

# Agreeing to Disagree and the Way Forward: Conclusions Drawn From the Triangular Perspective on EU-Turkey Relations

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## 1. Introduction: Narrating a Roller Coaster Relationship

Cooperation is a theme which constantly returns in the sometimes difficult triangular relations between the European Union (EU), Germany and Turkey. Geography, geopolitical challenges and long-standing people-to-people contacts are very much here to stay. Moreover, all three parts of the triangle will not cease to cooperate on matters of mutual significance and interest. Our edited volume seeks to disentangle this complex relationship by focussing on narratives within the EU, Germany and Turkey on EU-Turkey relations. Narratives create political action but will also lead to political inaction and deadlock if no common aims or *finalité* can be identified. When looking to interpret political developments, narratives have so far been largely overlooked as an explanatory research tool, which could specifically assist in understanding to what extent a new institutional frame might help to break-up the conflictual spiral that has been determining EU-Turkey relations in recent years.

Turkey's relations with the EU and Germany often resemble a roller coaster ride with no end in sight and where rapprochement can alternate with conflict within months. In the past decade alone, we can observe a quite telling pattern: The European Commission's attempt to revive EU-Turkey relations by introducing a 'Positive Agenda' on cooperation in distinct fields during 2012<sup>1</sup> dissolved into thin air only one year later as the 2013 Gezi Park protests in Istanbul disclosed how state and police forces turned against the country's civil society. This is said to have marked a turning point in EU-Turkey relations.<sup>2</sup> In 2015, the influx of migrants

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1 Cf. European Commission. Positive EU-Turkey agenda launched in Ankara. Memo/12/359. Brussels, 17.05.2012.

2 Cf. Weise, Helena/ Tekin, Funda. From EU-Accession to Unique Partnership – Narratives, Strategies and Scenarios of EU-Turkey Relations in the German Parliament 2002–2018. In this volume, p. 179-109, p.91.

from Syria into the EU and Germany gave rise to German-led negotiations, which eventually led to the March 2016 EU-Turkey statement on migration and constituted a sudden, short phase of cooperation.

However, immediately afterwards relations deteriorated once again following the failed coup attempt in Turkey of July 2016, which in Turkey's view produced a belated and inappropriate reaction from the EU. Shortly before, the German parliament with an almost unanimous vote officially recognised the 1915 mass deaths of Armenians during the Ottoman Empire as genocide. Relations weakened even more in 2017 due to a number of issues: a dispute about Turkish campaigning for the referendum on Turkey's presidential system in EU Member States; elections in Germany that further politicised relations with Turkey; and the fact that people of German nationality were arrested in Turkey following the failed coup attempt.<sup>3</sup>

In response to Turkey's continued backsliding in the rule of law and human rights issues, the EU's General Affairs Council decided in June 2018 that accession negotiations with Turkey were effectively frozen, with no chapters being considered for opening or closing. Finally, EU-Turkey relations reached rock-bottom in 2020 after months of Turkey's energy drilling and military conflicts off the coast of Cyprus and Libya in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. Following the European Council's decision on targeted measures against Turkey, it offered "a positive political agenda [...] provided constructive efforts to stop illegal activities vis-à-vis Greece and Cyprus are sustained"<sup>4</sup> by Turkey. Since then, open conflict between the EU and Turkey has receded.

In the immediate aftermath of Russia invading Ukraine in February 2022, a series of high-level visits of German and EU officials to Turkey took place to discuss not only security cooperation, but also various other areas of concern.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, in late April 2022, a life sentence was hand-

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3 Cf. Turhan, Ebru. Introduction. In: Ebru Turhan (Ed.). *German-Turkish Relations Revisited. The European Dimension, Domestic and Foreign Politics and Transnational Dynamics*. Turkey and European Union Studies Vol. 2. Baden-Baden, 2019, pp. 11–27, p. 12.

4 European Council. Conclusions. Special meeting of the European Council, 1 and 2 October 2020. EUCO 13/20. Brussels, 02.10.2020, p. 8.

5 Cf. European Commission. Executive Vice-President Timmermans in Turkey to strengthen cooperation on climate, 20.04.2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news/executive-vice-president-timmermans-turkey-strengthen-cooperation-climate-2022-04-20\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news/executive-vice-president-timmermans-turkey-strengthen-cooperation-climate-2022-04-20_en) [29.05.2022]; The Federal Government. Federal Chancellor Scholz visits Turkey, 14.03.2022, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/scholz-in-turkey-2015574> [29.05.2022].

ed down to prominent businessman, philanthropist and activist Osman Kavala, who had been convicted of having attempted to overthrow the government during the Gezi Park protests. This caused a further impairing of Turkey's relations with both the EU and the Council of Europe, the latter having earlier agreed on starting infringement proceedings against Turkey for not obeying the European Court of Human Rights' judgements that had clearly demanded Osman Kavala's release.<sup>6</sup> The clear and confrontational statements by the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, and his German counterpart, Annalena Baerbock, during a joint press conference in Istanbul in July 2022, highlighted two issues: there are still various conflictual issues that strain both German-Turkish and EU-Turkey relations. Both sides are currently not willing to conceal their opposing positions.<sup>7</sup> All of these events are politically outstanding in themselves. While they have effectively sent EU-Turkey relations on a roller coaster ride, for the moment at least a train crash has been avoided.<sup>8</sup>

All contributions to our volume share the aim of contextualising this present state of affairs by entangling the complex, multi-layered EU-Turkish relationship through the analysis and deconstruction of respective narratives in the EU, Turkey and Germany. Broadly speaking, we understand narratives as the 'stories people tell' that mostly include a 'moral of the story' in terms of a normative statement on how the framework and intensity of EU-Turkey relations should be designed.<sup>9</sup> Why does this matter? Narratives play an important role for political behaviour in helping to

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- 6 Cf. Council of Europe. Committee of Ministers refers Kavala v. Turkey case to the European Court of Human Rights, 03.02.2022, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/porta/~/committee-of-ministers-refers-kavala-v-turkey-case-to-the-european-court-of-human-rights> [29.05.2022]; Human Rights Watch. Turkey: Council of Europe Votes for Infringement Process. Sanction Sought for Ankara's Refusal to Release Rights Defender Osman Kavala, 02.02.2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/02/02/turkey-council-europe-votes-infringement-process> [29.05.2022].
  - 7 Cf. Reuters. Turkish, German ministers argue over policies in tense news conference, 29.07.2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/turkish-german-ministers-argue-over-policies-tense-news-conference-2022-07-29/> [(29.07.2022)].
  - 8 Cf. Tekin, F./ Wessels, W. Untangling German-Turkish Relations: Thinking Ahead. In: Ebru Turhan (Ed.). German-Turkish Relations Revisited. The European Dimension, Domestic and Foreign Politics and Transnational Dynamics. Turkey and European Union Studies. Vol. 2. Baden-Baden, 2019, pp. 269–279, p. 270.
  - 9 Cf. Tekin, Funda/ Schönlaue, Anke. The EU-German-Turkish Triangle. A Conceptual Framework for Narratives, Perceptions and Discourse of a Unique Relationship. In this volume, p.9-30, p. 61.

make sense of one's past and future.<sup>10</sup> A common understanding or at least comprehension of one's counterpart's perceptions and ideas provide the foundation for discussing, negotiating and envisioning a path towards the achievement of a future scenario. This means that diverging or even contested interests and priorities do not necessarily have to result in a conflictual relationship so long as they are embedded in the same story or share the same 'moral of the story'.

In this chapter we aim to answer the general research question of what impact narratives have on the relationship between the EU, Turkey and Germany by presenting the main findings of this volume's narrative analysis in a comparative, temporal and thematic approach. In the next section we revisit the chapters of this edited volume from the perspective of these analytical elements. In the third section we elaborate on whether or not those findings suggest a paradigm shift in EU-Turkey relations and outline a future scenario for the relationship. The final section provides an outlook on how our findings could possibly interplay between potential developments of differentiated integration in the EU.

## 2. Main Findings of the Narrative Analysis

The contributions to this volume analyse narratives on EU-Turkey relations from different angles and within different time periods up until the year 2019. Clearly, we could analyse the dialogue of many more actors, but nevertheless the combined results provide for a very good understanding of what themes have driven the relationship over the past few decades. We consider the stories that were told and which narratives shape our understanding of the way actors want us to perceive the relationship. This analysis also includes an assessment of Turkish public opinion, which facilitates our appreciation of how discourse about the relationship changes.

We structure the research findings in this volume by answering the question of whether and, if so, to what extent do EU, German and Turkish actors' narratives correlate or contrast in general terms, and, more specifically, with a view to the four thematic dimensions of politics, security, economy and identity. Within the political dimension, discussion focuses, often within the context of accession talks, on the state of the political system, particularly in light of: democracy, the rule of law, human rights,

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10 Cf. Jones, Michael/ McBeth, Mark. A Narrative Policy Framework: Clear Enough to be Wrong? in: *The Policy Studies Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 2, pp. 329–353, p. 330.

as well as respect for and protection of minorities. Geostrategic arguments deal with Turkey's geopolitical significance in Europe and especially its role in Europe's security architecture, such as the country's vital role in NATO due to its geographic characteristics. The economic dimension subsumes all references made to bilateral and multilateral trade or relevance as mutual trading partners. Under the societal or identity-related dimension, we identify references to religion, cultural identification and ascriptions determining norms, values and behaviour of individuals as well as groups along with societal categories applied by the narrators, for instance 'us' vs. 'them'.<sup>11</sup> This style of analysis helps to identify recurring topics and define lines of argument that sometimes develop over wide timespans. We, therefore, additionally assess whether and if so to what extent such narratives change over time.

Having briefly introduced our conceptual frame, we now set off to merge individual analyses with common findings. We discover that narratives or stories in the EU, Germany and Turkey did not share a 'moral of the story' concerning the common *finalité* of relations in almost all cases over the past 60 years. Exceptions are the early 1960s and the end of the 1990s/early 2000s, when Turkey finally became a candidate country. Sometimes, different plots on each side about the very same issue lead to a different 'moral to the story' and proposed policy solutions. We identify three main turning points (two relating to Germany and the EU and one to Turkey), resulting in two paradigm shifts on the European side, but none on the Turkish side.

### *2.1 Narratives on EU-Turkey Relations: Three Main Storylines*

Considering the multitude of narratives on EU-Turkey relations that the authors to this edited volume identified in the EU, Turkey and Germany, the picture seems at first sight to be rather complex. Figure 31 collects 24 narratives concerning different objects of analysis featured in the individual chapters.

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11 Cf. Schönlau, Anke/ Schröder, Mirja. A Charged Friendship: German Narratives of EU-Turkey Relations in the Pre-accession Phase, 1959–1999. In this volume, pp. 57-77, p. 61.

Figure 31: Simplified Collection of Narratives on EU-Turkey Relations and their Moral of the Story

Actor	Time	Narrative	Moral of the story
Turkey	1959-1990	Westernisation	Accession
	since 1960s	Economic Cooperation	Accession
	1980-2000	Europeanisation	Accession
	since 1989	Eurasianisation	Accession
	2000/2002	Turkey as 'the Heir'	Accession
	since 2000s	Turkey as a 'Great Power'	Accession
	2013	Victim of Double-Standards	Accession
EU	1960-1980	Membership	Accession
	since 1960s	Strategic Partner	Cooperation
	since 1980s	Distant Neighbour	Cooperation
	1980s/1997/2005	Special Case/Candidate	Cooperation
	1997-2004	Membership	Accession
	1992-today	Transactional Partnership	Cooperation
	since 2015	Problematic Neighbour	Cooperation
Germany	1960s	Turkey as Partner of the West	Cooperation
	1970s	Complicated Military Ally	Cooperation
	1980s	Important Partner	Cooperation
	1980s	Political Concern	Cooperation
	1990s	European with Exceptions	Cooperation
	1990s	Geostrategic Partner	Accession
	2000s	Not European	Cooperation but no accession
	2000s, 2015	Geostrategic Asset	Cooperation
	2000s	EU Accession	Accession
	since 2013	Politically Unpredictable Country	Cooperation but no accession

Source: Own compilation based on the chapters present in this edited volume.

Upon closer observation those narratives in essence tell three different kinds of stories. Firstly, they explore the issue of how far Turkey and the EU converge in terms of identity or rather consider the question of whether and if so to what extent does Turkey belong to Europe/the EU. Respective narratives since the 1950s up to the 1990s on the Turkish side deal with Turkey's *Westernisation* or *Europeanisation*, considering Turkey as a "crucial part of the West" or owning a "rightful" place among European countries<sup>12</sup> respectively. Narratives in the EU and Germany are by far more sceptical and build on the narrative of Turkey being "European with exceptions"<sup>13</sup> in the 1990s or simply describing Turkey as "not (belonging) to the European cultural circle"<sup>14</sup> in the early 2000s. Turkey's corresponding narrative dealing with this supposed clash between European and Turkish identity is the one on *Turkey as 'the Heir'*.<sup>15</sup> The storyline suggests, that "Turkey is European *because* of its past (... and that) European actors bring up so-called identity-related differences, strategically using Turkey's past and thereby masking their own underlying reluctance for further integration".<sup>16</sup>

Secondly, narratives assess Turkey's actorness. Turkish narratives since 1989 tell the story of Turkey becoming a regional power (*Eurasianisation* narrative) or a "great power"<sup>17</sup> considering Turkey's alternatives to the EU. In Germany, the narrative of Turkey's *Geostrategic asset*<sup>18</sup> was dominant between 2000 and 2013. The Gezi Park protests produced the German narrative on Turkey being a *Politically Unpredictable Country*.<sup>19</sup>

Thirdly, most narratives deal with questions about the EU-Turkey relationship's quality. While in Turkey one single mono-thematic narrative could be identified, which is simply concerning *Membership*,<sup>20</sup> narratives in Germany and the EU vary considerably. There is also a *Membership*/EU accession narrative but stories focus more on Turkey as a "special

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12 Özbey, Ebru Ece/ Hauge, Hanna-Lisa/ Eralp, Atila. Identity Representations in Narratives on EU-Turkey Relations. In this volume, pp. 31-55, p. 42.

13 Schönlaue/ Schröder, A Charged Friendship, 2022, p. 72.

14 Deutscher Bundestag. Michael Glos. Plenary Protocol 15/4. Berlin, 29.10.2002, p. 88, cited in Weise/Tekin, From EU-Accession to Unique Partnership, 2022.

15 Cf. Özbey /Hauge /Eralp. Identity Representations in Narratives on EU-Turkey Relations, 2022.

16 Ibid., p. 45.

17 Ibid., p. 40.

18 Weise/ Tekin. From EU-Accession to Unique Partnership, 2022, p. 105.

19 Ibid., p. 170ff.

20 Cf. Özbey/ Hauge/ Eralp. Identity Representations in Narratives on EU-Turkey Relations, 2022.

candidate”,<sup>21</sup> “(important) strategic partner”,<sup>22</sup> “partner of the west”,<sup>23</sup> “geostrategic partner”<sup>24</sup> and “distant”<sup>25</sup> or even “problematic neighbour”.<sup>26</sup> This corresponds with narratives of a relationship with a *Complicated Military Ally*<sup>27</sup> or *Transactional Partnership*.<sup>28</sup>

Our analysis has also highlighted the differences of storylines in the EU, Germany and Turkey respectively. Turkish narration reflects to a large extent on the country’s position within the European and regional architecture, both geostrategic and politically. Turkish narratives are often explicitly about what Turkey is like and what role it holds (or should hold) in the world. Although Turkish narratives to a large extent define Turkey as part of Europe, the implicit question is how Turkey defines itself against (the idea of) Europe. This is not the case for the EU or Germany, where narratives on Turkey are mostly unidirectional and less self-reflective as they state something about Turkey, not about the EU. Although there are in general European narratives about Europe and the EU, such as the ‘community of values’ narrative,<sup>29</sup> this is not tied to EU-Turkey relations. Given that the EU is a decades-old bloc and Turkey is the country that wants to accede, this is certainly not surprising. However, this lack of self-reflection in the European and German narratives on EU-Turkey relations denies the fact that “it takes two to tango”<sup>30</sup> in this relationship. This means that even though developments in Turkey and Turkey’s compliance with the accession criteria and actions in accordance with good neighbourly relations are crucial for the state of play in EU-Turkey relations, this represents only one side of the coin. Enlargement or even Turkey fatigue and absorption

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21 Özbey/ Hauge/ Eralp. Identity Representations in Narratives on EU-Turkey Relations, 2022, p. 41.

22 Ibid., p. 40.

23 Schönlau/ Schröder, A Charged Friendship, 2022, p. 62.

24 Ibid., p. 75.

25 Özbey/ Hauge/ Eralp. Identity Representations in Narratives on EU-Turkey Relations, 2022, p. 49.

26 Rau/ Ersoy/ Wessels. EU Leaders’ Narratives on Turkey, 2022, p. 154.

27 Schönlau/ Schröder. A Charged Friendship, 2022, p. 66.

28 Rau/ Ersoy/ Wessels. EU Leaders’ Narratives on Turkey, 2022, p. 151.

29 Müller, Manuel. Individuelle und kollektive Selbstbestimmung jenseits des Nationalstaats: das kosmopolitisch-demokratische Narrativ der europäischen Integration. In: *integration*, 2021, Vol. 44, No. 4, pp. 251–265.

30 Cf. Soler i Lecha, Eduard/ Tekin, Funda/ Sökmen, Melike Janine. It Takes Two to Tango: Political changes in Europe and their Impact on Turkey’s EU bid. FEUTURE Online Paper No. 17. Cologne, April 2018.



capacity as well as crises and trends of differentiated integration in the EU are just as important when it comes to assessing the relationship.

Each narrative has its own ‘moral of the story’. In broad terms one key element is the question of whether EU accession/membership is the destined *finalité* of the relationship or alternative forms of institutional relations between the EU and Turkey need to be considered. Turkey’s accession to the EU remains a “strategic priority”.<sup>31</sup> A single exception is constituted in the Euro Crisis, when Turkey claimed to be considering alternatives to accession in light of the weak economic and political state of the EU.<sup>32</sup> In conclusion and as already stated, in Turkey there is only one ‘moral of the story’ and that is membership. In the EU and Germany, though, plots of narratives have repeatedly considered alternative options. The plot of narratives which claim that Turkey is not European or sufficiently European relates to the concept of privileged partnership in the early 2000s. In this case, both the plots of narratives and their ‘moral of the story’ diverge between the EU and Germany on the one side and Turkey on the other. This is bound to cause conflict in the relationship.

## 2.2 *The Difficulties of Breaking the Vicious Circle of Mutual Accusations*

Concerning the question whether and if so to what extent EU, German and Turkish narratives contrast in general terms, we can draw two main conclusions from our analysis.

Firstly, narratives grow increasingly rich in contrast over time, but interestingly correlate the more contrast can be identified. By the end of 2019, we see the German side relating to Turkey as an *Politically Unpredictable Country*<sup>33</sup> when it comes to the EU’s main accession criteria democracy and the rule of law. Turkey, in return, identifies European partners as not trustworthy for criticising Turkish domestic policy-making.<sup>34</sup> Where

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31 Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Türkiye’s Enterprising and Humanitarian Foreign Policy. A Synopsis, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/synopsis-of-the-turkish-foreign-policy.en.mfa> [04.07.2022].

32 Cf. Özel, Soli. Despite the eurozone crisis, and the ambivalent attitudes of the Turkish public, Turkey still stands to benefit from EU accession. In: LSE Blog, 29.10.2012 [04.07.2022].

33 Cf. Tekin, Funda/ Schönlau, Anke. The EU-German-Turkish Triangle, 2022.

34 Özbey/ Hauge/ Eralp. Identity Representations in Narratives on EU-Turkey Relations, 2022.

Turkey lifts itself up as *Great Power*<sup>35</sup> in its regional environment including European littoral states to the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, the EU sees in Turkey a “problematic neighbour”<sup>36</sup> behaving aggressively towards its (European) neighbours. These contrasting yet strongly correlating narratives provide an explanation for the vicious spiral of mutual accusations that the EU and Turkey as well as Germany and Turkey have been entrapped by for the past decade.

Secondly, narratives of different EU institutions differ widely, referring to different plots and therefore a different ‘moral of the story’. Following their own institutional logic, self-perception and competences, they employ diverging narratives on EU-Turkey relations that impede establishing a common narrative that is easily comprehensible outside the EU institutions and translated into a comprehensive policy set or strategy towards Turkey. The European Council, representing the Member States who have their very own bilateral ties with Turkey, agreed in the past years on statements representing the lowest-common denominator among Member States’ preferences. This narrowed the statements down to focus on criticising Turkey’s relations with its neighbours and consequently defining cooperation as the determining form of EU-Turkey relations. The European Council’s stance on Turkey is predominantly geostrategically induced. The European Parliament’s emphasis is on the rule of law and human rights, but it is not able to lock or unlock any institutional path under the current institutional set-up. The European Commission’s take is rather technical, although nuanced in regard to the rule of law in Turkey, since it is one of the parameters observed within the accession process.<sup>37</sup> However, these findings on the EU institutions’ communication are not new to Turkey. Over time, Turkey has learned to play ball with the differing signals and follows its own (foreign) policy approach that is not related to EU foreign policy aims. Economic cooperation, embedded in a larger (geo-)political context, can be used for strategic escalation (“no one should try to deceive us”<sup>38</sup>) of rhetoric, or in a very cooperative way when it comes to bi- or

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35 Ibid., p 46.

36 Cf. Rau/ Ersoy/ Wessels. EU Leaders’ Narratives on Turkey, 2022.

37 Cf. Toygür, Ilke/ Tekin, Funda/ Soler i Lecha, Eduard/ Danforth, Nicholas. Turkey’s foreign policy and its consequences for the EU. In-depth Analysis, Requested by AFET Committee, European Parliament, EP/EXPO/AFET/FWC/2019–01/Lot1/2/C/03.

38 Bedir, Nurdan/ Gedikli, Ardahan/ Şenyuva, Özgehan. So Close Yet So Far: Turkey’s Relations with Germany in Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Narratives (2003–2018). In this volume, pp. 111-139, p. 131.

multilateral trade, as in “German companies operating in Turkey profit by various price advantages (...) (and) also contribute to the production, technology and export levels of Turkish industry”.<sup>39</sup> The Turkish president’s promotion of cooperation and escalation at the same time, as identified by *Gedikli, Bedir and Şenyuva*, is a strategy for a transactional relationship, but not for sustainable rules-based cooperation and vision.

### *2.3 Thematic Trends and Narrated Turning Points in EU-Turkey Relations*

Looking at the development of narratives across time, Turkey, the EU and Germany have come to agree to disagree. Shifts at national, regional or global levels, such as the consequences of the end of the Cold War and of the bi-polar structure of the international system are relevant factors in respective analyses. While there is mostly convergence during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, building on geostrategic interests, narratives become more diverse and more distinct from the 1990s onwards. Narratives have a ‘plot’, the actual theme that the narrator talks about. Analysing and comparing these thematic dimensions that drive<sup>40</sup> EU-Turkey relations helps to contextualise the narratives and then identify critical turning points in the narration. In EU-Turkey relations, narratives mostly take place within four thematic dimensions – geostrategic, political, economic, societal/identity – and one ‘cross-cutting’ dimension which is unique to the narration of Turkey’s president Erdoğan.

The geostrategic dimension is a true evergreen and one of two most influential dimensions in narratives on EU-Turkey relations. Turkey’s perception as a “cornerstone within our system of defence”<sup>41</sup> in Germany in the 1960s was matched by NATO’s perceived role in the “reinforcement of [Turkey’s] national security”.<sup>42</sup> The first slight changes in this dimension appear in the 1970s and the emerging Cyprus conflict (“Support

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39 Cf. Bedir, Nurdan/ Gedikli, Ardahan/ Şenyuva, Özgehan. So Close Yet So Far: Turkey’s Relations with Germany in Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Narratives (2003–2018). In this volume, pp. 111-139, p. 130.

40 Cf. Saatçioğlu, Beken/ Tekin, Funda/ Ekim, Sinan/ Tocci, Nathalie. The Future of EU-Turkey Relations: A Dynamic Association Framework amidst Conflictual Cooperation. FEUTURE Synthesis Paper.

41 Schönlau/ Schröder. A Charged Friendship, 2022, p. 64.

42 Özbey/ Hauge/ Eralp. Identity Representations in Narratives on EU-Turkey Relations, 2022, pp. 41.

for Greece is not meant to be against Turkey, an ally<sup>43</sup>), but cooperation-prone narratives such as the *Strategic Partner* or *Important Partner* narrative remain dominant in this dimension throughout the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s. Conflictual narratives are commonly observed in European Council Conclusions since Turkey started its energy explorations and military exercises in the Eastern Mediterranean and pursued its own strategy in Northern Syria that would “undermine the stability of the whole region”.<sup>44</sup> Narratives now address the same issue with a different interpretation (i.e. Turkey’s self-perception as the *Great Power* vs. the EU’s perception of Turkey as a *Problematic Neighbour*).

Though economic ties between Turkey and the EU have belonged to the institutional basis of EU-Turkey relations since the Ankara Agreement of 1963, the economic dimension appears relatively seldom throughout the analyses. Hence, none of the narratives identified in Figure 31 (above) is mainly driven by economics. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, discussions in Germany and the EU about Turkey’s economy or financial assistance are connected to the geostrategic dimension respectively understood as a means of stabilising Turkey as a NATO member. In the 1990s, Turkey’s ability to fulfil the economic requirements of membership became more prevalent. In Turkey, the economic dimension has indeed been frequently mentioned since the 2000s, albeit used to pursue both cooperation and conflict with its EU partners, as stated in the previous section.

The societal/identity dimension is perhaps the most difficult to grasp; it appears from time to time in Germany and the EU during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (“Turkey is a part of Europe”<sup>45</sup>). Interestingly, the dimension disappears from the Chancellor’s narratives in governmental declarations at the time when Kohl’s reservations against Turkey’s cultural identity were the main obstacle to Turkey’s membership application. Rather, the stance that Turkey is not fully European respectively *European with exceptions* was disseminated by other ranks within his party.<sup>46</sup> In Turkey, contrastingly, identity is ubiquitous but always intertwined with geostrategic or political arguments. The plot in this dimension changes over time, becoming more conflictual and dominant since 2013: The earlier version related that the EU will bring Turkey “to the level of contemporary civilisation

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43 Schönlau/ Schröder. *A Charged Friendship*, 2022, p. 66.

44 Rau/ Ersoy/ Wessels. *EU Leaders’ Narratives on Turkey*, 2022, pp. 155.

45 Özbey/ Hauge/ Eralp. *Identity Representations in Narratives on EU-Turkey Relations*, 2022, p. 48.

46 Cf. Schönlau/ Schröder. *A Charged Friendship*, 2022, pp. 72ff.

it deserves”<sup>47</sup> in 2003 (politically induced); but by 2016 this had changed to, “Turkey is not a guest but the host in Europe”<sup>48</sup> (identity/geostrategic induced).

Finally, along the geostrategic dimensions, the political dimension has in recent years been the most relevant. Seldomly observed when the EU was still an economic, not a political union, it became more visible from the 1980s onwards. The narrative of *Political Concern* was introduced with the military coup in Turkey during 1980.<sup>49</sup> Since the Gezi Park protests in 2013, most discussions in the German Bundestag on Turkey were part of the political dimension on how to “adjust the political course towards Turkey”.<sup>50</sup> In light of the attempted Coup d’etat in Turkey during 2016, the European Council even demanded Turkey’s “full compliance with the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, including Protocol 13 on the abolition of the death penalty”.<sup>51</sup> From a Turkish perspective, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, the political dimension often became intertwined with the identity dimension, where the EU’s political system was part of a vision of Turkey’s future. Initiated by the Gezi Park protests, but stretching to 2015 and the so-called migration crisis in Europe, the political dimension becomes very relevant in Turkey, citing “injustices and double standards”<sup>52</sup> in the accession process and general treatment of Turkey. Still, the Turkish president also continued to speak about solidarity and cooperation, which leads *Gedikli, Bedir and Şenyuva* to the conclusion that he pursues several approaches at the same time to his EU and German partners.<sup>53</sup> Thus, there are certain thematic trends in the narration of EU-Turkey relations especially in Germany and the EU. The Turkish narrative, in this volume extensively displayed by the Turkish president’s speeches, is more diverse both in terms of dimension as well as in quality: Erdoğan covers all dimensions from economics, political system, identity and geostrategic considera-

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47 Özbey/Hauge/ Eralp. Identity Representations in Narratives on EU-Turkey Relations, 2022, p. 43.

48 Ibid., p. 45.

49 Cf. Schönlau/ Schröder. A Charged Friendship, 2022, p. 70.

50 Weise/ Tekin. German Narratives, Strategies and Scenarios of EU-Turkey Relations 2002–2018, 2022, p. 93.

51 Council of the EU. Council Conclusions on Turkey, 18.07.2016, <https://www.councilofeuropa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/07/18/fac-turkey-conclusions/> [08.01.2022].

52 Bedir/ Gedikli/ Şenyuva. So Close Yet So Far, 2022, p. 154.

53 Ibid., p. 138f.

tions frequently. He also uses cooperative and conflictual narrations of the relationship at the same time.

Having identified thematic trends over time, the contributions to this volume additionally identified several turning points in the narration on EU-Turkey relations. Furthermore, in light of the previous analysis, they are narrated differently in the EU, Germany and Turkey, because their narratives prevail and change for different reasons. In Germany and the EU, we observe two turning points.

Firstly, Turkey's acquiring of candidacy status in 1999 was strongly induced among other factors by a new government in Germany. This government coalition of the social democrats and the Greens offered a narrative of Turkey as an important geostrategic partner and concluded that it was in the EU's own interest to accept Turkey as a member.

Secondly, a significant turning point was formed by the Gezi Park protests of 2013, when under the impression of Turkey's repressive actions against civil society actors, the last advocates of Turkey's accession changed their narrative to Turkey being too unpredictable to qualify for EU membership. Quickly thereafter, at Union level the *Problematic Neighbour* narrative quickly spread. Since 2018, the accession process has been effectively frozen.

In Turkey, the turning point is less bound to one specific event, but rather a development from becoming more similar to Europe (*Westernisation*, *Europeanisation*, to some extent *Eurasianisation*) to a self-perception of important regional and geopolitical force/entity (*the 'Heir'* or the '*Great Power*'). During the Gezi Park protests in 2013 and thereafter, the Turkish narration of its relations with the EU became harsh, but it never stopped (officially) advocating for membership. Compared to the years of *Westernisation* and *Europeanisation*, the plot had changed: Turkey should not become EU member because of its Europeanness, but because of its geopolitical importance.

### 3. Scenarios – Is There a Paradigm Shift and Which Vision for the Future Does it Correspond to?

Three different scenarios for the (institutional) future of EU-Turkey relations guide our analysis. We asked whether or not we observe a fundamental change of story on EU-Turkey relations – and if so, what drives this change and to which future scenario can it be linked?

The first scenario suggests a revitalisation of EU-Turkey relations, including a return to a conventional accession paradigm in the EU, Germany

and Turkey alike. This could be indicated by the re-emergence of narratives of Turkey's Europeanisation. In terms of theme, this would especially mean positive and shared narratives in the political dimension. Assessing the analysis presented in this edited volume, we cannot find any evidence for such a scenario or the possibility of a corresponding paradigm shift<sup>54</sup> that would render such a scenario likely in the foreseeable future. There is certainly no indication that there could be positive narrations on the developments in the political dimension over the foreseeable future. On the contrary, the joint press conference by the German and Turkish ministers of foreign affairs in July 2022 gave evidence of the vicious spiral of mutual accusations tightening: Çavuşoğlu accused Germany of siding with Greece and hence interfering in a bilateral conflict instead of taking a mediating role as Germany had done in the past. Baerbock was very clear on her demand that Turkey should refrain from further military operations in Syria and should free Osman Kavala from prison as requested by the Council of Europe.<sup>55</sup> With the Green party holding relevant ministries for EU-Turkey relations such as the Federal Foreign Office or the Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Action as well as chairing the European Affairs Committee in parliament, a new more values-based narrative on EU-Turkey relations might emerge and be consolidated over the legislative term of the traffic-light coalition in Germany. This would mean that headwinds for Turkey and EU-Turkey relations might even intensify.<sup>56</sup>

It is quite telling that the EU-accession narrative disappeared in the EU and Germany after its brief revitalisation during the so-called migration crisis that the EU was facing at the end of 2015. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 revitalised debates on the EU's enlargement as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia submitted their applications for EU accession. Interestingly enough, there is no mentioning of Turkey whatsoever in such debates. However, one can find evidence in the current debate on EU-Turkey relations of the expectation that the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections in Turkey might represent a turning point in the country's democratisation. Opposition

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54 'Paradigm shift' constitutes a fundamental change in the dominant narratives detailing how EU-Turkish relations are perceived and described by political actors, cf. Tekin/Schönlau, *The EU-German-Turkish Triangle*, 2022.

55 Reuters, Turkish, German ministers argue over policies in tense news conference, 29.07.2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/turkish-german-ministers-argue-over-policies-tense-news-conference-2022-07-29/> [29.07.2022].

56 Tekin, Funda. *EU-Turkey Relations and General Elections in Germany – Headwinds for Turkey?*, In: *Brief Series*, Berlin Bosphorus Initiative, April 2021.

parties signed a memorandum of understanding that they would return the country to a parliamentary system if they won the elections. Yet, in spite of the economy being in a dire state and Erdoğan losing support among his constituencies, there is no guarantee that elections will bring about a political change that might eventually also trigger a change in narratives on EU-Turkey relations in Turkey, in the EU or in Germany. Additionally, the geostrategic narrative's 'moral of the story' from both EU and German perspectives is no longer promoting Turkey's possible EU membership. On the contrary, Turkey is increasingly narrated as the *Distant Neighbour* or even *Problematic Neighbour*. The war in Ukraine has put Turkey's geopolitical and geostrategic position back in the spotlight, but this has not triggered a turning point in the storyline. In Turkey, every narrative contains the element of *Membership*, even though it is questionable whether or not membership is now in the interests of the current Turkish government. This constellation of narratives renders the scenario of '(re)energised accession process' for EU-Turkey relations obsolete in short-, mid- and also long-term perspectives.

The second scenario of a 'Unique Partnership with privileges specific for Turkey', would be suggested by narratives in the EU, Germany and Turkey that focus on Turkey as a strategic or important partner. This scenario would entail a rules-based cooperation between the EU and Turkey, in specific defined areas, with some 'opt-ins' for Turkey. It would be unique to the extent that no other country shares the same format of relations with the EU. EU-Turkey relations are already institutionally unique because they are structured within the accession track, the association agreement that established a Customs Union in 1995 as well as some looser forms of cooperation within the framework of High-Level Dialogues concerning policy areas of mutual interest such as counter terrorism, energy or transport.

The boldest attempt in narrating this uniqueness of EU-Turkey relations is the concept of "privileged partnership" dubbed by the German Christian Democratic Union in the early 2000s.<sup>57</sup> This advance was, though, massively rejected by Turkey that claimed that EU-Turkey relations already resembled a privileged partnership and hence there was nothing to gain for Turkey by this concept and consequently Turkish leaders insisted on the accession perspective. The United Kingdom's (UK) decision to exit from the EU raised expectations among political stakeholders that this

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57 Cf. Weise/ Tekin. German Narratives, Strategies and Scenarios of EU-Turkey Relations 2002–2018, 2022, p. 84.



‘Brexit’ could not only provide a blueprint for future EU-Turkey relations but could also provoke a paradigm shift in Turkey from insisting on EU membership to accepting some sort of privileged partnership. It was assumed that because the UK represented a large and powerful country which preferred to be associated to the EU rather than being a member, forms of EU-Turkey relations that were everything but membership could gain attraction for Turkey. Sigmar Gabriel, German minister of foreign affairs at the time, and Johannes Hahn, EU Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations in the Juncker Commission, both promoted alternative formats for EU-Turkey relations in terms of “realistic strategic partnership”.<sup>58</sup> As the Brexit-negotiations dragged on it turned out that both expectations had been false.

Generally, the narrative foundation of this scenario of a ‘Unique Partnership’ will become increasingly thinner if narratives in the individual thematic dimensions of the relationship become increasingly conflictual. If Turkey acts according to the narrative of Turkey as a *Great Power* and the EU and Germany focus on narratives of Turkey as a *Strategic Partner* at best or a politically unpredictable country that is increasingly turning away from European values, more positive and less contrasting narratives in the geopolitical or economic dimensions cannot provide sufficient counterarguments to balance the relationship within the delicate state of a Unique Partnership.

What we can identify instead is a scenario of ‘conflictual cooperation’,<sup>59</sup> which means that conflictual dynamics in certain dimensions such as politics and security go hand in hand with demands and interests for cooperation in others such as the economy, trade, migration and energy. This relates to the scenario of ‘stagnating and increasingly conflictual relations with a difficult neighbour’ in which the EU and Turkey cooperate within certain areas on a transactional basis, accompanied by conflictual narrations in the EU, Germany and Turkey and full disappearance of

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58 Spiegel Online. Gabriel sieht Brexit als Vorbild für Türkei-Beziehungen, 26.12.2017, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/sigmar-gabriel-will-brexit-als-vorbild-fuer-eu-tuerkei-beziehungen-a-1185065.html> [27.07.2022]; Daily Sabah. Despite Turkey's previous refusals, EU commissioner suggests 'strategic partnership', 07.11.2018, <https://www.dailysabah.com/eu-affairs/2018/11/07/despite-turkeys-previous-refusals-eu-commissioner-suggests-strategic-partnership> [27.07.2022].

59 Tekin, Funda. The Future of EU-Turkey Relations: Exploring the Dynamics and Relevant Scenarios. In: Saatçioğlu, Beken/ Tekin, Funda (Eds.): Turkey and the European Union. Key Dynamics and Future Scenarios. Turkey and European Union Studies. Vol. 3. Baden-Baden, 2021, p. 11.

the accession narrative. Referring to what we analysed in the previous scenario, this is the most likely scenario for EU-Turkey relations when looking at the narratives. Since 2013, narratives in the EU, Turkey and Germany have increasingly been shifting towards conflict. Whereas the Turkish side still underlines cooperation interest in the economic dimension, other actors have identified Turkey increasingly as unpredictable<sup>60</sup> or “hostile”.<sup>61</sup> The few attempts of refreshed institutional cooperation, as explained under the ‘Unique Partnership’ scenario, have not translated into long-lasting changes of narratives.

Our narrative-analysis has shown that under the current circumstances, a stagnating and increasingly conflictual relationship remains the most likely scenario for the foreseeable future. Changing tracks to a more cooperative scenario, namely the Unique Partnership, would require substantial changes in the relationship, which are likely to be displayed by sustained new narratives. These could hint at special forms of partnerships with emphasis on areas of successful cooperation, possibly in trade or energy (in fact, there are numerous challenges to successful cooperation to be solved). Furthermore, we cannot expect the discontent between actors to disappear in full, even if the share of conflictual narratives would decrease.

Ultimately, we seek to find an answer to future cooperation potential in EU-Turkey relations, based on our narrative observations. Moreover, while we stated above that the EU and Turkey “agree to disagree”, this disagreement cannot be solved before the EU itself finds a new approach to Turkey and accession, which would be a precondition for producing a new narrative.

#### *4. Which Way Forward in EU-Turkey Relations and the Role of Germany*

By aggregating the different analyses presented in this volume, we observe a number of interesting findings that explain why the triangular relationship is stuck in a spiral and what needs to happen to put relations on a new track. We argue that, if the EU wishes to leave this locked-in track, part of the solution must be to look for consensus among its own ranks to build a common path and discuss the future of its relations with Turkey. Beyond

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60 Weise/ Tekin. German Narratives, Strategies and Scenarios of EU-Turkey Relations 2002–2018, 2022, p. 107ff.

61 Özbey/ Hauge/ Eralp. Identity Representations in Narratives on EU-Turkey Relations, 2022, p. 49.

questions on the fate of Turkey's democracy (though intertwined), the demand for 'good neighbourly relations' with Greece and Cyprus are at the core of the Union's continued conflicts with Turkey and drive the latest Council narratives. In this light, it will be difficult for Germany again to take "refuge in leadership"<sup>62</sup> when it comes to EU-Turkey relations. Nevertheless, the German government could capitalise on its outstanding relations with Turkey and aim to steer a discussion on the future of EU-Turkey relations.

Germany's role in this triangular relationship is special in the sense that Turkey's president, as *Gedikli, Bedir and Şenyuva* worked out, often addresses Germany when the actual addressee of a matter is (or should be) the EU and its institutions. After the German election in 2021, Turkey is now confronted with a new government, Germany's foreign ministry is now run by the Green party, whose emphasis (as written by *Weise and Tekin*) is focussed on the state of rule of law in Turkey, coupled with which a very critical stance on political developments. For a moment in spring 2022, in light of the Russian attack on Ukraine, the re-evaluation of relations with Russia and sudden revival of NATO, it appeared that geostrategic considerations might override the emphasis on the rule of law in Turkey for a while: Turkey organised dialogues between Russia and Ukraine; visits from Member State and EU officials mounted, including new High Level Dialogues; and an alternative meeting format was set up by the European Commission in light of the EU-Turkey refugee deal.<sup>63</sup>

Though the outlook for war in Ukraine in May 2022 shifted to prospects of a long-term war and therefore might have lasting impact on the geopolitical set-up in Germany and European security structures, Germany's Foreign Minister Baerbock has underlined concerns about the state of rule of law in Turkey, in particular Turkey's handling of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, and criticised "abstract pre-emptive strikes"<sup>64</sup> of Turkey in Northern Syria for not being covered

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62 Reiners, Wulf/ Tekin, Funda. Taking Refuge in Leadership? Facilitators and Constraints of Germany's Influence in EU Migration Policy and EU-Turkey Affairs during the Refugee Crisis (2015–2016). In: *German Politics*, Vol. 29, Issue 1, 2020, pp. 115–130.

63 Cf. European Commission. Executive Vice-President Timmermans in Turkey to strengthen cooperation on climate, 20.04.2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news/executive-vice-president-timmermans-turkey-strengthen-cooperation-climate-2022-04-20\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news/executive-vice-president-timmermans-turkey-strengthen-cooperation-climate-2022-04-20_en) [29.05.2022].

64 Spiegel Online. „Warum kommen Sie immer wieder mit Osman Kavala?“, 30.07.2022, <https://www.spiegel.de/ausland/baerbock-und-cavusoglu-streiten-a>

by international law. The host, Turkey's Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu, as a rejoinder offered praise that during former chancellor Angela Merkel's leadership, Germany had been a "sincere mediator"<sup>65</sup> between Turkey and Greek interests. Hence, also under the new government, the roller coaster pattern in EU-Turkey relations described in the beginning will continue, with a general gap between structure and ambition.

Based on the findings above, EU-Turkey relations are currently stuck in what we initially referred to as conflictual cooperation: Cooperation is ad-hoc, transactional and takes place outside the institutional pathways initially created for candidate countries, with currently no possibility to turn back on this structured path. Even at times of an apparent positive atmosphere and more frequent bilateral visits, the relationship is highly prone to deviations into reciprocal accusations and conflicts. Such deviations may be induced by external shocks, specific policies of one of the parties or simply building on domestic policy calculation, namely in election campaigns. This is not specific to Turkish-German or EU-Turkey relations. Relations between individual EU Member States vary in their intensity, there being blocs, close partnerships and rather distanced relationships. The difference is the institutional structure and rules-based order in which member countries would always come back to the table and seek to find ways of cooperating.

In EU-Turkey relations, there is no longer such a common fall-back position or institutional structure. Accession negotiations remain on ice. High Level Dialogues take place when it is politically pleasing but have no structured and regular cycle (at least not in practice). This is reflected in the absence of an alternative format/designation in the narratives. When looking to other international cooperation formats such as NATO, the relationship has suffered a lot. A common understanding of the importance of geostrategic cooperation and mutual dependencies has not prevented open conflicts within the alliance.

As long as the EU and Turkey agree to disagree, conflictual cooperation will continue. Narratives on all sides provide different 'morals of the story', sometimes completely different interpretations, but they confirm that cooperation on matters of common interest is necessary and indeed vital. The

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1a2dd-8faa-4029-865c-a28b2fdf3fa2 [(30.07.2022)].

65 Tagesspiegel. Türkischer Oppositionspolitiker lobt die „direkten Aussagen“ der Außenministerin, 30.07.2022, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/nach-streit-zwischen-baerbock-und-cavusoglu-tuerkischer-oppositionspolitiker-lobt-die-direkten-aussagen-der-aussenministerin/28561620.html> [30.07.2022].

European Parliament will not change its stance towards Turkey, but the Council will cooperate as long as possible even with a distant – or hostile – neighbour.

There are various variables that might prevent the break-up of this vicious circle of mutual accusations within the narrative dimension of EU-Turkey relations. Hence, it will also be important to focus on setting up a sustainable institutional framework for this relationship. This has to imply considering forms of external differentiation.<sup>66</sup> Today, it is clear that Turkey does not belong to the EU's or Germany's narration of EU enlargement. The French President Emmanuel Macron launched a debate on additional frameworks for the EU's relations with third countries – the European Political Community. There are other concepts such as Andrew Duff's affiliate membership that contribute to this debate. Inspiration can also be drawn from Nathalie Tocci's 'principled pragmatism' as a way to acknowledge different practices and realities worldwide while making international law and its underlying norms "the benchmark of what is acceptable in a relationship and what is not".<sup>67</sup> Regardless of whether and how such concepts might be framed institutionally their narration will be just as important. As long as states that have been promised accession at some point perceive such concepts as alternative to the EU's enlargement instead of a stepping stone on the way into the EU, this debate will increase frustration among those states. Such fear of being stuck in the outer circle of the EU's concentric circles already caused the concept of the European Confederation promoted by Francois Mitterrand in the 1990s to disappear from debate rather quickly. The fear of a second-class membership will undermine any new concept of external differentiation if the EU cannot dilute the fear of being kept at its doorstep. Hence, any attractive concept of differentiated integration requires a thorough debate of how differentiated integration can bring the EU as a whole – including today's non-members – forward. EU-Turkey relations are currently absent from this debate. Our analysis concludes that conflictual cooperation will continue. Arriving at a different, perhaps Unique Partnership, will require different narratives.

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66 Tekin, Funda. Differentiated Integration: An Alternative Conceptualization of EU-Turkey Relations. In: Wulf Reiners, Ebru Turhan (Eds.). *EU-Turkey Relations. Theories, Institutions, and Policies*, 2021, Cham, pp. 157–181.

67 Kaldor, Mary. Principled pragmatism: defending normative Europe. 12.12.2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/principled-pragmatism-defending-normative-europe/> [25.07.2022].

