



**Talking Europe on the sidelines: mapping EU membership discourses in the Turkish Parliament (2004-2017)**

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**Abstract**

*Scholars have written a great deal on intra-EU controversies related to Turkey, but there is a scarcity of systematic analyses on the evolution of Turkish political discourses on EU membership. This article examines an original dataset on Turkish parliamentary debates by mapping political parties' positions and frames between 2004 and 2017. Based on a holistic analysis, we distinguish three discursive phases in parliamentary EU membership debates: bumpy start (2004-2005), enthusiasm (2006-2012), and accession fatigue (2013-2017). At the party level, we find that the incumbent AKP has decreased its support for EU membership over time while the opposition parties – except for the ultranationalist MHP – became leading proponents. This article contributes to the literature by dissecting positional and argumentative patterns in Turkish party-political discourse on EU membership.*

Keywords: Turkey-EU relations, Turkish EU membership discourse, parliamentary debates

**Introduction**

Turkey-European Union (EU) relations remain a perplexing tale. The EU officially opened accession negotiations with Turkey on 3 October 2005. More than a decade later, talks are formally still ongoing, but the process is de facto on hold. Within the EU, the issue of Turkish accession remains highly contested.<sup>1</sup> The country's population size, comparatively low level of economic development, Islamic culture, and migrant population in various European states complicate its EU perspective. What is more, the Turkish government has recently gotten into European crossfire due to increasing authoritarianism, which is fundamentally at odds with the EU's democratic membership criteria. This circumstance aggravates said problems and the EU has been busy also dealing with other problems in the past years, from the economic and Schengen crises to Brexit and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this article, we would like to shift the perspective and ask: how does it look on the other side? Turkish public support for EU membership appears to have somewhat convalesced in recent years

ever since it started falling off in the late 2000s. Different public opinion surveys corroborate this trend. The Eurobarometer reports public support for joining the EU at 67 percent in 2004 compared to 42 percent in 2010.<sup>2</sup> According to the transatlantic trend survey, 73 percent favored membership in 2004, while the number dropped to 44 percent in 2013.<sup>3</sup> In 2021, 56 percent of the respondents of a GMF survey believed that Turkey's EU membership would be a good thing, whereas 25 percent thought it would be a bad thing.<sup>4</sup>

While existing surveys help us trace public sentiment, due to a lack of systematic and longitudinal analyses, we know comparatively little about the evolution of Turkish political discourse on EU membership. There seems some agreement in the literature that the accession debate was overwhelmingly positive at the beginning of the process in the early to mid 2000s.<sup>5</sup> Exceptions are the MHP as a traditional opponent of supranational integration and the CHP who oscillated towards soft Euro-scepticism after the AKP came to power in 2002.<sup>6</sup> The precise timing at which the initial enthusiasm levelled off, however, remains subject to debate among scholars. Some observers pinpoint the loss of initial ardor soon after the start of negotiations in 2005, causing the topic of EU membership to lose “its central role in the political debates.”<sup>7</sup> One explanation points at “extra conditional pressures coming from the EU that are not officially part of [...] standard membership conditionality”.<sup>8</sup> Other authors find sceptic stances to have started taking hold only around the late 2000s<sup>9</sup> and have persisted ever since.<sup>10</sup> Yet others posit that in the 2010s, the incumbent party's Turkish EU membership discourse became more pragmatic and calculating,<sup>11</sup> if not setting off a process of “de-Europeanisation” – understood in terms of a distancing from the European system of norms, values, and policy expectations.<sup>12</sup> As regards the framing of EU membership, nationalism, multiculturalism, and economic considerations are reported as the most dominant frames in Turkish public discourse.<sup>13</sup> For the period 2007 to 2011, which coincides with Turkey's domestic peace process, research posits the prevalence of security-related justifications.<sup>14</sup>

We believe that studying political parties is key in that their political communication is likely to incorporate both domestic and international political input and they play a crucial role in shaping the policy agenda and decision-making processes. Correspondingly, in this article, we engage in a fine-grained analysis of the ebbs and flows of Turkish parliamentary discourse from 2004 to 2017.<sup>15</sup> The results of such an analysis can subsequently serve as an anchor point to undertake

comparisons with other discourse arenas (e.g., press, social media) and ascertain implications for the future trajectory of EU-Turkey relations.

We conceive of political discourse as an exchange of positions and arguments on a given issue. Parliamentary debates showcase popular representation and policy deliberation on Turkish EU membership by providing open and direct access to the positions taken and arguments used by policy-makers. Another critical advantage of plenary debates as a data source is that they are less truncated than media reports – a problem, which is likely exacerbated in contexts where media self-censoring is prevalent. Our dataset encompasses the period 2004 to 2017<sup>16</sup> which covers Turkey's membership accession negotiations (since 2005). As we want to provide a comprehensive diachronic analysis, our guiding research question reads: *how are Turkish EU membership parliamentary debates structured, and how have they developed over time?*

Turkey's contested European credentials<sup>17</sup> make for a potentially insightful case study beyond its confines. We believe that its uncertain accession perspective can be leveraged to examine how diminished EU conditionality affects the structure of political discourse in third countries. Attendant analyses can assess how discursive shifts relate to rule transfer or democratization. Through its substantive and longitudinal insights on the structure of accession discourse, our article contributes to furthering the academic and practical understanding on the repercussions of diminished EU conditionality in candidate countries.<sup>18</sup>

At the most general level, our findings suggest that the ebbs and flows involved in Turkey-EU relations have measurably affected Turkish parliamentary debates on EU membership. Based on our aggregate data, we identify three discursive phases in contemporary EU-Turkey relations: *bumpy start* (2004-2005), *enthusiasm* (2006-2012), and *accession fatigue* (2013-2017). We substantiate our accession phases model with recourse to seminal political developments. Looking at the party level, we find the incumbent party in Turkish politics, the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, Justice and Development Party), to champion EU membership for the initial parts of its tenure in office only to observe a negative shift after 2013. Ever since, however, the AKP has become increasingly lukewarm to the idea, taking sides with the MHP (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, Nationalist Movement Party) in the camp of membership opponents. In parallel, the main opposition party, CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, Republican People's Party), now forms part of the group of EU membership proponents spearheaded by the Kurdish party family (most recently,

the HDP (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, People's Democratic Party)). We put forward that these shifts in Turkish political discourse post-2013 are likely related to the incumbent's authoritarian tendencies, which conspicuously culminated in the abolition of Turkey's parliamentary regime in 2018. Democratic backsliding, in turn, has spurred EU membership support on the part of the opposition parties, and this development has gone hand in hand with increasing references to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in recent years.

This article's remainder is structured as follows: we first define key concepts and their operationalization before discussing data collection and coding issues. We continue with our empirical analysis of the structure and evolution of Turkish parliamentary discourses on EU accession. Our conclusion discusses findings and includes suggestions for future research.

## Analytical framework

### *Concepts*

We follow existing research in defining political discourse as an ensemble of positions and frames on a particular subject.<sup>19</sup> We assume that political actors behave strategically by taking positions on issues and framing them in a certain way to shape and dominate the "political discourse of the day."<sup>20</sup>

This article conceptualizes political positions through statements made by MPs in plenary debates. We thereby distinguish three types of positions: positive, conditional, and opposing. While the first and last categories are self-explanatory, the middle category, conditional, can manifest two logics of political action. First, actors may voice a conditional stance to tie issue support to certain concessions or conditions – this version arguably represents the classic case of a conditional statement. Second, conditional positioning may also embody motives of "calculated ambivalence".<sup>21</sup> In this scenario, actors are primarily interested in not tying themselves to a specific position and remain flexible – we acknowledge the existence of different motivations for conditional statements but do not further pursue them in this article.

Frames are here understood in terms of justifications actors provide when taking a position.<sup>22</sup> Our approach resonates well with seminal definitions in the literature.<sup>23</sup> We further acknowledge that "frames lead a double life":<sup>24</sup> on the one hand, political actors use them as "rhetorical weapons" to

convince and win arguments; on the other, frames also serve as cognitive structures that help citizens make sense of issues.<sup>25</sup>

**Frame classification scheme**

To classify and compare political speech patterns across parties, we distinguish utilitarian and normative justifications.<sup>26</sup> These two categories emphasize interests (utility-based), identities, and norms (value-based) and relate to two specific logics of social action: the logic of consequences and the logic of appropriateness, respectively.<sup>27,28</sup> Our master-frames, utilitarian and normative justifications, come with a set of sub-frames to capture nuances in argumentative patterns. At the utilitarian end are arguments related to the costs/benefits of accession, state modernization policy, geopolitics, security, and a residual category for other utilitarian arguments (e.g., environmental concerns). Our normative sub-frames include belonging to “Europe” (denoting references to Europe and the EU), liberal democracy, and the rule of law, multiculturalism, sovereignty, and fairness. Our frame classification resonates with studies about citizen discourses on enlargement and membership.<sup>29</sup> Table 1 provides an overview. Below we further explicate the sub-frames we use in our case study.

*Table 1 near here*

*Utilitarian frames.* Costs/benefits of accession relate to the economic and social gains or losses accruing from becoming an EU member.<sup>30</sup> State modernization policy represents a somewhat idiosyncratic argument in the Turkish case – an entrenched development strategy (*cağdaşlaşma projesi*) since the late Ottoman times.<sup>31</sup> Said modernization policy is closely tied to a “Westernization narrative”,<sup>32</sup> which views the West in general and Europe in particular as models to emulate. In our coding scheme, statements qualify under this subframe if the speaker portrays EU membership as a strategy for the nation's benefit. Under the label geopolitics, we code statements that frame EU membership to increase Turkey’s country’s regional power. The subframe security, by contrast, represents a container for justifications that center on regional war/peace, terrorism, or individual security and relate these to EU membership.

*Normative frames.* Belonging to EUrope captures identity-related arguments such as those that stress Turkey's historically grown place in the European political system and/or the continent. Frames on democratization, human rights, and the rule of law are self-explanatory.

Multiculturalism relates to Turkey's "bridging role" between the East and the West and captures arguments that conceptualize the EU as a multicultural polity. Sovereignty includes statements related to national independence, the unitary-state, or external impositions of EU rules in the context of conditionality. Finally, under the category fairness feature arguments related to an alleged "unfair" treatment of Turkey compared to other candidate countries by habitually pointing at the accession process's open-ended nature.

### Data and methodology

The central unit of analysis in this study are political parties. Our substantive focus lies on positions and frames related to membership and belonging to the EU and other regional organizations. The party-level data, which we primarily use for the analysis, was initially collected on the level of individual statements made in plenary debates in Turkey's Grand National Assembly (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi*, TBMM) between 2004 and 2017. We focus on the following four parties/party families on which we have sufficient data available: MHP (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, Nationalist Movement Party), AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, Justice and Development Party), CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, Republican People's Party), and the Kurdish party family (we include under this category parties that have formed along ethnic lines: DTP (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*, Democratic Society Party), BDP (*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi*, Peace and Democracy Party) and HDP (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, People's Democratic Party)).

In coding parliamentary statements, we applied a modified version of political claims analysis,<sup>33</sup> which sits squarely with our objective to capture political positioning on and framing EU membership in the Turkish Parliament.<sup>34</sup> In our understanding, a political statement in plenary transcripts is not necessarily limited to a grammatical sentence but can span over several lines. We differentiate the subject (the actor), object (the issue), the direction of the relationship (positioning), as well as the justification (frame) that goes along with it. As actors often back their policy position by using complex arguments,<sup>35</sup> we allowed for the assignment of more than one frame. Justifications in the dataset were initially recorded in terms of keywords, which we used to assign frames based on our classification scheme. Besides, per statement, we also collected contextual information such as the actor's origin and his/her role (e.g., member of Parliament or government, party affiliation). Here is an example: "European Union membership is a strategic



goal for Turkey, for the country to attain a healthier structure by implementing internal reforms” (Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, TBMM plenary debate, 18 December 2009). In this statement, Davutoğlu takes a positive stance (positioning) on Turkish EU membership (issue), arguing it to be a strategic goal and path to reforms (justification).

Using parliamentary debates as the main arena to analyze political EU membership discourses in Turkey is a pragmatic choice for the following reasons. First, it enables us to capture political deliberation at length for parties and actors individually.<sup>36</sup> Where the press is not entirely free, as can be said for the case of Turkey (Turkey ranked second after Burundi in terms of most significant 10-year declines in aggregate freedom scores between 2010 and 2020<sup>37</sup>), parliamentary debates offer more direct access to the frames and arguments used by policy-makers than other outlets – the self-censoring of the media in less democratic settings represents a significant source of bias.<sup>38</sup> Second and relatedly, parliamentary debates represent arenas of ordinary politics as compared to, for example, electoral (election or referenda campaigns) or protest arenas, which are forums of extraordinary politics.<sup>39</sup> Analyzing parliamentary debates thus enables us to capture everyday elite discourses,<sup>40</sup> which are crucial to understanding diachronic speech patterns. Finally, while parliamentary debates represent only a subset of political discourse (besides media and state), we find it reasonable to assume that parties in parliament aggregate and express publicly relevant positions and arguments.<sup>41</sup>

**Mapping the lay of the land: Turkish political discourse on EU membership (2004-2017)<sup>42</sup>**

We start with a few central observations. First, the most dominant actors in the Turkish parliamentary discourse are the AKP and CHP, followed by the MHP and the Kurdish party family for the period under observation. This pattern reflects parties’ political relevance in the Turkish political system. Second, the most salient issue throughout the analyzed period has been full membership with the EU.<sup>43</sup> Much less mention find other types of cooperation forms with the EU such as the Customs Union or non-member associations. Further, membership-related statements about the EU make up the bulk of claims in Turkish political discourse (> 90 percent) in comparison to other regional organizations such as NATO (3 percent) or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (3.5 percent). Third, most membership-related statements made in the Turkish Parliament relate to Turkey itself. Very few statements concern other countries’ memberships in



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3 regional organizations (Figure 1, left panel). Among those membership-related statements, most  
4 are EU-related (right-panel). Discursively, this would attest to (a) the EU being a central force of  
5 attraction in Turkish political discourse and (b) content centering on Turkey itself rather than other  
6 countries. Finally, the aggregated data indicates that almost all parties have on average been more  
7 in favor of joining the EU than not – except the MHP – over the last fourteen years (Figure 4)  
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12 *Figure 1 near here*  
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15 Next, we move to discuss in more detail how Turkish political parties have framed EU membership  
16 and link this to the positions they took on the issue. Figure 2 shows positioning, and Figures 3 to  
17 4 depict frame usages at both master- and sub-frames levels over time. Generally speaking, we can  
18 pinpoint that the ultranationalist MHP utilized plenty of sovereignty and fairness-related  
19 arguments and does so rather consistently over time; the ethnic Kurdish party family habitually  
20 resorted to liberal democracy frames; the AKP and CHP used more diverse arguments. We  
21 elaborate below.  
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28 *Figure 2 near here*  
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31 The incumbent AKP surfaces as the staunchest defender of full EU membership in the Turkish  
32 Parliament and does so roughly until 2014. While supporting full accession, AKP MPs voiced  
33 rather negative positions concerning alternative forms of affiliation with the EU. Besides  
34 privileged partnership, opposition was voiced to the Customs Union. In justifying its support for  
35 EU membership, the AKP has, on balance, used utilitarian frames more often than normative ones  
36 and thereby frequently invoked arguments on state modernization policy, benefits of accession,  
37 and liberal democracy/human rights/the rule of law.  
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43 The main opposition party, CHP, by contrast, positioned itself and argued less consistently on EU  
44 membership. While initially rather lukewarm to the idea of joining the EU, after the start of  
45 membership negotiations, the CHP gradually adopted a more positive stance. This shift could be  
46 related to comparatively high levels of membership support among the Turkish public during that  
47 time. The CHP most frequently argued for modernization, liberal democracy/human rights/the rule  
48 of law when making a case for EU membership. The party's positions against EU accession mostly  
49 went along with national sovereignty and fairness-related arguments (normative frames).  
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As to the remaining opposition parties, the ultra-nationalist MHP, on balance, opposes any form of closer integration with the EU. When arguing against accession, the party regularly uses sovereignty and fairness-related arguments. Political representatives of the most significant minority in Turkey, the Kurdish party family, were staunch supporters of EU membership on the grounds of democracy and human rights all along.<sup>44</sup> A sub-frame analysis reveals that Kurdish Parties predominantly utilized liberal democracy/human rights/rule of law-related arguments in making their case for membership in the club.

*Figure 3 and 4 near here*

**A play in three acts: phases of contemporary Turkish EU membership discourse**

In this section, we analyze general trends and single out three discursive phases: *bumpy start* (2004-2005), *enthusiasm* (2006-2012), and *accession fatigue* (2013-2017). Figure 5 depicts our accession phases model.

*Bumpy start* (2004-2005): Turkey's EU accession negotiations were subject to a bouncy start. The anchoring of an open-ended negotiations clause in the EU-Turkey accession framework,<sup>45</sup> the so-called "Cyprus issue" and the subsequent freezing of accession chapters represent a case in point. While the open-ended nature of the accession negotiations is the result of EU-internal controversies over Turkey's EU credentials, the Cyprus issue stands out in this context and warrants some explication: To proceed with the negotiation of accession chapters, Turkey was held to open its harbors and airports to the Republic of Cyprus. Technically, this move equals the extension of the Additional Protocol (2005) of the Ankara Agreement (1963) to Cyprus, and de facto implies the recognition of Cyprus as a sovereign state by the Turkish republic. The issue stirred a hot debate in the Turkish Parliament. Our dataset reflects this turn through the incumbent AKP's conditional positioning on EU membership for the said period, amounting to roughly 25 percent of all its statements in Parliament in 2004, and even more so for the CHP (~ 75 percent). At this stage, Turkish MPs across the board used plenty of normative frames, most notably stressing fairness and sovereignty. Eventually, the Turkish government de facto refused to apply the Protocol to Cyprus, which the European Commission brought to attention in its 2005 Progress Report. As a result, the European Council decided that no chapter shall be provisionally closed

until Turkey fulfills its commitments related to the Additional Protocol.<sup>46</sup> The stalemate on this matter continues ever since.

*Figure 2 near here*

We pinpoint a second phase starting after this controversy which we placatively label *enthusiasm* (2006-2012). First, because accession negotiations on selected chapters started nevertheless, the initial controversy gradually gives way to wide-reaching political and public support for EU membership in Turkey during this phase. Concurrently, there is a decrease in normative frames and an increase in utilitarian frames, primarily those focusing on the costs and benefits of accession. Looking at the CHP, we observe positional changes similar to the AKP but more substantial in magnitude.<sup>47</sup> In 2007, with the constitution of the 23rd Parliament, we observed three out of four parties being supportive of EU membership. In parallel, the share of normative frames that emphasize fairness and sovereignty goes down. Among all four parties, solely the MHP seems to remain decidedly opposed to EU membership, primarily using frames that stress national sovereignty. Second, political and economic stability take hold during this phase. On the one hand, 2009 marks the beginning of the peace and reconciliation process with the ethnic secessionist PKK also known as the "peace process" (*barış süreci*). It foresaw the expansion of minority rights, a ceasefire between the PKK and the Turkish Armed Forces, and a gradual opening towards the political recognition of Kurdish ethnic identity. On the other hand, the Turkish economy steadily grew, resulting in significant welfare gains for citizens. For instance, GDP per capita increased from 9.038 USD to 12.519 USD<sup>48</sup> from 2009 to 2013, stoking a general feeling of optimism, both among the elites and the public. Against this positive backdrop, accession negotiations progressed – albeit selectively and in spite of frozen accession chapters.<sup>49</sup> Notwithstanding the bumpy start of EU-Turkey accession negotiations, the EU membership discourse within the Turkish Parliament in this second phase is predominantly positive.

*Accession fatigue* (2013 onwards). This phase marks the beginning of a significant shift in the discourse on EU membership and the trajectory of EU-Turkey relations. Several positional alterations characterize parliamentary discourse during this period. First, AKP MPs begin to voice distinctively skeptical positions on EU accession; by 2017, the AKP's support for EU membership reaches a historical low. We take the simultaneous increase in conditional positions to indicate further that MPs formerly in favor of EU membership now start to question its merits. As regards

ultranationalist MPs, there is a sharp increase in conditional positions during this episode. Although the MHP has been relatively doubtful of EU membership all along, their skepticism too was at historically high levels in 2017. Second, parties on the left side of the ideological spectrum show opposite trends. The CHP's support for membership marginally decreased from its peak in 2012 and reverted to a supportive stance. The party used a rather diverse set of justifications. MPs affiliated with Kurdish parties exhibited consistently favorable positions during this phase. Here we note a predominant use of normative justifications stressing arguments related to liberal democracy/human rights/the rule of law.

The shift in discursive sentiment in the Turkish Parliament on EU membership during the accession fatigue phase can be roped to several internal and external events: the Gezi Park protests in 2013 and EU officials' outspoken criticism towards Turkish authorities' dealings with the event, a lacking perspective for the visa liberalization dialogue between the EU and Turkey, as well as the migration crisis in 2015. Remarkably, the EU's launch of the so-called Positive Agenda in 2012, to accelerate alignment with EU policies, seems to have had no significant positive impact on parliamentary speech – most likely due to the agenda lacking concrete incentives. By 2016, the European Parliament voted to suspend accession negotiations with Turkey over human rights and the rule of law concerns. Although a non-binding decision, its symbolic value is of arguable importance.

While the account above may not be conclusive, it suffices to buttress our argument that critical stances in this later phase by the incumbent AKP, and later by its political partner, the MHP, are the result of a faltering accession process, increasing authoritarianism and a shifting power asymmetry between the EU and Turkey.<sup>50</sup> These shifts coincide with a plunge in discursive support for EU membership and an increase in said parties' normative arguments. In parallel, opposition parties (most notably, CHP and the Kurdish Party family) increased their support for EU accession. We ascribe this to inter-party competition and the AKP's strengthening authoritarian grip during this period. In the early 2010s, and finally reaching an apex with the change to a presidential system in the aftermath of the 2016 *coup d'état*, the AKP has been steadily expanding its executive powers while dismantling democratic checks and balances. Political persecution of regime critics from all walks of life, the breakdown of the peace process with the PKK, and a revival of internal armed conflict are among the key political characteristics of this latest episode.

## Concluding remarks

This article's objective was to analyze Turkish parliamentary discourse on EU membership. Based on our data, we identified three overall discursive phases:<sup>51</sup> bumpy start (2004-2005), enthusiasm (2006-2012), and accession fatigue (2013-2017). In the initial phase, the incumbent AKP was the leading proponent of EU membership. Since the latter half of the 2010s, the main opposition party CHP and the ethnic-Kurdish HDP have spearheaded the camp of European Union membership advocates. The latter finding suggests that the EU anchor may not have entirely vanished in Turkey but appears latently present depending on whether and how political entrepreneurs perceive benefits in using it.

Our results bring additional insights to previously made arguments in the literature as summarized in the introduction. First, we can corroborate the observation that overall enthusiasm for EU membership has waned over time but there exist important substantive party-political differences in terms of positioning *and* framing. At face value, parties' ideological profile may account for these differences, especially so until the early 2010s – e.g., the CHP and MHP, in the nationalist camp as opponents of membership on identity and sovereignty grounds; the Kurdish party family as a supporter of accession to improve human and minority rights; and the AKP as a primarily economically motivated advocate of EU membership. Government-opposition dynamics and strategic considerations aid in making sense of shifting discourses; this would apply to the CHP, which switched to becoming an EU accession supporter in the later negotiation years. The underlying dynamics somewhat resonate with Schattschneider's claim that democracy "is not to be found in the parties but *between* the parties."<sup>52</sup> Second, the structure of political discourse appears to exhibit variation across different discursive arenas, which would help explain diverging results in the literature. It would not be surprising for discursive patterns within the parliamentary debate to differ from electoral campaigns or protest politics: the former revolves around ordinary political deliberation, whereas the latter represent moments of "extraordinary intensification of political communication".<sup>53</sup> We presume ordinary political debates to be more likely to reveal baseline discursive configurations than extraordinary moments. Third, and looking beyond the Turkish case, our analysis holds insight as to how weakening EU conditionality can change domestic party competition dynamics and discourse patterns. A corollary would be to look at, in a next step, how shifts in discourse affect, for instance, domestic political developments such as EU

rule adoption or democratization processes. Based on the Turkish experience, we would expect cherry-picking: a calculated approach that follows party or state interests.

How do these results bear on the future trajectory of EU-Turkey relations? While public support for EU membership in Turkey has markedly decreased in recent years, partly due to domestic cueing by the incumbent party,<sup>54</sup> the current revitalization of EU membership aspirations by the opposition parties CHP and HDP – and partial backing by the incumbent – may very well have the potential to turn the political tide in the future. We suggest as potentially fruitful avenues for future research to go beyond single country analyses and assess discursive relations across parliaments (e.g., are candidate country discourses related to one another; to what extent do European parliamentary discourses affect one another?).

Tables and Figures

Table 1: Frame classification scheme

Utilitarian frames	Normative frames
Costs/benefits of accession	Belonging to EUrope
State modernization policy	Liberal democracy, human rights & the rule of law
Geopolitics	Multiculturalism
Security	Sovereignty
Other	Fairness

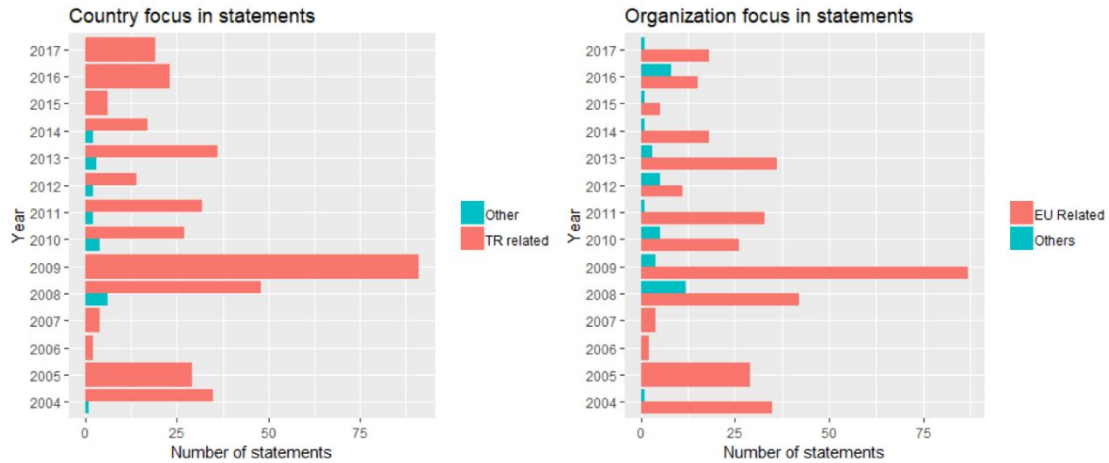


Figure 3. Descriptive statistics on MP statements

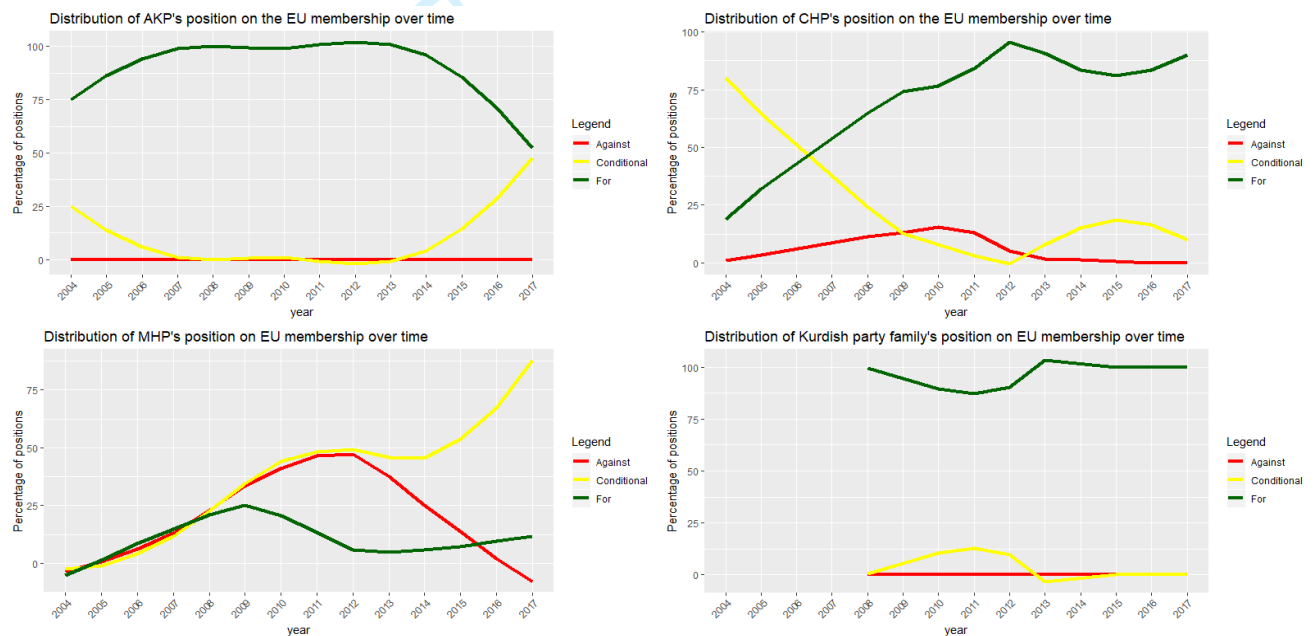


Figure 4. Party positioning on EU membership



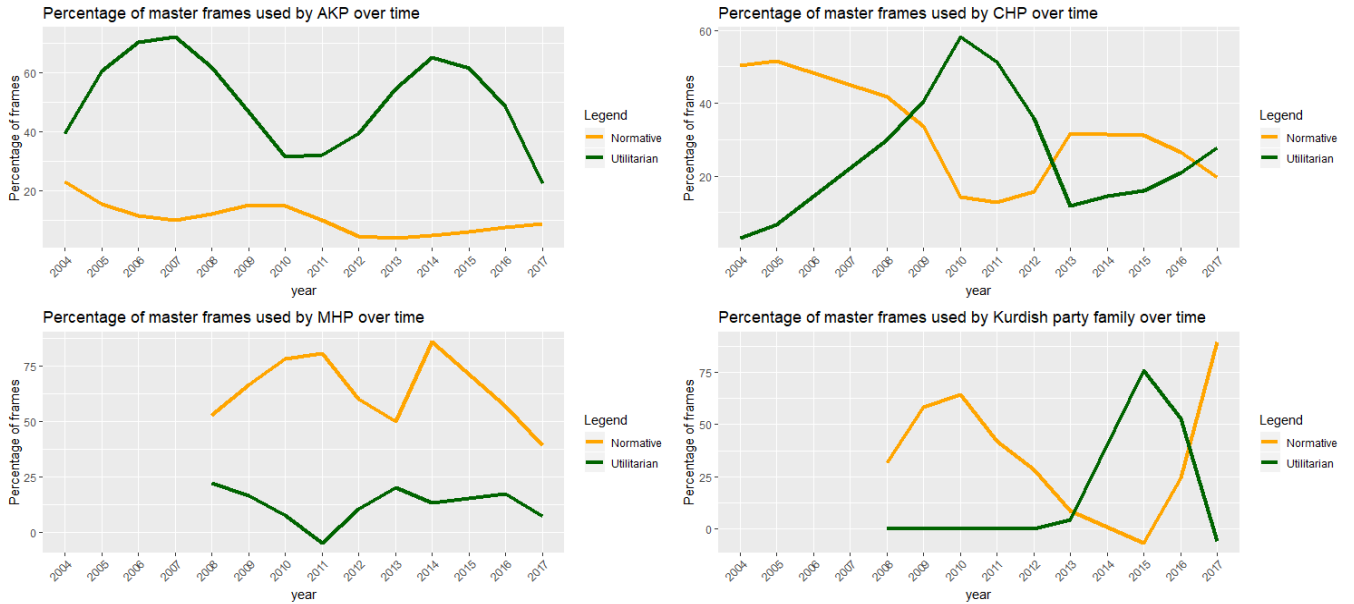


Figure 5. Party master-frames on EU membership

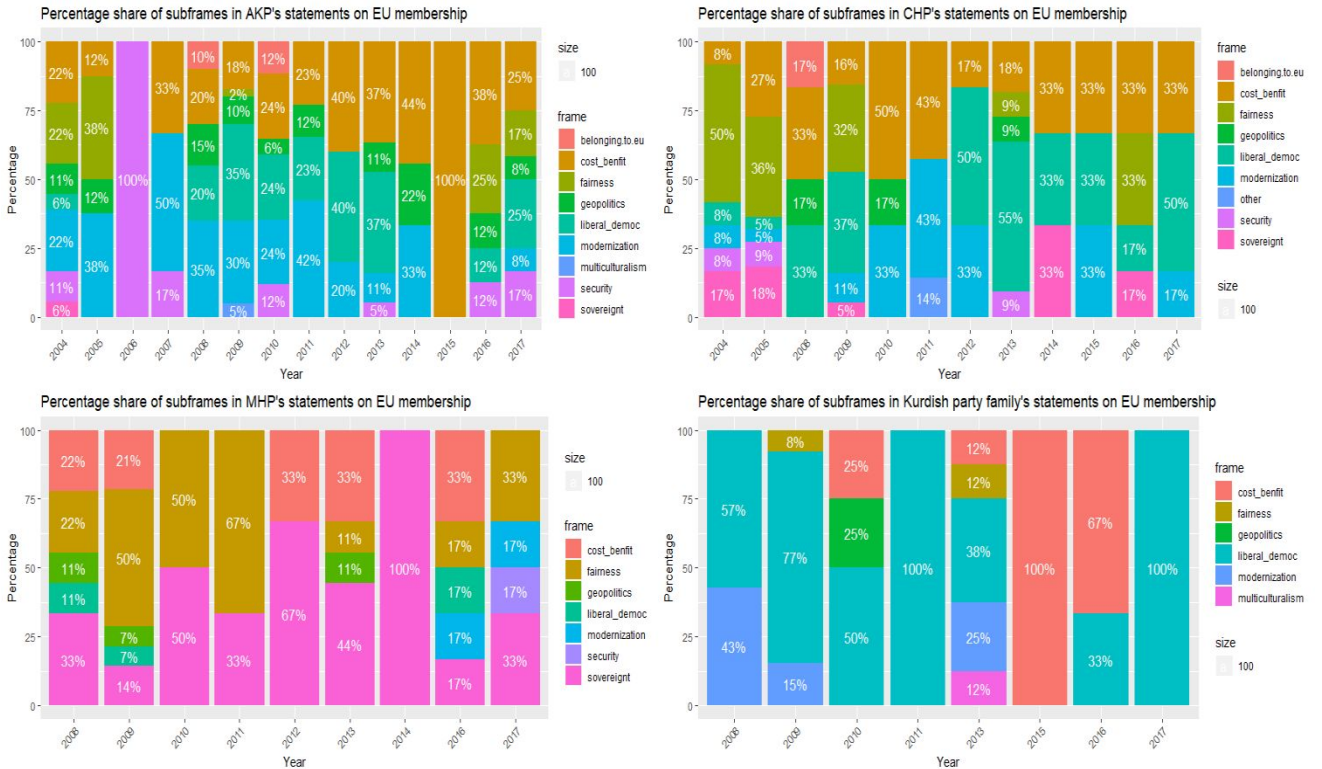


Figure 6. Party sub-frames on EU membership

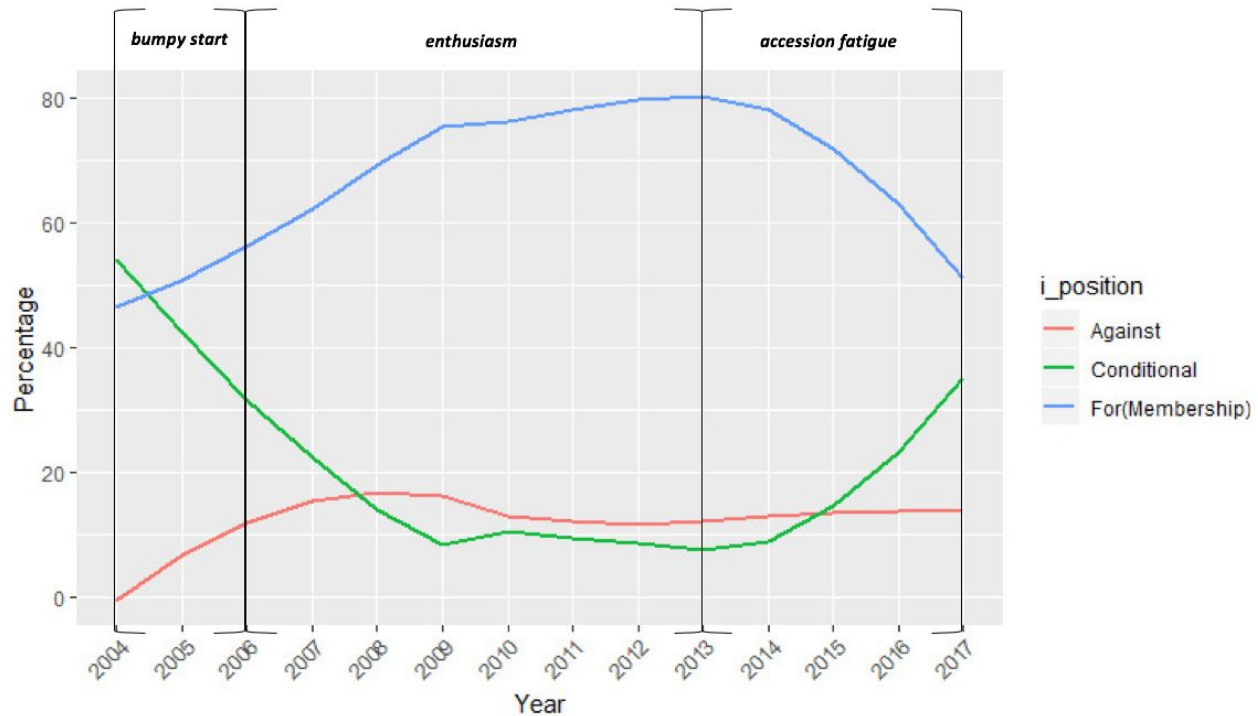


Figure 7. Discursive phases in contemporary Turkish parliamentary discourse

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<sup>1</sup> Aydın-Düzgüt "Constructions of European Identity: Debates and Discourses on Turkey and the EU"; Müftüler-Baç and McLaren "Enlargement Preferences and Policy-Making in the European Union: Impacts on Turkey." Müftüler-Baç "Turkey's Accession to the European Union: The Impact of the EU's Internal Dynamics"; Rumelili "Constructing Identity and Relating to Difference: Understanding the EU's Mode of Differentiation."

<sup>2</sup> Data from Eurobarometer survey item: "Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY'S) membership of European Union is a good thing ..."

<sup>3</sup> URL: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/survey-turkish-support-for-eu-membership-on-decline-opinion-divided-on-nato/>

<sup>4</sup> Intriguingly, support rates were around ten percentage points higher for the age group 18-24 (URL: <https://www.gmfus.org/publications/turkish-perceptions-european-union>)

<sup>5</sup> Müftüler-Baç and McLaren "Enlargement Preferences and Policy-Making in the European Union: Impacts on TURKEY"; Avci "The Justice and Development Party and the EU: Political Pragmatism in a Changing Environment."

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<sup>7</sup> Alpan "'Europe-as-Hegemony' and Discourses in Turkey after 1999: What Has 'Europeanization' Got to Do with It?", 80.

<sup>8</sup> Barış-Gülmez "Rising Euroscepticism in Turkish Politics: The Cases of the AKP and the CHP", 326.

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<sup>10</sup> Aydın-Düzgüt "De-Europeanisation through Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis of AKP's Election Speeches."

<sup>11</sup> Balkır and Eylemer "Shifting Logics: The Discourses of Turkish Political Elites on EU Accession."

<sup>12</sup> Aydın-Düzgüt and Kaliber "Encounters with Europe in an Era of Domestic and International Turmoil: Is Turkey a De-Europeanising Candidate Country?", 6.

<sup>13</sup> Koenig et al. "Media Framings of the issue of Turkish Accession to the EU."

<sup>14</sup> Akşit et al. "The Turkish Parliamentary Elite and the EU: Mapping Attitudes towards the European Union"; Doganay "The Turkish Parliament's Discourse on Europe."

<sup>15</sup> In this article, we use the terms political and parliamentary discourse and debate interchangeably.

<sup>16</sup> For information on coding and methodology: Bélanger et al. "Constructing Europe's Borders Project: Codebook."; For access to the dataset: Bélanger "Constructing Europe's Borders: Parliamentary Discourses Dataset."

<sup>17</sup> Steunenberg et al. "Between Reason and Emotion: Popular Discourses on Turkey's Membership of the EU."

<sup>18</sup> Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier "The Europeanization of Eastern Europe: the external incentives model revisited"

<sup>19</sup> Hajer "Discourse Coalitions and the Institutionalization of Practice: The Case of Acid Rain in Great Britain"; Leifeld "Discourse Network Analysis." While discourse research has entered political science research through constructivism, and the term is often thought of as a post-structural concept outside the realm of empirical study, we



do not see any a priori reason why they should not be studied using systematic approaches (see Jones and McBeth "Narrative Policy Framework: Clear Enough to Be Wrong?", 339). Related scholarship has generated valuable empirical insights doing so (see, for instance, Roe, "Narrative Policy Analysis: Theory and Practice"; Crespy and Schmidt "The Clash of Titans: France, Germany and the Discursive Double Game of EMU Reform.").

<sup>20</sup> Hall "Policy Paradigms, Social Learning, and the State: The Case of Economic Policymaking in Britain", 290. This article uses the terms frames, arguments, and justifications synonymously to facilitate linguistic diversity.

<sup>21</sup> Engel and Wodak "Calculated Ambivalence and Holocaust Denial in Austria."

<sup>22</sup> Kriesi et al. "Political Conflict in Western Europe", 42.

<sup>23</sup> Entman "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm", 52; Goffman "Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience", 221. Entman conceives framing as a process "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient." For Goffman, frames simply represent "schemata of interpretation."

<sup>24</sup> Kinder and Sanders "Mimicking Political Debate with Survey Questions: The Case of White Opinion on Affirmative Action for Blacks", 165.

<sup>25</sup> Elsewhere the notion of framing effect is used to denote frames' capacity to mobilize the public and shape public opinion (see also Chong and Druckman "Framing Theory"; Hoegliger "The Politicisation of European Integration in Domestic Election Campaigns", 102).

<sup>26</sup> Sjursen "Questioning EU Enlargement. Europe in Search of Identity"; Herranz-Surrallés "Justifying Enlargement in a Multi-Level Polity: A Discursive Institutional Analysis of the Elites-Public Gap over European Union Enlargement." In her original account, Sjursen makes a threefold distinction between utility, value, and rights-based arguments. This analytical move allows the author to integrate a third logic of social action, following Habermas: communicative rationality logic. We have limited our analysis to two master frames, utilitarian and normative justifications.

<sup>27</sup> March and Olsen "Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics."

<sup>28</sup> The public policy literature distinguishes cognitive and normative frames cognitive frames refer to schemes through which actors interpret the world, often articulated in terms of cause-and-effect relations, whereas normative frames revolve around values, norms, and identities. See Schmidt "Bringing Ideas and Discourse Back into the Explanation of Change in Varieties of Capitalism and Welfare States"; Sural "The Role of Cognitive and Normative Frames in Policy-Making."

<sup>29</sup> Dimitrova and Kortenska "What Do Citizens Want? And Why Does It Matter? Discourses among Citizens as Opportunities and Constraints for EU Enlargement." Specifically, our normative frame category resonates with discourses on the EU as a rule-based community, as a source of better governance, and as a community based on ideals and values. Discourses emphasizing the utility of enlargement are here represented by the utilitarian frame category.

<sup>30</sup> The subframes were developed based on an iterative process moving back and forth between theory and data.

<sup>31</sup> Camyar and Tağma "Why Does Turkey Seek European Union Membership? A Historical Institutional Approach"; Eralp "The Role of Temporality and Interaction in the Turkey-EU Relationship."

<sup>32</sup> Schröder "The Discursive Construction of Turkey's Role for European Energy Security: A Critical Geopolitical Perspective."

<sup>33</sup> Koopmans and Statham "Political Claims Analysis: Integrating Protest Event and Political Discourse Approaches."

<sup>34</sup> To ensure measurement validity and replicability, the project team has developed, piloted, and refined a comprehensive codebook with the involvement of five principal researchers and several research assistants. The project codebook contains details on the coding rules and tests to ensure replicability and reliability. See Belanger et al. "Constructing Europe's Borders Project: Codebook." We conducted additional intercoder reliability tests (ICR) to assess coding consistency for the Turkish case. For two ICR tests (three coders), the adjusted Cohen's Kappa yielded .95 and 1.00, respectively.

<sup>35</sup> Lerch and Schwellnus "Normative by Nature? The Role of Coherence in Justifying the EU's External Human Rights Policy."

<sup>36</sup> Ilie "Parliamentary Debates."

<sup>37</sup> Freedom in the World Report 2020, 14.

<sup>38</sup> We assume this to be less of an issue for MPs with immunity – although this is not to say that they may as well be subject to censoring or repression, in one way or the other.

<sup>39</sup> Kriesi et al. "Political Conflict in Western Europe", 221.

<sup>40</sup> Herranz-Surrallés "Justifying Enlargement in a Multi-Level Polity: A Discursive Institutional Analysis of the Elites-Public Gap over European Union Enlargement."

<sup>41</sup> A common critique is that an exclusive focus on parliaments comes at the expense of missing out on voices from outside the political system. We assume, however, that this problem is sufficiently ameliorated insofar as MPs usually interact not only with their electorate, but also with business, various societal actors and the media. See Bayley “Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Parliamentary Discourse.”

<sup>42</sup> As it exhibits particular idiosyncrasies compared to its European counterparts, a few remarks on the Turkish political system's institutional context are in order. First, due to the uniquely high electoral threshold (10 percent), the diversity of parties in Parliament is limited. To circumvent this high threshold, in the past, MPs have entered Parliament as independent representatives and later formed party groups within Parliament. The formation of a party group requires at least 20 members. Second, speaking time is distributed unevenly across MPs. Representatives of the party group have 20 minutes of speaking time, whereas individual members of Parliament have merely 10 minutes. Should an MP appear again in the same debate, the speaking time drops by half. Third, and as regards the constitution of Parliament, there have been five Parliaments during our period of analysis: the 22nd Parliament (2002 to 2007), the 23rd Parliament (2007 to 2011), the 24th Parliament (2011 to 2015), the 25th Parliament (2015), and the 26th Parliament (2015 to 2018). The AKP obtained a majority in each, except for the short-lived 25th Parliament, a hung parliament. The 26th Parliament came about after snap elections due to failed attempts at forming a coalition government. Hitherto, the Parliament consisted of 550 MPs. However, with the forming of the 27th Parliament after elections in June 2018, the number of MPs increased to 600. At the same time, the incumbent government transformed the country's parliamentary system into a presidential one. While the CHP and AKP entered all five Parliaments that coincide with our analysis period, the MHP and Kurdish parties formed part of Parliament only with its 23rd constitution (2007 and onwards). This lack of data is also why our general trends analysis (Figure 4), for the earlier periods in our time frame, is driven primarily by AKP and CHP data.

<sup>43</sup> Our data allows us to dissect the relative salience of various forms of association with the EU and general issues related to other regional organizations: NATO, Council of Europe, Collective Security Treaty Organization, Eurasian Economic Community, Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

<sup>44</sup> Turkey's Kurdish party family represents a unique case due to its ethnic and left-leaning programmatic orientation. Left ideology would have us predict critical stances on EU membership: prior studies demonstrate that opposition to the EU from the left is often the result of their discontent with the lack of concern about redistributive EU policies (cf. Marks et al. “Party Competition and European Integration in the East and West: Different Structure, Same Causality.”). The ethnic profile would suggest supportive orientations in line with the symbolic recognition argument from the literature on ethnic minorities: ethnic parties support EU integration insofar as EU membership creates opportunities for multiple identities to develop, receive expression, and be politically recognized (see Keating “European Integration and the Nationalities Question.”).

<sup>45</sup> Council of the European Union (12823/1/05).

<sup>46</sup> Council Conclusions, 2770th Council Meeting, 11 December 2006.

<sup>47</sup> One notable difference between the two parties lies in the increase in opposition to EU accession throughout the first phase. In 2004, no CHP MPs expressed opposition to EU membership, but roughly 20 percent of CHP MPs expressed conditional positions.

<sup>48</sup> World Bank Indicators, 2019.

<sup>49</sup> Yildirim et al. “Europeanization under Membership Uncertainty: The Cases of Environmental and Energy Policy in Turkey.”

<sup>50</sup> Geopolitical changes in the Middle East, especially with respect to Russia and Turkey staging a regional power comeback, represent another potentially relevant layer for analysis, which we do not further discuss here.

<sup>51</sup> Insofar as we identified different discursive phases and a gradual levelling off of enthusiasm in Turkey-EU relations over time, our results resonate with Hauge et al. “Narratives of a Contested Relationship: Unravelling the Debates in the EU and Turkey.”

<sup>52</sup> Schattschneider “Political Parties”, 60.

<sup>53</sup> Kriesi et al. “Political Conflict in Western Europe”, 7

<sup>54</sup> Şenyuva “Turkish Public Opinion and the EU Membership: Between Support and Mistrust.”