and negotiated readmission agreement between EU and Turkey, which was finally signed in December 2013.⁶⁸ The Agreement was signed together with the roadmap for the EU-Turkey visa liberalization dialogue, thereby linking two initiatives to each other. However, visa liberalization required significant efforts from the Turkish side to comply with EU standards on document security, migration and border management, public order and security, fundamental rights (Memişoğlu, 2014, pp. 15–16). Especially with regards to public order and security, Turkey failed to meet its obligations under the roadmap and thus the EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement was never effectively implemented.

Interestingly, EU policy makers believed that the readmission agreement with Turkey was a key instrument to stop or control the irregular migration to Europe from the eastern borders. This approach became clear with the EU-Turkey Statement in

⁶⁸ *Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Turkey on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation*, available at: [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A22014A0507\(01\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A22014A0507(01))

March 2016. The Statement was formulated mainly with the intention of creating an effective readmission system between EU and Turkey. However, this time, Turkey increased its demands and asked for additional compromises from the EU, including allocating considerable funds (up to EUR 6 billion) for refugees in Turkey, accelerating the visa liberalization roadmap and re-energizing accession negotiations (Ulusoy & Battjes, 2017, p. 9).

Thus, in this third period, a pluralist, dual-path approach emerged in the development of Turkish migration policy. EU-model migration management was implemented through ad hoc, reactive, and foreign policy/security-focused national approaches to policy-making. The result was an increase in the population of migrants deemed to be irregular in Turkey and more severe consequences for irregularity. This pluralist, dual-path approach to many policy fields in Turkey, including migration policy, continues today, contributing to the many failures associated with the EU-Turkey deal (Ulusoy & Battjes, 2017, pp. 8–10).

Finally, the effects of the pluralist approach to migration management were moderated by the Turkish economy. Due to its characteristic informal structure, during the economic boom, irregular migrants could be absorbed within the Turkish workforce relatively easily. However, when the economy stalled in 2008, the policy developments and legislative developments of previous years proved inadequate to address the needs of various groups of regular and irregular migrants. In particular, it failed to provide legal channels into the documented workforce or secure their status in the struggling shadow economy, leaving certain groups with no option but to seek opportunities elsewhere, including in the EU.

In sum, in line with shifts in national governance, foreign policy and economic condition, the Turkish state's approach to migration policy changed in periods: 2000-2005 was characterized by growth and reform; 2005-2008 was characterized by stagnation; and 2008 to 2016 is characterized by a disjointed national and EU "multiple paths" approach to migration management (Bayındır Goularas & Sunata, 2015;

İçduygu & Aksel, 2013; Memisoglu, 2014; Tolay, 2012). The introduction of migration policies geared toward facilitating Turkish accession to the EU into this national context culminated a pluralist approach to migration management in Turkey that is incoherent and has the potential – in combination with Turkey’s foreign relations and economic situation – to produce groups of people likely to pursue their chances in the EU with or without authorization.

5.4. The development of border management along the Greek-Turkish EU border

Over several decades, the migration corridor from Turkey to Greece – referred to by FRONTEX as the Eastern Mediterranean route – emerged as a major conduit into the EU. The 2015-17 mass inflow of refugees and other migrants into Greece via Turkey, which prompted the 2016 political agreement between the EU and Turkey, is generally presented as some sort of unexpected phenomenon, with no precursor. This could hardly be further from the truth. In irregular migration terms, the Turkish-Greek border is typically conceived (by authorities and researchers) as consisting of two borders: a land border that is mostly delineated by the Evros/Meriç river, and a sea border that stretches between the western Turkish coastline and the Greek Aegean islands that face it. Pioneering research on irregular migration across these borders found smugglers to be more or less essential for entering Greece outside designated border check points (İçduygu & Toktas, 2002).

Contrary to the views of policy makers, smuggling across the Turkish-Greek border is not a fixed network of international organized criminals: it consists of small, independent units which cooperate and provide flexibility and continuity for the concatenated chain of migration movements that constitute complex and often long and dangerous journeys to reach the EU (İçduygu & Toktas, 2002, pp. 46–47). Locally organized networks operate out of cities on the western coast of Turkey (Istanbul,

Izmir, Çanakkale) and each is specialized in a particular aspect of smuggling (connecting transport, the crossing, border intelligence and arrangements with officials, waiting points, etc.). Istanbul is the central hub for both the land and sea routes. Moreover, research (Schaub, 2013) reveals a distinction between smugglers with a sort of vocational commitment – knowing that refugees need the help of smugglers to find international protection – and those with a purely commercial approach. Thus, experiences of smuggling are extremely varied, ranging from compassionate treatment to aggressive exploitation.

Against this backdrop, this section examines migration management and border control activities in Greece in the decade prior to the so-called migration crisis of 2015-2016. It exposes the priorities and strategies employed by national and EU actors busy along the Turkish-Greek land and sea borders, boundaries which also form part of the EU external border. To set the stage, the border crossing at the land and sea borders is outlined in terms of the role of smugglers and what migrants face at the border. Next, the operations of FRONTEX are explored, both in terms of what they encompassed and their results. Finally, national enforcement operations along the Turkish-Greek border are described in relation to immigration politics in Greece.

5.4.1. Irregular migration between Turkey and Greece circa 2012

Up until 2006, the annual number of irregular migrants crossing either the land border between Greece and Turkey or the sea border in the Aegean was small – under 4,000 by sea and fewer by land (Baldwin-Edwards, 2006). This suddenly climbed to 12,000 detained on the land border in 2006, and in 2007 both borders recorded around 17,000 irregular crossings each. Greek border practices at this time were crude and frequently illegal in that they failed to identify those seeking protection and took no cognizance of the arrival of minors. NGO and press reports from the time provide witness testimony that along the land border they “used methods such as shouting, flashing lights or shooting in the air to deter them, or employ motor boats” (Schaub, 2013, p.

7). Moreover, refoulement or ‘pushbacks’ to Turkey were commonplace on both the land and sea borders (ProAsyl, 2007; Schaub, 2013).

The border region in north-eastern Greece used to be known for its treacherous minefields, which were completely removed by the end of 2009. Until a fence was erected by Greek authorities in 2012, migrants were instructed to cross the River Evros/Meriç in Turkey and then walk across the 12 km stretch of actual *land* border in the northernmost section of the Turkish-Greek border. Alternatively, they would try to cross the more dangerous sections of the River Evros/Meriç that delineate the Turkish-Greek border using small inflatable dinghies provided by smugglers. Since 2012, because of the well-guarded fence, this has been the only option for crossing the land border. On successfully crossing the river, almost always at night, migrants are picked up by cars or small trucks with the help of local civilians. They are taken to the nearest local city, from where they are transferred to Athens.

Sometimes, local Greek officials (border guard, coastguard, police) assist in the process if a prior arrangement has been made. Turkish army personnel in the northwest border region have also been known to facilitate crossing. The cost per migrant in 2012 was \$100, which was paid to high-ranking officers. These arrangements are typically reached with Greek and Turkish officials when smugglers have previously been captured and concluded a deal with them.

There are variable departures from the western Turkish coast, depending on the activity of Turkish authorities, weather conditions, local personnel, etc. These are in continuous flux. Destinations in the Aegean are also variable, depending on the safest coastal area in Greece, the speed of the boat, fuel capacity, and arrangements with the local coastguard. The cheapest smugglers typically provide low-quality, unsafe small boats or dinghies and minimal navigational assistance, while more up-market smugglers provide a better service, often avoiding the islands and going directly to the Greek mainland. After coast guard operations made the longer journeys to the mainland more difficult, smugglers in 2011–2012 usually took migrants to the

islands of Rhodes, Kos and Lesbos: from there, they could be taken either to Athens or onward to Sicily.

5.4.2. The arrival and impact of FRONTEX on the Turkish-Greek border scene

The operational début of FRONTEX coincided precisely with increased irregular arrivals on the Greek land border in 2006. Immediately, Joint Operation Poseidon Land was set up to provide expertise, personnel and training for the Greek border guard on the land border. Poseidon Land was repeated the following year and replaced by Joint Operation Saturn in 2009. In addition, in 2007, Joint Operation Poseidon Sea was established to address the rising number of arrivals on some North Aegean islands – presumably, a displacement effect from more aggressive policing of the land border. Figure 3 shows recorded arrivals 2007–2013 by broad region. The chart is annotated with key events concerning border management in the region.

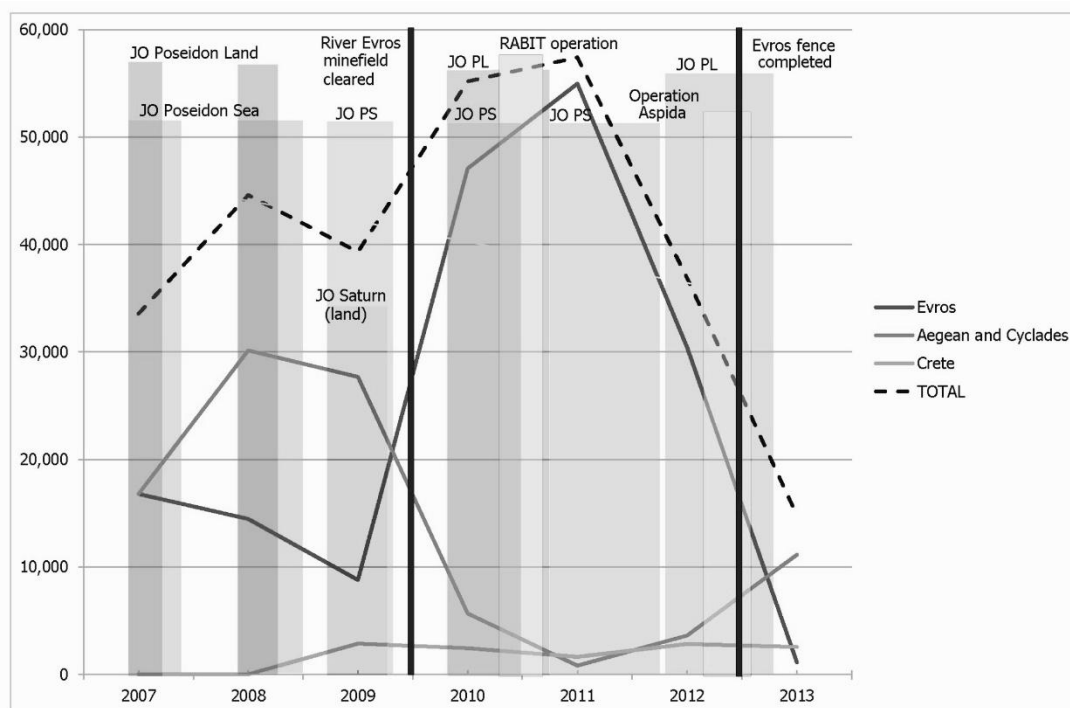


Figure 3: Recorded irregular arrivals in Greece via Turkey; major border management events, 2007–13 Source: own compilation using Hellenic Police data and FRONTEX data

In 2006, Poseidon Land (not shown in Figure 3, owing to missing data) addressed the lack of training and expertise of the Greek border guard, providing guidance for a few summer months each successive year. Over the period 2007-09, detected crossings of the land border declined, while arrivals by sea increased. However, in early 2010, arrivals at the land border started to increase, reaching a peak of around 7,000 per month in August, September and October; as land arrivals increased, sea arrivals declined. The minefields that had claimed many lives along the land border on the Greek side of the Evros river had been completely cleared by the end of 2009 (Martino, 2010): this fact may well have informed the choices of smuggling routes over 2010.

On 24 October 2010, the Greek Ministry of Citizen Protection sent a formal request to the European Commission for assistance at its land border with Turkey in the Evros region of north-eastern Greece. The very next day, the Executive Director of FRONTEX made a decision to deploy RABITs (Rapid Border Intervention Teams) to Greece, predicated on “a mass influx of third country nationals attempting to enter [EU] territory illegally”.⁶⁹ Five days later, border-control specialists began arriving in the Evros region. As noted by Carrera and Guild, this was the first ever implementation of the RABIT legislation of 2007 and the justification – that arrivals in Greece accounted for 90% of all detections of illegal border crossings into the EU – was statistically suspect according to FRONTEX’s own quarterly risk analysis reports (Carrera & Guild, 2010, p. 11). While there had been an increase in detections at land borders, overall, irregular migration into Greece was in decline. The majority of irregular arrivals in the EU were, in fact, being recorded at airports, not at land borders. Moreover, Carrera and Guild’s analysis of the nationalities of irregular arrivals demonstrates that irregular arrivals at the land borders mainly comprised

⁶⁹ Regulation No. 863/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 July 2007 establishing a mechanism for the creation of Rapid Border Intervention Teams and amending Council Regulation (EC) No 2007/2004 as regards that mechanism and regulating the tasks and powers of guest officers, Recital 7

Albanian seasonal workers and people from top refugee-producing countries (in particular, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Somalia) (Carrera & Guild, 2010, pp. 8–11).

Poseidon Land consisted of 175 border control experts from 26 member or associated Schengen states, including “experts in false documents, clandestine entry, first and second line border checks and stolen vehicles as well as dog handlers and specialist interviewers, debriefers and interpreters...The assets made available from Member States’ commitments to Frontex’s Centralised Record of Available Technical Equipment (CRATE) [were] as follows:

- 1 Helicopter (Romania)
- 1 Bus (Romania)
- 5 Minibuses (1 Romania, 2 Austria, 1 Bulgaria, 1 Hungary)
- 19 Patrol cars (4WD) (7 Romania, 3 Austria, 2 Slovakia, 7 Germany)
- 9 Thermo Vision Vans (2 Austria, 2 Bulgaria, 4 Germany, 1 Hungary)
- 3 Schengen buses (1 Austria, 2 Hungary)
- 3 office units from Denmark”⁷⁰

The objectives set out by FRONTEX are interesting for their emphasis and omission. The general objective is stated as being “to create a deterrent effect...and to demonstrate well-coordinated operational solidarity of the EU member states” (FRONTEX, 2011, p. 8). The three specific objectives were:

- (a) Assisting Greece in overall management of border control...with significantly improved border surveillance and reception capacity...
- (b) Providing sustainable support for strengthened border control with the aim of reducing irregular migration flows...

⁷⁰ FRONTEX, *FRONTEX TO DEPLOY 175 SPECIALIST BORDER-CONTROL PERSONNEL TO GREECE*, Frontex Press Release, Friday 29 October 2010, 2.

- (c) Assisting Greece in developing an adequate, mapped process for more effective border management...including readmission capabilities.

What is particularly concerning here is no mention of Greece's obligation to offer international protection and also to identify individuals in need of special consideration (e.g. minors). There is no discussion of the fact that most of the irregular migrants previously identified crossing from Turkey were from refugee-producing countries. Thus, we can observe a security rationale, allied with political integration (solidarity) objectives. International protection obligations could not be ignored, but were relegated to a secondary or even tertiary level.

The actual outcomes of the RABITs intervention in the Evros region are mixed. On a positive note, the capacity of the Greek authorities to register arrivals and to identify nationalities was increased (McDonough & Tsourdi, 2012, p. 15); moreover, the Fundamental Rights Agency considered that there had been a reduced likelihood of informal pushbacks to Turkey since the operation (FRA, 2011, p. 20). However, the identification process – usually the only substantive interview prior to deportation – remained severely deficient, with no lawyers present, few interpreters available, and heavy workloads of police personnel. Equally, Greece's poor reception capacity – one of the factors attributed to the *recorded* increase in irregular arrivals at land borders in 2010 (Carrera & Guild, 2010, p. 11) – was not significantly improved by FRONTEX interventions (McDonough & Tsourdi, 2012, pp. 17–18). In terms of reducing irregular inflows via the land border, initially there was no decline in numbers (see Figure 3). In fact, arrivals continued to increase throughout 2011 – albeit with seasonal reduction over the winter – and did not diminish until August 2012. An initial diversion effect from the southern Evros border to the northern part had required FRONTEX to redirect resources there; this was then followed in August 2012 by another diversion effect toward the Turkey-Bulgaria border and the Turkey-Greece sea border, although with much-reduced total numbers.

5.4.3. National operations and political attitudes toward immigration in Greece

With the onset of economic austerity in the wake of the global financial crisis, Greek politics briefly shifted to the right; in electoral terms, the country embraced a neo-Nazi political party (Golden Dawn) while, on the ground, incidents of racial violence multiplied. Mainstream Greek political parties responded to this popular trend by hardening their policies on irregular immigration and asylum-seeking, and the center right party *Néa Dimokratía* (New Democracy) even flirted with the idea of a future coalition government with Golden Dawn. Thus, an openly aggressive policing mentality emerged concerning both border management and treatment of immigrants within Greek society (Baldwin-Edwards, 2014a).

The center right government initiated two policies starting in August 2012: one concerning border management (Operation Aspida) and the other concerning police round-ups of foreign-looking people on the streets of Greece (Operation Xenios Zeus) (Angeli et al., 2014).

Under Operation Xenios Zeus, thousands of police conducted systematic stop and search on the streets and in homes, targeting areas populated by immigrants and persons with foreign appearance on a daily basis. Between 4 August 2012 and June 2013, the police stopped and detained just under 124,000 people on the streets of Athens; a mere 6,910 (less than 6%) were subsequently found to be residing unlawfully in Greece (Baldwin-Edwards, 2014a).

Meanwhile, Operation Aspida built on existing policies and border control measures. Previously, in January 2011, a decision had been taken to construct a fence for the 12km of actual *land* border in the northern section of Turkish-Greek border, where the Evros/Meriç river meanders into Turkish territory. Until 2010, this part of the border had been heavily fortified with minefields. The project was refused funding by the EU Commission, on the grounds that it was “pointless” and that more effective use of money should be made with purchase of technical equipment such as thermal

cameras, X-ray technology and specialized vehicles (Angeli et al., 2014, p. 27). But the project sustained governmental support and was completed in December 2012. Three months before the completion of the fence, Operation Aspida began with the stated intention of deterring irregular arrivals. 1,881 police officers were deployed along the Evros land border – mostly assigned border management duties, but some involved with reception and screening of arrivals. The operation was twice extended beyond its original life span (Angeli et al., 2014, p. 28). The actual impact of Operation Aspida and the border fence is difficult to gauge. Effectively, it built on the outcome of the RABITs operation initiated two years earlier. However, by focusing on the land border, Operation Aspida did nothing to address the increasing arrival of migrants in the Northern Aegean islands. Moreover, as mentioned above, reception and asylum procedures remained dysfunctional despite the increased governmental and political attention to the border. In particular, warning signs that detected irregular arrivals comprised mostly of people from refugee-producing countries (including a growing proportion of Syrians), who were unlikely to be deterred permanently by border controls, went ignored.

In sum, the Turkish-Greek border has been the focus of both national and EU migration management operations. Following the removal of landmines – an outdated mode of deterring unwanted people from entering the territory – the land border was fortified in accordance with modern technologies (e.g. fence, operational bases, increased policing mandates) and border patrols were intensified, militarized, and equipped with the latest surveillance technology and more, bigger and better transport. As demonstrated during the 2015-2016 crisis, these efforts did not solidify the border, only changed the way that people could attempt to cross it. As the border became the focus of various actors, strategies and politics, crossing the border became more complex, and smugglers adapted their networks and strategies accordingly. Irregular migrants and smugglers are not a threat to border management, but an integrated part of it. Border deaths preceded the border management practices on the

Greek side of the border discussed in this section. However, these practices have contributed to increasing the risk of death during border-crossing, as well as affecting how people die.

5.5. Border deaths between Turkey and Greece

People have been dying attempting to cross the Turkish-Greek border for decades, as elsewhere along the EU external borders (Last et al., 2016, 2017). 2015 saw the highest number of such deaths ever recorded in the Aegean Sea. This last part of the paper presents a discussion of border deaths in light of Turkish migration policy and enforcement activity along the Turkish-Greek border where the deaths occurred. It does not seek to exhaustively examine the relationship between state practices and deaths, nor definitively establish cause and effect. Rather, the purpose is to demonstrate some of the many links between migration and border management and deaths, similar to those observed along other sections of the EU external borders (Baldwin-Edwards & Lutterbeck, 2018; Carling, 2007; Lutterbeck, 2006; Topak, 2014).

Different sources of border death data show different trends over the last three decades. However, one common trend is an overall increase in the number of deaths from 2000, as compared to the 1990s (Last et al., 2017). The same is true of border deaths recorded in Greece (see Figure 4). Interestingly, however, this mirrors a shift in Turkish migration management. Prior to 2000, Turkey had a liberal visa policy towards third countries and very little migration law; from 2000, Turkey began adopting and implementing the EU's model for migration management, creating (by exclusion) a group of people with an interest in moving onto neighboring EU. A second shift, triggered by the economic downturn starting in 2008, is also mirrored in the arrival and death data in Greece presented in Figures 3 and 4. The informal economy had acted as a buffer for people excluded by the new migration management policies, but, a year into the economic downturn, it was no longer able to absorb the

population of irregular migrants. The economic downturn drove more people to attempt to cross the EU external border and thereby increased the number of people exposed to the existing risk of border death.

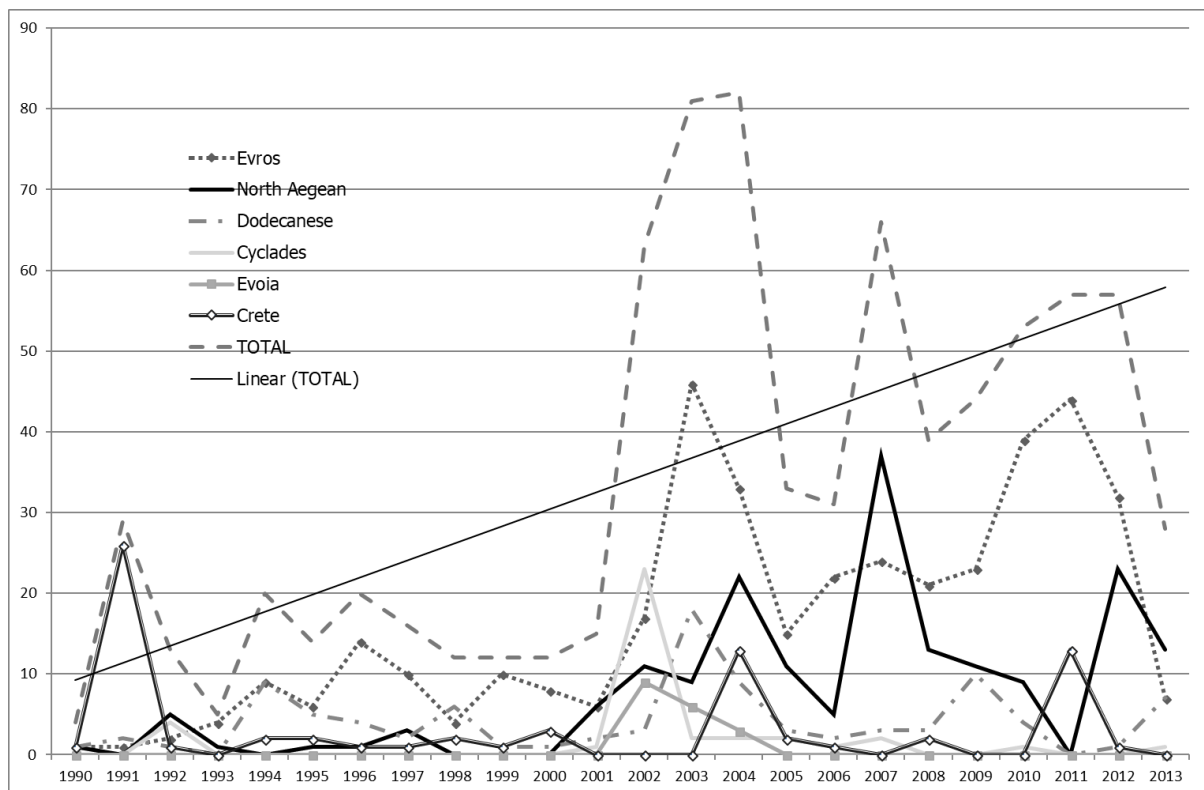


Figure 4: Recorded border deaths, Eastern Mediterranean route, by Greek regions 1990–2013 Source: own calculations, taken from “Deaths at the border database”, <http://www.borderdeaths.org>

Deaths on the Turkish-Greek border were commonplace in the early 2000s, especially on the land border which was planted with landmines. Public records of such deaths were kept quietly at the local level, and no political interest was ever indicated either by the Greek state or EU agencies. The peak in the number of deaths on the land border over the period 2001–2004 is largely attributable to landmines. This can be seen by the cause of death recorded in the Deaths at the Borders Database. The removal of the minefields by 2009 was definitely a positive contribution to reducing deaths and serious injury, as shown in Figure 5. On the other hand, the removal of

landmines is thought to have encouraged migrants to use the land route rather than the sea routes that had emerged in the Aegean, which contributed to increased arrivals and a corresponding peak in deaths at the land border in 2010 and 2011.

The completion of (and intensification of personnel along) the fence in 2012 meant that drowning became the standard cause of death along the land border as well as the sea border (see Figure 5). Single boat incidents tend to result in large numbers of casualties by drowning, as seen in the Aegean Sea. Thus, the boats used to cross the Meriç/Evros River produced larger clusters of deaths, whereas incidents such as mine explosions or car or train accidents typically result in a few fatalities at a time. For instance, the large proportion of drownings in 2003 shown in Figure 5 is attributable to a single capsizing in the Meriç/Evros River after which 23 bodies were found washed up on the Greek riverbed. Hypothermia, another major cause of death shown in Figure 5, is also often associated with crossing the Meriç/Evros River by swimming or after capsizing. In addition, the sealing of the 12km actual land border is thought to have diverted people back to the Aegean Sea (see Figure 3), where embarking on a boat is necessary to travel to the islands and onwards to Athens. This diverted population of travelers include many who are seeking international protection, who have not (or, indeed, cannot) attained a meaningful status in Turkey and are, therefore, determined to cross the border to the EU.

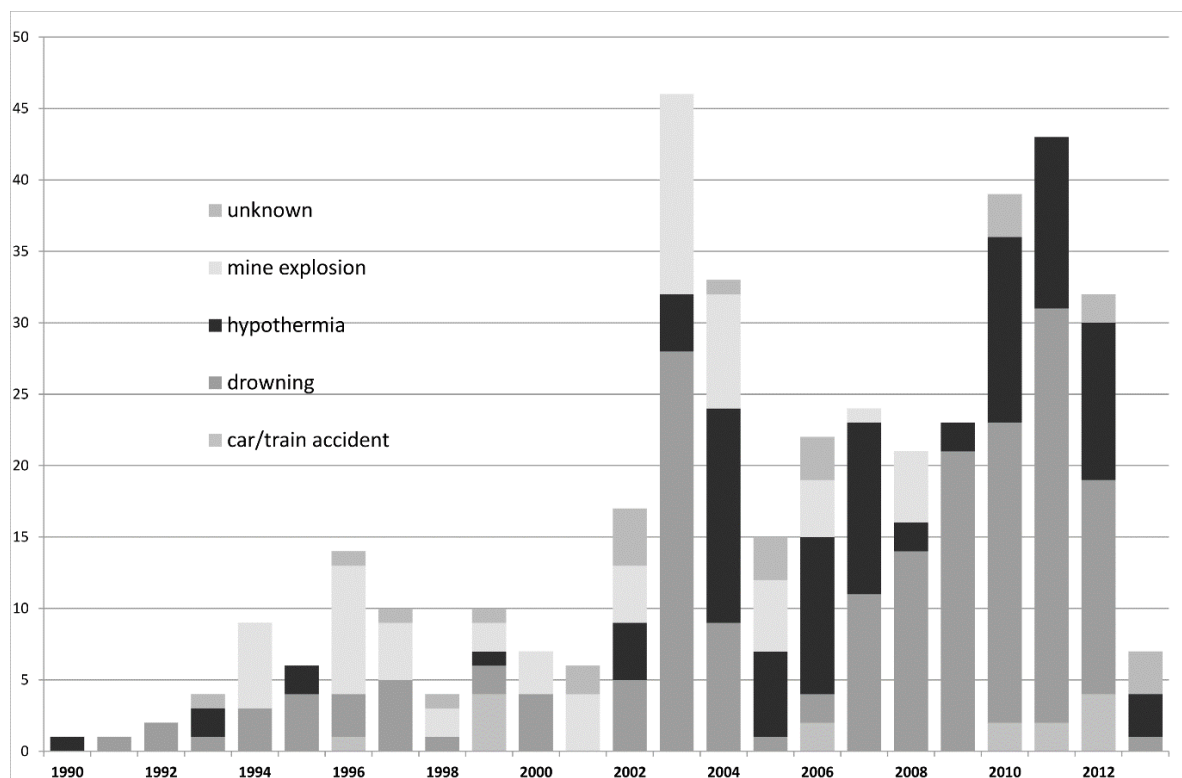


Figure 5: Causes of death among border deaths in the Evros region, 1990-2013 Source: own calculations, taken from “Deaths at the border database”, <http://www.borderdeaths.org>

As measures against smugglers and irregular migration intensified, practices developed that further endangered passengers on migrant boats. These included pushbacks by Greek border and coast guard, pullbacks by Turkish border and coast guard, dangerous chases and maneuvering, departing in bad weather and at night to reduce the risk of interception, confiscation of boats leading to a drop in boat quality, and arrest and prosecution of smugglers on board leading to inexperienced passengers driving the boat. These high-risk strategies employed by state agents and smugglers can directly cause deaths. For instance, the rise in drownings observed in the Evros region (see Figure 5) indicates that crossing the Meriç/Evros River became more dangerous, especially since 2006, coinciding with introduction of FRONTEX operations in the region. In fact, such border management and smuggling practices at EU external borders have been observed on all irregular migration routes; since the

early 2000s, there is widespread agreement among academics and NGOs that this escalation, triggered by the EU model of border management, has increased border deaths (Last, 2018).

5.6. Conclusions

The management of the Turkish-Greek border is a highly complex system with rapid evolution over a fairly short period of time. We have demonstrated, above, that its principal forces of structuration were institutional-political rather than coherent policy responses to existing or anticipated migration flows. In the case of Turkey, the lengthy and attenuated EU accession negotiations interacted with national politics so as to leave a specific group of people without meaningful opportunity either to integrate into Turkey or to resettle to third countries. It was this group that moved toward the EU border between Greece and Turkey, to face the risk of death associated with irregular border-crossing that has progressively been heightened by Greek and EU counter-smuggling strategies and efforts to prevent illegal immigration.

In the case of the EU, FRONTEX involvement in management of the Greek border resulted initially from the urgent institutional need of FRONTEX for political legitimacy (exaggerating the severity of migration inflows in Greece, to justify intervention) alongside the very poor capacity of the Greek state to manage its borders without recourse to land-mines and other non-legal techniques. The complex system that emerged took no cognizance of migrants' motivations, characteristics, human needs or entitlement to international protection. FRONTEX reacted to smugglers' changes of strategy with short-term redeployment of resources to specific loci: there was no strategy, no grasp of longer-term implications, and apparently no awareness of the role of policy in reducing or increasing deaths on the border.

In this way, the pluralist, ad hoc and security-oriented policies adopted and implemented in Turkey for the last two decades – in part driven by Turkish accession

to the EU – contributed to border deaths along the Greek-Turkish border. In addition, Greek and FRONTEX border activities added to the dangers faced by migrants trying to cross this border, contributing to an increase in deaths. Together, Turkish migration management and Greek/EU border management contributed to the inflow crisis of 2015-2016 and ensured mass casualties.

This article contributes to a growing but largely repetitive academic discussion on irregular migration and border deaths, attempting to distinguish itself with several fresh approaches. First, rather than taking the standard Euro-centric approach, it presents a coherent analysis of the development of Turkish migration policy as a backdrop to border deaths along the Turkish-Greek (EU) border. Secondly, rather than describing a seemingly coherent masterplan to fatally exclude certain people from the EU, border management along the Turkish-Greek border is presented as the complex outcome of a chaotic mix of national politics and law enforcement practices, smuggling networks and FRONTEX operations. Finally, the relationship between Turkish migration management and Greek/EU border management, on the one hand, and deaths on the other, is discussed empirically yet without the usual reference to unreliable mortality rates (Last, 2018).

06

Concluding Remarks: A Legacy of Migration Policies

Migration has long been a defining feature of human societies, shaping cultural identities, political landscapes, and economic structures. In the case of Turkey, migration policies have evolved over centuries, influenced by the nation's historical legacy, geopolitical position, and socio-political transformations. This study, *Not A Tabula Rasa: A Historical and Critical Look Into Migration Policies of Turkey*, challenges the notion that Turkey's migration policies are solely responses to contemporary events. Instead, it highlights how these policies are deeply rooted in historical patterns stretching back to the Ottoman Empire and beyond. From the forced displacements of the Ottoman era, such as the Armenian Genocide and the 1923 population exchange with Greece, to the modern-day handling of Syrian refugees, Turkey's migration policies reflect long-term state priorities rather than ad-hoc reactions to recent events.

Revisiting the research questions and chapter contributions

This thesis has asked how long-term Ottoman and Turkish practices of forced displacement, demographic engineering and the securitisation of human mobility have shaped the contemporary architecture of Turkey's migration and asylum regime. In this concluding section, the four sub-questions are briefly revisited to show how each chapter contributes to answering the overarching research question.

The first sub-question concerned the historical development of Ottoman and early Republican migration policies and the continuities and ruptures between these earlier practices and those of the modern Turkish Republic. Chapter 2 addressed this question by tracing a long genealogy of population management and forced

displacement. It showed how imperial tools such as the millet system gradually gave way to modern techniques of ethnic homogenisation, culminating in the 1934 Settlement Law and related policies. These historical practices produced durable “scripts” for how the state deals with perceived threats to territorial integrity and demographic order.

The second sub-question asked how the concept of *deep securitisation* can help explain both the attempted de-securitisation of forced migration in the period 2002–2011 and its failure during the Syrian refugee crisis. Chapter 3 demonstrated that the apparent openness of the early 2000s did not erase underlying existential anxieties of the state about demographic balance and territorial unity. Instead, these anxieties re-emerged forcefully when the Syrian displacement became protracted and large-scale, revealing a deeply securitised understanding of human mobility that is rooted in historical experiences rather than in short-term political preferences.

The third sub-question examined how European Union funding instruments for migration and asylum interact with Turkey’s historically rooted migration regime and contribute to the externalisation of EU border control. Chapter 4 showed that EU financial instruments and projects did not operate on a blank slate. They were layered onto an already deeply securitised and path-dependent field, often reinforcing existing priorities of containment and control rather than transforming them. The analysis of the EU–Turkey Statement and its aftermath illustrated how external financial incentives and conditionality encouraged a selective Europeanisation in which norms of control and deterrence were prioritised over norms of rights protection and long-term integration.

The fourth sub-question addressed how these long-term patterns are reflected in contemporary border policies and migrant deaths at the Turkish–Greek border. Chapter 5 analysed the evolution of border management in the Evros region and the Aegean Sea and showed how pluralist, ad hoc and security-oriented policies of both the European Union and Turkey translate into concrete practices that expose people

on the move to lethal risk. The chapter made visible the human cost of the historical legacies and governance structures analysed in the earlier chapters.

By bringing these answers together, the thesis demonstrates that Turkey's current migration and asylum regime is best understood as the latest manifestation of a much longer history of governing mobility through instruments of securitisation and demographic engineering.

The Historical Continuum of Migration Policies

The study's core thesis -that Turkey's migration policies are not the result of modern crises alone but are a continuation of historical trends- is evident in each chapter. From the forced displacements during the Ottoman Empire, such as the Medz Yeghern and the 1923 population exchange with Greece, to the external pressures of modern times, Turkey's approach to migration has consistently been driven by long-term national security concerns, demographic engineering, and the desire to maintain political and territorial stability.

Turkey's historical legacy of migration management, which has been discussed in Chapter 2, highlights an enduring concern for the ethno-religious composition of its population, a concern that has persisted from the Ottoman millet system to the policies of the Turkish Republic. This preoccupation with demographic stability has repeatedly led to migration policies that prioritize state security over humanitarian considerations. The foundational years of the Turkish Republic were marked by a determined effort to homogenize the population, a strategy carried over from the last decades of the Ottoman Empire. Such continuity demonstrates that Turkish policymakers have long understood migration not simply as a matter of humanitarian or economic concern but as an existential question for the state.

The Role of Securitization

As discussed in Chapter 3, the concept of securitization is central to understanding how migration policies have developed in Turkey. Migration has been framed as an existential threat to the nation, with the state treating population movements - both internal and external - as potential disruptions to its demographic balance, territorial integrity, and political stability. This process has been particularly visible in Turkey's response to the Syrian refugee crisis, which reignited old fears about ethnic fragmentation, particularly in relation to the Kurdish issue.

While there was a brief period of attempted de-securitization between 2002 and 2011, Turkey's migration policies quickly reverted to a securitised framework in response to the Syrian crisis. This shift reflects the deep-rooted historical anxieties that continue to shape Turkish political discourse, where migration is often viewed as an existential threat rather than an opportunity for economic or social renewal. As this book has demonstrated, this securitised approach has long been present in Turkish migration policy, manifesting in policies designed to control, manage, and restrict population movements, whether in the Ottoman period or the modern-day Turkish Republic.

External Pressures and Turkey's Role as a Global Actor

The influence of external actors, particularly the European Union, has been a recurring theme throughout this thesis. Chapter 4 highlighted how Turkey's relationship with the EU has impacted its migration policies, particularly in the context of the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement. This agreement marked a turning point in the externalization of migration control, with Turkey playing a critical role in managing Europe's external borders.

Through this agreement, Turkey has leveraged its strategic position to secure financial and political concessions from the EU, using migration as a tool of diplomacy. However, this externalization has also contributed to the hardening of

Turkey's migration policies, with an increasing emphasis on border control, containment, and security. The reliance on EU funds to manage refugee flows has further entrenched a system that prioritizes external demands over domestic humanitarian needs, complicating efforts to reform asylum policies in line with international standards.

Legal scholarship further supports and refines the conclusions drawn in this thesis. Analyses of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection, temporary protection regulations and related secondary legislation document how these frameworks are implemented by the Presidency of Migration Management and other authorities (Ankara Barosu, 2024). They highlight both the breadth of administrative discretion and the recurring tendency to frame questions of residence, registration and removal in security terms. Likewise, detailed examinations of dispersal and de-concentration policies in earthquake-affected regions show how contemporary measures directed at foreigners echo earlier Republican practices of using internal relocation and spatial reorganisation to manage perceived demographic and security risks (Elçin, 2023).

Although these studies were not part of the original empirical design of Chapters 4 and 5, their findings are consistent with and add further nuance to this thesis' argument that Turkey's migration and asylum regime remains shaped by a long-term, path-dependent logic of securitised demographic engineering.

The Human Cost of Migration Policies

The consequences of Turkey's securitised migration policies are most tragically evident at its borders, where the joint responsibility of both Turkey and the European Union plays a critical role. As Chapter 5 demonstrated, the Turkish-Greek border has become a central flashpoint in the European migration crisis, where people on the move face increasingly dangerous conditions.

The militarization of the Aegean Sea, fuelled by Turkey's security concerns, ranging from Kurdish conflict and regional instability to perceived geopolitical competition with Greece, along with external pressures from the EU, has resulted in severe human suffering. Migrants attempting to cross into Europe, often fleeing conflict and persecution, have faced perilous journeys, and tragically, many have lost their lives in the process.

This human toll highlights a broader ethical crisis shared by both Turkey and the EU in their joint approach to migration management. While Turkey has taken on the role of Europe's gatekeeper, its border control and containment policies have also been affected by European demands to limit migration into the EU. The cost of these policies, however, has been disproportionately borne by the most vulnerable; people seeking safety. The collaboration between the EU and Turkey, which prioritizes security and containment over humanitarian considerations, raises fundamental questions about the sustainability and morality of these strategies. Both Turkey and the EU must confront the ethical implications of their shared responsibility in managing migration, balancing security needs with a more humane approach that protects the rights and dignity of those on the move.

In conclusion, adopting an indigenous, long-term interdisciplinary approach is essential for developing a comprehensive understanding of complex sociopolitical phenomena, such as migration policy. This framework, which integrates historical, legal, sociological, and political perspectives, is particularly effective in revealing the deep-rooted continuities that shape present-day policies and practices. As demonstrated in the case of Turkey's migration policies, contemporary developments cannot be adequately understood in isolation from their historical antecedents. Tracing policies back to their Ottoman origins highlights how historical legacies—such as state-driven demographic engineering, securitization of population movements, and ethno-national identity construction—continue to inform Turkey's current migration strategies.

Furthermore, this interdisciplinary approach enables a nuanced analysis that goes beyond the simplistic dichotomy of humanitarianism versus securitization. By incorporating historical trajectories and geopolitical dynamics, such a method reveals the layered motivations behind policy decisions, including the role of external pressures, such as European Union agreements, and internal factors, such as national identity construction and territorial integrity. The indigenous dimension, centered on local, culturally specific understandings, ensures that research and policymaking remain context-sensitive, avoiding the imposition of externally derived frameworks that may misrepresent or overlook critical local nuances.

This holistic, long-term perspective also underscores the ethical and humanitarian considerations that are often obscured by securitised policy frameworks. Acknowledging the historical continuity of forced displacement and demographic control highlights the enduring human cost of migration policies, both past and present. By situating contemporary migration management within a broader historical and interdisciplinary context, scholars and policymakers can better identify the structural causes of displacement and develop sustainable, just, and humane migration policies.

Ultimately, the value of an indigenous, long-term interdisciplinary approach lies in its ability to foster a more critical and empathetic understanding of complex social issues, contributing not only to academic scholarship but also to the development of more ethical and historically informed governance practices.

07

An Afterthought on the Decolonial Positioning of This Study

A central theme in decolonial theory is the need to critically revisit historical narratives, particularly those shaped by Eurocentric viewpoints, to better understand how knowledge production has often marginalized non-Western perspectives (Mignolo, 2021). In migration studies, Eurocentric frameworks have traditionally positioned Europe as the primary actor and destination in global migration, while reducing other regions, including Turkey, to peripheral roles as transit zones or buffers (Lemberg-Pedersen, 2019). Although the concept of decoloniality has not been explicitly employed in this thesis, the analysis aligns with its concerns; particularly through the critique of dominant narratives and the focus on alternative, often overlooked, positionalities.

This study contributes to these discussions by highlighting Turkey's historical role in migration management and population policies that predate European influences. The Ottoman Empire and, later, the Turkish Republic developed large-scale migration strategies and population policies long before European powers externalized their own migration control mechanisms. A decolonial approach to Turkey's migration history reveals the agency of Ottoman and Turkish state actors in managing human mobility in ways deeply rooted in local political, social, and cultural contexts. While this perspective challenges the Eurocentric framing of migration management as a Western construct, it also opens avenues for further research on how historical narratives shape contemporary policy.

However, one must also not forget that the Ottoman Empire was also a colonial empire, exercising control over vast and diverse territories across three continents. Its expansionist policies, administrative strategies, and forced displacement practices were instrumental in shaping the demographic, social, and political landscapes of the regions under its rule. While often framed as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious polity that allowed for a degree of local autonomy through systems like the millet system, the empire also engaged in systematic population management, forced migrations, and resettlement policies that had far-reaching consequences. These measures were often driven by strategic, economic, and security concerns, aiming to consolidate imperial authority, suppress resistance, and maintain territorial integrity.

The forced displacement of Armenians, Greeks, and other ethnic and religious communities, exemplifies the empire's use of migration as a tool of governance and demographic engineering. Entire communities were uprooted, reshaped or eliminated to serve the interests of the ruling elite, resulting in profound social and cultural transformations that are still felt today. These policies did not only affect the territories that later became the Turkish Republic but also had lasting impacts on the Middle East, North Africa and the Balkans, where legacies of Ottoman rule continue to influence.

Future research should further investigate how Ottoman colonial legacies intersect with contemporary migration policies in former imperial territories, shedding light on how historical patterns of forced displacement continue to shape modern nation-states and their approaches to migration governance.

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Summary

Not A Tabula Rasa:

A Historical and Critical Look Into the Migration Policies of Turkey

This thesis advances a single, sustained argument: the migration and asylum regime of contemporary Turkey cannot be understood as a *tabula rasa* shaped only by recent events such as the European Union accession process since mid-1990s or the Syrian refugee crisis of 2011. Rather, it represents the latest manifestation of a long continuum of state practices and ideologies that have evolved over several centuries, from the Ottoman period to the present. Against a literature that tends to read Turkish migration policy as reactive and externally driven, the study underlines the historical depth, demonstrating how centuries of administrative practice in both the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic continue to structure present-day law and policy. Migration, in this account, has consistently functioned as an instrument of governance, national security and state-building rather than as a mere humanitarian or economic concern.

The overarching research question asks how the long-term Ottoman and Turkish practices of forced displacement, demographic engineering and the securitisation of human mobility have shaped the contemporary architecture of Turkey's migration and asylum regime. This question is pursued through four interrelated sub-questions, each corresponding to an empirical chapter and examining a distinct dimension of the problem: the historical development of population management; the deep securitisation of human mobility; the role of European Union funding in externalisation; and the human cost of border practices. Read in sequence, the chapters move from deep history to present-day governance and from internal

state logics to external border practices, forming a cumulative narrative rather than four separate case studies.

Methodological and Conceptual Positioning

Methodologically, the thesis is distinguished by an indigenous, long-term and multidisciplinary approach that combines legal, historical, sociological and political analysis with a diachronic research strategy and case-study principles. The study makes three contributions to the existing literature. The first is epistemological: by tracing migration policy back to its Ottoman and early Republican antecedents, it recovers a history that much of the scholarship erases or treats as marginal. The second is methodological and closely related: a multidisciplinary, longitudinal lens is better able to make sense of current configurations of Turkish migration law and policy than approaches that assume these are predominantly short-term responses to external events. The third, more limited but crucial, contribution introduces Abulof's concept of deep securitisation, largely overlooked in the field of migration, building on the Copenhagen School framework of Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde and extending it to the Turkish context.

The Argument Across the Chapters

Chapter 2 establishes the historical and conceptual foundations by reconstructing the *longue durée* of Ottoman and Turkish population management. It traces a genealogy that runs from imperial instruments such as the millet system and *sürgün* (forced relocation) through the late-Ottoman turn toward ethno-national homogenisation, the Armenian Genocide (Medz Yeghern), and the 1923 population exchange with Greece, to the 1934 Settlement Law. The chapter demonstrates that, although the governing logic shifted from imperial pragmatism toward ethno-nationalist homogenisation, the conviction that demography equals security remained constant. These historical

practices produced durable scripts for how the state responds to perceived threats to territorial integrity and demographic order.

Chapter 3 translates these historical insights into the conceptual framework of deep securitisation, showing how long-standing existential anxieties about demographic balance and territorial unity continue to shape the asylum and migration system. It analyses the attempted de-securitisation of forced migration during the period from 2002 to 2011 and the failure of that effort with the onset of the Syrian refugee crisis, which re-triggered securitisation and revived older fears, particularly those connected to the Kurdish question. The apparent openness of the early 2000s, the chapter argues, never erased the deeper security imaginary rooted in the traumatic aftermath of the Ottoman collapse.

Chapter 4 situates this historically grounded regime within a broader European context, examining how EU funding instruments interact with Turkey's migration policies and contribute to the externalisation of border control. Taking the 2013 Law on Foreigners and International Protection and the creation of a civilian migration administration as an institutional turning point, the chapter shows that Europeanisation had only a limited effect on migrant and refugee rights. Formal convergence with EU norms coexisted with restrictive implementation on the ground, and the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement marked a shift from normative convergence toward pragmatic containment and a selective Europeanisation in which control and deterrence were prioritised over rights protection and long-term integration. EU financial instruments did not operate on a blank slate; they were layered onto an already deeply securitised and path-dependent field, often reinforcing existing priorities of containment.

Chapter 5 brings the analysis to the level of concrete border practices and human lives by examining migrant deaths at the Turkish - Greek border. Tracing the evolution of border management in the Evros region and the Aegean Sea, it shows how the pluralist, ad hoc and security-oriented policies of both the European Union

and Turkey translate into practices that expose people on the move to lethal risk. The chapter critiques the tendency to attribute these outcomes solely to the 2016 Statement, insisting instead that the agreement was but one moment in a longer, two-sided negotiation, and it makes visible the human cost of the historical legacies and governance structures analysed in the earlier chapters.

Conclusion

Taken together, the chapters demonstrate that Turkey's current migration and asylum regime is best understood as the most recent expression of a much longer history of governing mobility through securitisation and demographic engineering. Both internal factors -historical traumas and the perceived necessity of ethnic and religious homogeneity for national security- and external factors such as EU pressure and international agreements continue to shape policy. By moving beyond the simplistic dichotomy of humanitarianism versus securitisation, long-term interdisciplinary approach reveals the layered motivations behind policy decisions and foregrounds the ethical and humanitarian considerations that securitised frameworks tend to obscure. The thesis ultimately argues for a more critical, context-sensitive and empathetic understanding of migration governance that is capable of guiding more just and historically informed policy.