JOURNAL OF BALKAN AND NEAR EASTERN STUDIES
2024, VOL. 26, NO. 5, 597–620
https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2024.2308968

Linkage Theory and Autocratic Regime-Survival Strategies in a Post-Liberal Order: The Case of Authoritarian Middle Power Turkey (2013–2022)

Aylin Güney [a] and Emre İşeri [b]

[a]Full Professor, Department of International Relations, Yaşar University, Izmir, Turkey; [b]Director of the Center for Mediterranean Studies and full Professor, Department of International Relations, Yaşar University, Izmir, Turkey

ABSTRACT

At a time of authoritarian drift in many parts of the world characterizing a post-liberal order, this paper aims to contribute emerging literature on how domestic and international factors interact in shaping the foreign policy preferences of middle powers in this new epoch. Hinging on a synthesis of linkage and regime survival theories, the article argues that as the 'inner-directed linkage' of the West to those authoritarian regimes weakens, those regimes' 'outer-directed linkage' with emerging Asian authoritarian centres strengthens. Having been ruled for more than 20 years by authoritarian leader Erdoğan of the JDP (Justice and Development Party), Turkey is an interesting case as an authoritarian middle power with its incrementally intensifying ties with Russia and China. Drawing on the Erdoğan regime's statements and acts departing from the liberal order, especially after the Gezi Park protests in 2013 and the failed coup attempt in 2016, the article concludes that Turkey has recalibrated its domestic and foreign policy, replacing its Europhilism with Eurasianism as a part of his regime survival strategy.

KEYWORDS

Linkage theory; regime survival strategy; post-liberal order; authoritarianism; middle power; Turkey

Introduction

Echoing Antonio Gramsci's *interregnum* in which 'the old world is dying and the new world struggles to be born', the ruling (liberal) order has lost its hegemonic capacity to rule through consent.[1] At this point, the critical question is whether or not it is 'the time of monsters' that would rewrite the plot as a tragedy under 'the great delusion'[2] of an American-led liberal international order (LIO) being able to maintain peace. On the bright side, Acharya postulates a 'multiplex world order'[3] forecasting the survival of only some of the liberal elements in a complex multiple cross-cutting international/regional order.

At a time of global interregnum, small/middle powers' domestic political economic transformation and foreign policy orientations in this new (dis)order pose a puzzle for

CONTACT Aylin Güney aylin.guney@yasar.edu.tr

This article has been republished with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.
Supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2024.2308968

scholars.[4] Turkey, as an 'authoritarian middle power'[5] in its own right, as a NATO member and European Union (EU) candidate, is an interesting case. Labelled as a 'model country'[6] and 'the twenty-first century's first Muslim power'[7] in its region by pundits in the West just one decade ago, the country has since displayed authoritarian drift and democratic backsliding. This has been coupled with a marked Eurasianist turn, with the country sliding away particularly from the EU with an unprecedented anti-European stance. Turkey's foreign policy shift towards Russia and China has been strikingly important in this regard.

Against this backdrop, this paper aims to analyse the reasons for and nature of Turkey's new political and economic foreign policy orientation towards its authoritarian partners (i.e., Russia and China) since 2016 by synthesizing the linkage and regime survival theories. It will question whether this foreign policy shift, i.e., an outer-directed linkage, can be explained as a 'survival strategy' adopted by President Erdoğan of Turkey,[8] triggered by the inner-directed linkages of perceived threats and EU policies towards Turkey.

Autocratic linkages and regime survival: a new conceptual framework

The complex interdependent international order has once again highlighted the explanatory power of linkage theory in understanding why and how states make certain foreign policy choices. Scholars in the late 1970s argued that 'international politics of linkage [means], a state's policy of making its course of action concerning a given issue contingent upon another state's behaviour in a different issue area'.[9] Thus, as complexity increases, the linkages between domestic politics and foreign policy also become important and relevant. Pridham argues that 'linkage politics has been concerned with domestic institutional processes and constraints on political choice; with "boundary-crossing" events and mechanisms; and, at a deeper level, with the notion of "penetrated systems"'.[10] In this regard, it is worth mentioning that these linkages work in two directions: with inner-directed linkages which is the impact of the international environment on the domestic politics and with outer-directed linkages, in which domestic developments and actors have an impact on external relations.[11] In the same vein, Mesquita and Smith argue that linkage research brings a new perspective to the view that accepts states as unitary actors.[12]

In explaining how domestic considerations shape foreign-policy preferences, Mesquita and Smith further argue that

> the choice of foreign policy interactions is generally constrained to be incentive-compatible with the motivations of national leaders to maintain their personal hold on political power. In that sense, agency issues are a focal point of analysis when linking domestic politics into international affairs. Domestic international structures such as the inclusiveness or exclusiveness of governance and the extent to which government is accountable and transparent or personalist and opaque, are also viewed as central to shaping the interplay between domestic and international leaders, elites and ordinary citizens.[13]

Linkage theories have been criticized by some scholars who argued that the theory falls short of fully explain the complexities of foreign policy dynamics. One such criticism is about the separation of domestic and international political realms by Noone, who argues

that 'cross-fertilization between domestic-foreign policy realms exists and should be encouraged'.[14] Stein points out to the fact that, linkage theories may neglect the differences of opinions within bureaucratic politics which, might in turn, effect the foreign-policy decisions.[15] Another criticism is about the fact that it does not adequately address the role of international dimension in regime change, which can, in fact, significantly impact shifts in foreign policy.[16]

Despite these criticisms, linkage theories are quite important and useful in explaining the foreign policy orientations of the authoritarian regimes. In this respect, it is the main aim and intended original contribution of this article to reveal that a synthesis of linkage theory and regime survival theory is necessary to make sense of the authoritarian regime's foreign policy orientations in the international system. Therefore, this article aims to the understanding of foreign policy behaviours by bringing together the linkage theories and regime survival theories through the Turkish case. While the linkage theory argues that the foreign policy of autocratic regimes is influenced and directed by their domestic interests (outer-directed linkage) such as regime survival,[17] the Regime Survival theory mainly focuses on the domestic and foreign policy strategies of authoritarian regimes aimed at the continuation of their power.[18] In this regard, the Regime Survival theory argues that authoritarian regimes shape their foreign policy preferences by shifting international linkages which will strengthen their domestic power. Therefore, the article aims to highlight the fact that by combining the arguments and analytical tools of both linkage theory and regime survival theory, a more comprehensive understanding of authoritarian regime's foreign policy orientations can be achieved.

In this regard, it is possible to argue that international autocratic linkages have important political-economic implications for the survival of authoritarian regimes.[19] Contrary to Levitsky and Way's postulation that a political linkage to the West supports various measures against abuses of power,[20] autocratic linkages ensure a status-quo for autocratic regimes that have been freed from institutional oversight and democratic pressures. Indeed, the resilience of autocratic regimes hinges on the co-existence and support of one another (e.g., the Sino-Russian strategic partnership) through close political and economic linkages at a time of an 'emerging hybrid international order' in which the rivalry between Western democracies and authoritarian state capitalist regimes escalates. Many authoritarian leaders and their political-economic clientele in hybrid regimes (e.g., Brazil, Hungary, India, and Poland) are affected by tensions between alternative forms of capitalism. They also find China's 'new models of "successful development"' appealing, with its emphasis on, stability, order, security, and effective decision-making. These factors can be quite alarming for those countries' democracy levels.[21] As another 'hybrid regime' experiencing a democratic recession, the Turkish case is quite illustrative of this notion.

Emerging authoritarian gravity centres and global power shift

At a time of the unprecedentedly complex and interdependent world order elaborated above, it is possible to observe interacting developments: global power shifts to the east,[22] the fall of the liberal international order (LIO),[23] the rise of 'new authoritarianism',[24] and the emergence of 'anti-hegemonic powers'[25] (i.e., China and Russia) as 'authoritarian gravity centres'.[26] Among 59 identified authoritarian

regimes,[27] only China and Russia are powerful enough to pose major challenges to the LIO. As Krugman notes, those regimes have substantial differences and one commonality: 'China is a *bona fide* superpower, whose economy has by some measures overtaken the United States. Russia is a third-rate power in economic terms, and events since 24 February suggest that its military was and is weaker than most observers imagined. It does, however, have nukes. One thing China and Russia have in common, however, is that both are currently running very large trade surpluses'.[28] In this light, it is evident that China has been posing more important challenges for the LIO than Russia. Indeed, the title of the EIU's 2021 Democracy Index was 'The China challenge', which noted: 'The real challenge for the West may not be to prevent China from one day becoming the dominant global power, which seems to be, if not inevitable, at least highly likely—but to manage that process in such a way as to avoid war and preserve democracy and the best of the Western enlightenment legacy. This implies that the US and its Western allies should focus their energies on rejuvenating their political systems so that they can provide a desirable alternative model to that of China'.[29]

Most recently, the autocratic Putin regime that led Russia's Ukrainian invasion in February 2022 has served as a potent symbol of defiance against the LIO. Against this assault, core members of the LIO have been united in their condemnation and imposed heavy sanctions, as well as making significant efforts to cut their energy dependence on Russia. Proceeding with its decision to halt the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, what Germans labelled a *zeitenwende* meaning a historic turning point, Chancellor Olaf Scholz pledged a 100 billion euros 'special fund' to build-up Europe's strongest military force in response to Putin's Russian war. China, the other principal challenger of the LIO, has remained neutral over the Ukrainian conflict, while refusing to condemn Russian aggression and criticizing Western sanctions. This mainly stems from the fact that it has less to lose from supporting Russia's aggression than in the past.[30] What strikes most observers is that China does not stand alone in its neutrality. China, India, Brazil, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia, and even NATO member Turkey have objected to declaring economic warfare against Russia. In this light, as Adler puts it, 'the map of global participation in the sanctions against Russia suggests a new non-aligned movement might be on the rise'.[31] Just like in the Cold War years, once again three blocks have crystalized following Russia's invasion of Ukraine[32]: 1) The United States (US) and the European Union (EU)-led transatlantic block, united in their condemnation of Russian aggression and imposing sanctions; 2) Russia and its allies (Belarus and Syria), which do not recognize Ukraine as a sovereign state; and 3) China, leading the rebirth of neutrality and non-alignment as viable principles in international politics. As A. Hamzawy, the Director of the Carnegie Middle East Program, puts it:

> Great power China, along with India and several other middle powers in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America, is using the renewed confrontation between the United States and Russia to push for a multipolar world order that restores international peace and moves away from destructive military adventurism and sanction schemes that harm global trade and cripple global food and energy security.[33]

As 'the third wave of authoritarianism' unfolds, this trend has been accompanying the substantial authoritarianism of various countries (e.g., Hungary, India, Russia, Turkey,

and Venezuela).[34] The EIU 2021 report attests to this global authoritarian trend: 'Democratisation suffered more reversals in 2021, with the percentage of people living in a democracy falling to well below 50% and authoritarian regimes gaining ground'.[35]

Weakening European linkages: Turkey's shift from Europhilism to anti-Europeanism[36]

Even though some date the authoritarian leanings of the JDP from its early days in office,[37] there seems a consensus on the following critical junctures: the Gezi Protests in 2013,[38] the coup attempt in 2016,[39] and the transition to a presidential system in 2017.[40] Moreover, Turkey's unprecedented foreign policy shift in general to Eurasia, and particularly towards Russia and China, as a part of its regime-survival strategy cannot be completely understood without taking into account the weakening of the long-standing linkages between Turkey and the EU, as well as Turkey's shifting stance from Europhilism to de-Europeanization. This shift is clearly evident in much of the discourse of Erdoğan. According to Aydın-Düzgit, 'discursive articulations of Europe and the EU in the Turkish domestic scene is [necessary] to understand the ways in which the Turkish Self is constructed vis-à-vis the European/EU Other'.[41] This new Self has been extremely important in shaping the foreign policy orientations of Turkey under Erdoğan's rule.

Turkey, as an EU candidate country, has been continuing its Europeanization process since 1959, when it first submitted its application to the then-EEC. Since then, with ups and downs along the way, the relationship has evolved considerably as Turkey signed the Customs Union Agreement with the EU in 1995 and eventually was accepted as a candidate country in 1999. Following Turkey's candidacy, the EU acted as an increasingly important anchor in normative, legal-institutional and economic terms, as well as occupying a central role in Turkey's foreign policy preferences. A strong Europhilism marked Turkey's orientation towards the EU, referred by Öniş as a 'golden age'.[42] Especially after the JDP's victory in the 2002 general elections, the pace of Europeanization increased as Turkey was able to change most parts of the restrictive 1982 Constitution, a product of the military coup d'état in September 1980. As a result of a series of reforms made in line with legal-institutional Europeanization, the EU decided to start accession negotiations with Turkey in 2005, which at the time was considered a giant step in cementing long-lasting EU-Turkey relations. As Saatçioğlu argues, the JDP relied on 'civilianization and other liberalizing reforms in order to ensure its political survival vis-à-vis the military-judicial secular establishment'[43] and thus used the EU for domestic political gains in this period.[44] The harmonization reforms consequently let to the 'enhancement of AKP's [JDP] power and its potential empowerment against the military and high judiciary'.[45]

However, rather ironically, just after the start of the accession negotiations with the EU, the Europhilist tide which had marked the early 2000s was soon reversed and replaced by rising Euro-scepticism in Turkey by the "weakened credibility of EU conditionality by 2005.[46] This in turn developed into 'estrangement of Turkey from the EU'[47] and the development of an anti-European stance reflected in the rhetoric and policies of the incumbent government led by Erdoğan from 2011 onwards. In this respect, it is possible to observe three important turning points in the shift from Europhilism towards anti-Europeanism. Although 'the Cyprus question',[48] as well as

the populist/Turco-sceptic rhetoric of leading political figures such as Angela Merkel and Nicholas Sarkozy, precipitated the first signs of the emergence of Euro-scepticism in Turkey, the tone and the stance of the rhetoric became harsher in the 2010s as crises developed one after another. As Yaka argues, 'internally, the AKP's commitment to the EU membership project was motivated by its own agenda of weakening "the Kemalist-bureaucratic tutelage regime" and its main institutions . . . by means of EU adjustment regulations'[49] However, the rejection by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) of Leyla Şahin's appeal regarding the headscarf ban in Turkish universities constituted one of the most important turning points marking the rise of Euro-scepticism on the part of the JDP.[50]

Erdoğan's euro-scepticism after a 'cycle of disappointments'[51] gradually shifted towards anti-Europeanism in the 2010s, following a number of incidents. First, the Gezi Park protests in 2013 mark an important turning point. This period showed how Erdoğan's government had identified a new threat and resorted to security measures. The disproportionate use of force by the state police and eventual arrests during the Gezi Park protests[52] were highly criticized by EU leaders. In reaction, the EU was characterized in Erdoğan's speeches as an 'unwanted intruder'[53] in Turkey's domestic politics. Identifying the course of action taken by Turkey under Erdoğan as 'counter-conduct', Cebeci states that 'the AKP government has countered EU's quest for political reform through overt and covert means of resistance whilst pursuing the discourse and practices of accession to the EU'.[54] Thus, 'during this period, the EU's self-imagination as "Fortress Europe" and identification of Turkey as the "Other" and subsequent Turco-scepticism, led to a mirroring and created a Euro-sceptic national identity in Turkey as revealed in Erdoğan's discourse'.[55]

A second important event was the failed coup attempt by the FETO (Fethullah Terrorist Organization) against Erdoğan's government on 15 July 2016. This event changed the course of relations between Turkey and the EU by halting the short-lived rapprochement between them that followed the Syrian migration crisis and EU-Turkey deal signed between the two parties on 18 March 2015.[56] The EU was quite critical of the Turkish government's handling of this domestic crisis and found the wide and vague definition of 'terrorists' in dealing with this crisis unacceptable, regarding it as an infringement of the proper functioning of democracy. In response, Erdoğan's government started to harshly criticize the EU, stating that 'despite our efforts to fight with terrorism and rising far-right movements, we observe the continuation of a double-standard in Europe's approach. PKK and YPG, the terrorist organizations are tolerated and even supported in wider Europe'.[57] These statements clearly showed the Turkish government's representation of Europe/EU as an 'essentially discriminatory entity'.[58] After that, Anti-Europeanism characterized the new Turkish national identity, as shown by President Erdoğan's discourse and the accompanying rising authoritarianism in Turkey. Europe/EU has hitherto been represented as 'democratically/economically inferior to Turkey in political and economic terms'.[59] For Erdoğan, the EU was acting hypocritically and could not be trusted. [60] He also referred to the EU as the 'sick man of Europe'[61] and stated that

> We have never seen ourselves outside of Europe. But for 54 years, they didn't take us into the European Union. [If so] then a new era will begin. April 16 is the day to review this decision.

> Turkey is a European country both physically and de facto. The problem is that Europe doesn't want to see us for itself'.[62]

In sum, these two events and the impact of these domestic developments upon the EU's highly critical stance towards Turkey fuelled anti-Europeanism in Erdoğan's rhetoric. During that time, Erdoğan accused the European countries of not sufficiently criticizing and even protecting the 'terrorists' who took part in both the Gezi Park protests and the failed coup attempt. Aydın-Düzgit argues that 'constructing Europe/EU in a negative way can be argued to dismantle the discursive legitimacy of the EU's democratic demands on Turkey, and create a more difficult climate for the adoption of democratic reforms in the country'.[63]

The negative spiral that characterized Turkey-EU relations were exacerbated by the transition to a Presidential form of government in Turkey, following a referendum in 2017 at the initiative of Erdoğan. This domestic development had important repercussions on its relations with the EU. The EU expressed serious concerns about the referendum and stated:

> We take note of the reported results of the referendum in Turkey on the amendments to the Constitution, adopted by the Turkish Grand National Assembly on 21 January 2017. We are awaiting the assessment of the OSCE/ODIHR International Observation Mission, also with regard to alleged irregularities. The constitutional amendments, and especially their practical implementation, will be assessed in light of Turkey's obligations as a European Union candidate country and as a member of the Council of Europe. We encourage Turkey to address the Council of Europe's concerns and recommendations, including with regards to the State of Emergency. In view of the close referendum result and the far-reaching implications of the constitutional amendments, we also call on the Turkish authorities to seek the broadest possible national consensus in their implementation. [64]

For Erdoğan, Turkey's transition to an all-powerful Presidential system marked the peak of his unquestionable power. As he consolidated this power and increased the intensity of his authoritarian rule, he no longer viewed the EU as a credible anchor with the authority to counter his already-established omnipotent position as the President of the Republic. The EU, in response, has become a harsh critic of President Erdoğan throughout this authoritarian period. However, as the EU ceased to be a credible actor with the power to impose conditions for democratization and as Erdoğan no longer needed the EU for fostering his power vis-à-vis the domestic Kemalist-secular establishment, a new *modus vivendi* was created between the two sides, namely ignoring each other. This tendency was particularly visible when the EU had almost no contact with Turkey under President Erdoğan during the period when Russia's war against Ukraine broke out and when grain and energy crises followed.

As a result, it can be concluded that the EU for Turkey constituted a very important actor up until the 2010s as a part of an international environment which posed inner-directed linkages. In other words, the desire for alignment with the EU was clearly affecting the course of domestic politics in Turkey, even if it was an instrumental harmonization for the JDP in the initial years. However, as the EU began to be perceived as a critic rather than a supporter of the policies of President Erdoğan, anti-Europeanism replaced the Europhile attitude by the 2010s. In turn, negativity in the inner-directed

linkage led to a realignment of foreign policy towards Eurasia in general, and Russia and China in particular, in the form of an outer-linkage towards a new gravity centre.

Authoritarianism in Turkey and regime-survival strategy as outer-directed linkage

It is possible to argue that increased threat perception, as well as concerns for regime survival, have culminated in Erdoğan's increasing authoritarianism, as marked by the Presidential system that gave him excessive and unprecedented powers. The development of this authoritarianism has seen a number of junctures. It was after the weakening of the linkages with the EU and the subsequent empowerment of Erdoğan that Turkish foreign policy started to seek support and alliance from other autocratic powers in different regions, such as Russia and China. Especially after the 2016 failed coup attempt, the pragmatic survival instincts of President Erdoğan have become evident through his growing autocratic rule. In this light, Turkey has begun to further drift away from democracy and become a 'competitive authoritarian regime', if not an example of 'full authoritarianism'.[65] Indeed, the reports of Freedom House and the BTI Transformation Index attest to this authoritarian drift. Both of those indexes reveal democratic recession in the country since the Gezi Protests in 2013 and a dramatic downturn following the 15 July coup attempt in 2016 (Table 1) Categorized as a 'hybrid regime' by the EIU (2021), Turkey has turned out to be one of those countries drifting away from democracy. This paved the way for the 'authoritarian gravity centers' of Russia and China to emerge as authoritarian partners by providing a political economic boost for the survival of Erdogan's regime to counter domestic and Western pressures.[66]

Table 1. Human rights record of Turkey.

Turkey	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Freedom House (Freedom Report TR)													
Political Rights	3	3	3	28/40	28/40	26/40	24/40	18/40	16/40	15/40	16/40	16/40	16/40
Civil Liberties	3	3	3	33/60	32/60	29/60	29/60	20/60	16/60	16/60	16/60	16/60	16/60
Total Score	-	-	-	**61/100**	**60/100**	**55/100**	**53/100**	**38/100**	**32/100**	**31/100**	**32/100**	**32/100**	**32/100**
Verdict	**Partly Free**	**Partly Free**	**Partly Free**	**Partly Free**	**Partly Free**	**Partly Free**	**Partly Free**	**Partly Free**	**Not Free**	**Not Free**	**Not Free**	**Not Free**	**Not Free**

Note: The pre-2013 scale: 1.0–2.5 (Free), 3.0–5.5 (Partly Free), 5.5–7.0 (Not Free).

BTI Transformation Index (Democracy Status TR)							
Political and Social Integration	7.3	7.3	7.0	7.0	5.8	5.3	5.0
Stability of Democratic Institutions	8.0	8.0	8.0	8.0	5.0	3.0	3.0
Rule of Law	7.3	7.5	7.3	6.3	4.3	3.5	3.5
Political Participation	7.8	7.8	7.8	7.3	6.0	5.8	5.8
Stateness	8.0	7.8	7.8	7.8	6.8	7.0	6.8
Total Score	**7.7**	**7.7**	**7.6**	**7.3**	**5.6**	**4.9**	**4.8**
Rank	**#30**	**#28**	**#26**	**#33**	**#67**	**#77**	**#74**

Note: The Democracy Status is composed of 5 criteria, and the scale is from 1 (Least Democratic) to 10 (Most Democratic).

Domestic determinants of Turkey's outer linkage: entering Eurasian authoritarian gravity centers

While Turkey's domestic authoritarian setting was justified and acted as an outer-directed linkage to render rapprochement with China and Russia, the deepening relations with these 'authoritarian gravity centres' have in turn formed inner-linkages. The attempted coup on 15 July 2016 attributed by Ankara to the Gülen movement—later referred to as the Fethullah Terrorist Organisation (FETO)—have provided solid ground to strengthen those linkages between hybrid Turkey and authoritarian regimes of Russia and China. In the aftermath of the coup attempt, the West's lack of open support for the Erdoğan fight against the FETO at best, its harsh criticisms on the declaration of the state of emergency to crack down on individuals and groups believed to have links with at worst, has put the Atlantic alliance even more in question for the Turkish government. In one of his criticisms against the Western stance on Ankara's fight against FETO, Erdoğan stated:

> If you pay attention, it has been exactly one month since the coup attempt, but almost no Western statesmen, presidents or heads of state have visited our country excluding the secretary general of the Council of Europe. . .When they [referring to EU officials] call us on the phone, we have seen that they are more curious about the situation of the coup plotters rather than our situation, which is very interesting. . .In fact, soldiers, diplomats and journalists of Western countries occasionally reveal their true intentions'.[67]

Eurasianist outer linkage on the rise

One of the dynamics structurally affecting Turkey's foreign policy preferences has been the concentration of power around Erdoğan domestically. 15 July created a ground on which all previous attitudes could be reset. The participation of Doğu Perinçek in the JDP-National Movement Party (NMP) alliance gave clues to Ankara's new foreign policy orientation. Both parties' protectionist, inward-looking, anti-Western and especially anti-Americanism, especially Perinçek's Eurasian perception centred on Russia and China, overlapped with Erdoğan's conjunctural survival priorities for his own rule. This was reflected in foreign policy in the form of anti-Westernism and rapprochement with Russia and China, namely Eurasianism.[68]

Eurasianism has gained a variety of ideological meanings through time owing to ever-changing internal/external dynamics interacting with the pragmatic political-economic considerations of Turkish policy-makers. The idea that has recently gained ground postulates strategic cooperation with Russia and China as an alternative to long-standing ties with the West.[69] The nationalist-Islamist ruling coalition of the JDP and the Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*-MHP) has partnered with the Doğu Perinçek-led Patriotic Party (*Vatan Partisi* and its mouthpiece media *Aydınlık*). Being against the LIO, thereby, Western liberal values (e.g. individualism) have not only served as a glue of their alliance but also become instrumental in stoking Eurasianist fervour in Turkey,[70] contributing to the incumbent regime by widening and solidifying consent to its authoritarian rule among the Turkish public.[71]

In this context, Eurasianism has become more popular among the Turkish public, and the *de facto* alliance with Doğu Perinçek's Motherland Party (*Vatan Partisi*) and this

party's Eurasianist views have begun to find extensive coverage in the pro-government Turkish media.[72] On the domestic front, the rise of Eurasianism has not only paved the way for the mainstreaming of radical nationalist views but also contributed to the government coalition's approval ratings. Meanwhile, the Turkish government has accelerated the country's authoritarian drift to defend the state from alleged existential threats. On the regional front, the Turkish government has adopted the 'Blue Homeland' (*Mavi Vatan*) doctrine in the Eastern Mediterranean[73] and its foreign policy has been militarized (ıe.g.., Syrian operations, drone warfare).[74]

Against this backdrop, Turkey's pivot to Eurasia has reached its zenith in the international realm.[75] While Europeanization/de-Europeanization and neo-Ottomanism have been off the agenda, Eurasianism has remained the last geopolitical vision for the incumbent Turkish policymakers.[76] The interaction of pragmatism and the ideology of policy-makers has always played a differing role in Turkey's orientations.[77] The current wave of Eurasianism in Turkey and, thereby, the country's 'Eurasian pivot'[78] in its foreign policy, however, mainly derives from 'the worldview and interests of the new ruling coalition, and the pragmatic survival instincts of President Erdoğan'.[79] This is particularly the case at a time of severe domestic economic hardship prompting Turkish policymakers to adopt more pragmatism in determining their regional priority as Eurasia.[80]

The rise of Eurasianism in Turkey has occurred in parallel with the country's economic downturn (foreign capital inflow, GDP per capita, high-risk premium). Öniş refers to the fact that 'the onset of the global economic crisis has helped to inject a further element of uncertainty to the already uncertain trajectory of Turkey-EU relations and future direction of Turkish foreign policy in general'.[81] As the 'EU itself is going through a period of deep economic and financial difficulties marked with relative stagnation of the European markets',[82] Turkish policy-makers have been confronted with the challenge of generating capital to fuel the growth of the country's infrastructure and mining sector-based economy. To revive the Turkish economy against the tide of this economic downfall, President Erdoğan has relied on a three-pillar neoliberalism[83]: 1) Authoritarianism 2) Populism 3) Developmentalism. Though prosperity is narrowly interpreted as economic growth fuelled by the construction and mining sectors, Turkish policymakers have utilized the appeal of such growth to achieve consent-building. President Erdoğan's electoral banners reading 'Mega-projects require a master ship and a governing state requires experience'[84] are good indications of how Turkish policy-makers have propagated the prosperity appeal of their developmentalist model for electoral gains and thereby, regime survival.[85] In this parallel, as it will be elaborated below, Ankara calculated that launching Russian nuclear-powered plants, hosting energy pipelines (i.e. Turkish Stream) and integrating into China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as the 'Middle Corridor' will complement the country's developmentalist economic model.

Russian outer linkage

Referred as a 'roller-coaster relationship',[86] Turkey–Russia partnerships have considerably improved in various areas including security, Syria, and energy as the former's ties with the West have worsened.[87] Following a frosty era in their relations due to Turkey's downing of a Russian warplane on 24 November 2015, the post-coup attempt context set

the ground for a new strategic partnership between the two countries. In this vein, Russian President Vladimir Putin's unequivocal stance in favour of Erdoğan against coup plotters showed Ankara the way forward. Indeed, Putin was one of the first world leaders to call Erdoğan after 15 July, prioritizing a relationship and interests that transcended personal ties. Russia's behaviour that night represented an important strategic move for the future in the face of the West's 'moral and strategic blindness'.[88] Hence, the coup attempt sent a clear message to Erdoğan about who he could trust to consolidate and prolong his regime.

A look at the timetable is enough to provide clues for the evolution of Turkey's post-coup preferences. On 9 August 2016, President Erdoğan made his first foreign trip after the coup to St. Petersburg, where he met with Russian President Vladimir Putin for the first time since Turkey shot down a Russian jet in November 2015. At this meeting with one of the first leaders to call him about the 15 July coup attempt, Erdoğan stated that 'the region has political expectations from us. I believe that our solidarity will help to solve the problems in the region'.[89] It took only 15 days to learn what Erdoğan referred to as 'solidarity' as Turkey launched its first large-scale cross-border operation (i.e., Euphrates Shield) in Syria with the approval of Russia. Thanks to Russia's green light, Erdoğan led Turkey was able to drive out the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh) and the People's Protection Forces (YPG), or the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDC), which is made up of YPG forces that are battling the former, from the region west of the Euphrates. As a result of this aggression, both the US and the EU began to view Turkey's operations in Syria as detrimental to their security interests, thereby, their relations were further strained.[90] Regardless of Western objections to Erdoğan led Turkey's state of emergency declaration and the Syrian operation in the post-coup context of the country, President Putin expressed 'how pleased he is to see the normalisation of domestic political life in Turkey'.[91] In this politically heated atmosphere, Turkey's first operation to Syria was proceeded by Operation Olive Branch in 2018 and Operation Peace Spring in 2019.

Arguably, Russia's mending fences with Turkey, support for Erdoğan's regime and approval of the Syria operation paid its dividends with the defence system deal. In November 2016, only four months after the coup attempt, NATO member Turkey began negotiations to purchase the Russian anti-ballistic missile system S-400s. The contract was signed in December 2017 with a 2.5 billion USD agreement and the first delivery took place in July 2019. As of 2023, the defence system has still not been activated and it is not clear when and against whom it will be activated. To add insult to injury, the S-400 order cost Turkey its F-35 programme partnership. Moreover, Washington threatened Turkey with severe sanctions if the S-400s were activated. Beyond symbolizing a new strategic partnership between Turkey and Russia, one may wonder Erdoğan's rationale behind this deal against all odds. Through a regime survival approach, distrustful of NATO/American defence systems, it makes sense for Erdoğan to rely on Russian S-400s as a 'coup-proofing' strategy against American-made aircrafts.[92]

The energy sector stands out as the most developed area in Turkish–Russian relations. Indeed, the Soviet Union/Russia have been Turkey's main natural gas suppliers since the 1980s. Until recently, Russia exported gas to Turkey through two pipelines: the Blue Stream line beneath the Black Sea and the Western pipeline that enters Turkey from Bulgaria. As TurkStream, an additional underwater pipeline, commenced gas transportation from Russia in 2020, the Western line was deactivated. The first nuclear power

plant in Turkey is also being built at Akkuyu, Mersin province, by a subsidiary of Russian state-owned Rusatom. The plant will be owned and run by the Russian subsidiary. Regardless of various controversies on its (environmental) sustainability and public outcry against the project,[93] it is expected to be operational by 2024. Finally, it should be noted that Turkey has long desired to build a nuclear plant, but has not been able to do so due to various failed economic partnership agreements with Western partners.[94]

Chinese outer linkage

Even though Turkey's geographic perception of Eurasia frequently refers to the landmass comprising Russia and Central Asia, Sino-Turkish bilateral economic ties grew without any geopolitical outlook for China in the first decade of JDP rule. However, as Turkey lost its EU membership prospects, the JDP began to perceive China as a significant partner. In this context, Turkey and China signed a joint declaration for strategic partnership in 2010, and then Prime Minister Erdoğan mentioned prospective Turkish membership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) while Turkey became a 'dialogue partner' with the organization in 2013.[95] Nonetheless, Turkey's critical stance on China's persecution of Uyghur Muslims had remained the main political obstacle to the intensification of Sino-Turkish relations.

In this new political context, President Erdoğan began to turn a blind eye to the Uyghur Muslims living under Chinese control in Xinjiang. Back in 2009, then Prime Minister Erdoğan had referred to Chinese human rights infringements against the Uyghurs as 'a kind of genocide',[96] this revealed the degree of Turkey's changing geopolitical outlook towards China. Most recently, President Erdoğan repeated Turkey's 'aim to become a member'[97] of the SCO in his speech at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization 22nd Summit of Heads of State in Uzbekistan on 16 September 2022. Possible Turkish membership of the SCO, according to Ülgen, would mean 'having a fateful friendship with countries that do not have democracy and fundamental freedoms in their social order, on the one hand, having a similar stance with those in favour of expansionism in the geopolitical break aftermath of the Ukraine war, on the other'.[98]

In parallel, close observers of autocratic leader Erdoğan note that Turkey has transformed its foreign policy from 'the logic of independence' to 'the logic of strategic autonomy'[99] at least at the discourse level. However, it is questionable to what extent having closer ties with China would enable Turkey to adopt a fully independent foreign policy orientation. Put differently, Turkish policymakers were forced to use new tactics and occasionally felt compelled to downplay the country's objections on sensitive disputes (i.e., Uighurs) in order to adjust to China's ascent.[100]

By the same token, Turkey's neutral stance in line with China on the Russian war on Ukraine is not a surprise. Erdoğan led Turkey has perceived the war as an opportunity to expand the country's influence and has adopted a leadership role as a mediator by emphasizing the structural weakness of post-WWII institutions.[101] Adopting a relatively neutral outlook, Turkey, on the one hand, labelled Russia's military operation as an 'illegal military invasion' and supplied UAVs (Bayraktar TB2) to Ukraine, on the other hand, refused to join sanctions against Russia. Along with deferred gas payments,[102] this policy line promoted Turkey to double trade volume with Russia (making it the second after China trading with Russia) and present itself as a problem

solver in transportation, logistics, commodities and energy issues by serving as a link to Europe.[103] This pragmatic position of Turkey on the Ukraine war paved the way for some scholars to label its strategy as 'hedging' to avoid taking sides in a great-power rivalry and yield economic benefits of its ambiguous position, despite its Eurasianist turn.[104]

Along with the aforementioned geopolitical dimensions of intensified Sino-Turkish relations, one should also note the significant development of the economic/financial dimension. In 2017, President Erdoğan's speech in Beijing emphasized mutually beneficial bilateral, multilateral, and regional cooperation through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) summit, which served as a turning point in those countries' growing asymmetric economic dependence. Through its Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), China has emerged as a key creditor to Turkey in the post-2018 era of successive currency crises.[105] In this context, Chinese penetration of the Turkish economy, both as an investor (e.g., bridges, ports, railways, highways) (Table 2) and creditor (Table 3) has relatively expanded, however, it remained modest compared with the volume of Western investments in the country.[106]

Envisaging a natural synergy with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China, Turkey has initiated the 'Middle Corridor', formally known as the Trans-Caspian East-West-Middle Corridor Initiative, aimed at developing connectivity between east and west:

> . . . within the framework of the Middle Corridor, major infrastructure initiatives connecting Europe with Asia were completed such as the "Marmaray" undersea railway, the Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge in İstanbul which was inaugurated on 26 August 2016, the Eurasia Tunnel that was inaugurated on 20 December 2016 and the İstanbul Airport that was inaugurated on 29 October 2018. In that regard, the Three-Level Tube Tunnel Project in İstanbul, Çanakkale Strait Bridge project, Edirne-Kars High Speed Rail project, Gebze-Orhangazi-İzmir Motorway, Northern Marmara Motorway project and the construction of Filyos, Çandarlı and Mersin ports are major examples of further ongoing national projects that will also enhance regional interconnectivity.[109]

Arguably, one of the consequences of the Russian war against Ukraine has become the elevation of the geopolitical economic importance of the Middle Corridor (See Map 1). This is due to the fact that the Middle Corridor emerges as a geopolitically more feasible route connecting China to Europe than the Northern Corridor traversing the borders of those countries (i.e., Russia and Belarus) under heavy sanctions.[110]

Table 2. China's major investments in Turkey since 2015.[107]

Project Name and Year	Investment
Tekstilbank (ICBC Turkey), 2014.	75.5% stock to Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC).
Kumport Container Terminal, 2015	940 million USD, 65% of the total amount.
Netaş (Telecommunications equipment company), 2017	101 million USD, 48% of the total amount.
Trendyol, 2018	728 million USD, 75% of the total amount.
Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge, 2019	688 million USD, 51% of the total amount.
Hunutlu Thermal Power Plant, (2019-ongoing)	Around 1,7 billion USD, co-financed with Bank of China (BOC), China Development Bank (CDB), Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC).
Bandırma Boron Carbide Plant, 2019	70 million USD, 67% of the total amount.
Ankara–Istanbul High-Speed Railway Line, 2014	750 million USD
Edirne–Kars High-Speed Railway Line	30 billion USD.
Konya Metro, 2021	1 billion 196 million 499 thousand Euro.

Table 3. China's notable financing in Turkey.[108]

Project Name and Year	Approved Financing and Financing Type
Tuz Gölü Turkey Gas Storage Expansion Project, 2018.	600 million USD, 22% of the total financing sources. Co-financed with World Bank, Islamic Development Bank, Commercial Banks, and BOTAS.
TSKB Sustainable Energy and Infrastructure On-lending Facility, 2018.	200 million USD. Stand-alone.
TKYB Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency On-lending Facility, 2019.	200 million USD. Stand-alone.
İstanbul Seismic Risk Mitigation and Emergency Preparedness Project, 2019.	300 million USD. Stand-alone.
Efeler 97,6 MWE Geothermal Power Plant Expansion Project, 2019.	100 million USD, 28,55% of the total amount. Co-financed with European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB), and other commercial banks.
Vakıf Bank	Chinese Exim Bank provided a loan of 140 million USD.
Covid-19 Credit Line Project, 2020.	500 million USD. Stand-alone.
İzmir Metro Expansion Phase 4: Fahrettin Altay- Narlıdere Line Project, 2020.	56 million USD, 16% of the total amount. Co-financed with EBRD, BSTDB, and others.
Covid-19 Medical Emergency Response (MER) Project, 2020.	82.6 million USD, 35% of the total amount. Co-financed with EBRD and others.
China Development Bank's loan to Turkcell (Mobile phone operator company), 2020	590 million USD 8-year maturity loan deal to finance infrastructure investments
A new enlarged swap agreement, 2021	Raising the limit by 3.4 to billion USD
The Industrial Development Bank of Turkey (TSKB) to reach climate mitigation and adaptation goals under the Paris Agreement.	Loan of 200 million USD from China Development Bank.

Map 1. The belt and road initiative (BRI) and Turkey's middle corridor (in blue line).

Since 2001, Sino-Turkish economic relations have significantly developed. Nevertheless, despite the substantial increase in bilateral trade figures, it is highly asymmetric. Turkish imports from China are nearly nine times more than its exports. As at 2021, the EU continued to be Turkey's largest export market, accounting for over 33% of

Table 4. Turkey–China economic and trade relations (TUIK-Billion USD).

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
TÜİK: Turkey's exports to China 2013–2021 (general trade system)									
Total (in thousand US$)	3.755.649	2.970.633	2.500.618	2.378.538	3.037.675	3.078.644	2.726.078	2.865.866	3.662.823
Share in total exports (%)	2,3	1,8	1,7	1,6	1,8	1,7	1,5	1,7	1,6
Note: China is ranked the 17th in the list indicating TR's exports relations.									
TÜİK: Turkey's imports from China 2013–2021 (general trade system)									
Total (in thousand US$)	25.260.751	25.732.865	25.283.734	24.852.474	23.753.644	21.506.001	19.128.160	23.041.354	32.239.211
Share in total imports (%)	9,7	10,2	11,8	12,3	10,0	9,3	9,1	10,5	11,9

Note: China is ranked the 1st in the list indicating TR's import relations.

the country's imports, and 41% of its exports. In comparison, only 2% of total Turkish exports were directed to China, causing a substantial trade deficit for Turkey (Table 4). Moreover, regardless of Turkey's high expectations of China to invest in its well-publicized mega-projects (incl. Istanbul Canal Project[111]), Chinese investments have remained limited compared to those from the West. Half of them have consisted of low value-added manufacturing, extraction of raw materials (e.g., Hunutlu power plant in Adana), and marketing of Chinese products.[112]

Against the backdrop of Turkey's pivot to Eurasia in general, and China in particular, a critical eye may question the consequences of this rupture away from the LIO for the country's political economic prospects. Under the guise of 'strategic autonomy', middle power Turkey's rapprochement with China has not rendered the former able to implement an independent foreign policy line. At best, Turkey could become entrapped with the latter's policy preferences. Arguably, the JDP-led Turkey's abandonment of the Uygur Muslims under inhumane Chinese treatment is the most striking example in this regard. Apart from Turkey's asymmetric economic dependence on China, it is also documented how close economic ties with China and the BRI scheme have been utilized by authoritarian regimes to generate resources for their clientele or cronies to maintain their survival, with questionable economic contributions for the country overall.[113]

Conclusion

In light of the analyses hinging on the authoritarian middle power Turkey above, it is possible to conclude that in an increasingly interdependent and complex international setting, a synthesis of linkage and regime survival theories have an explanatory value to shed light on domestic/foreign policy preferences of middle powers in the post-liberal order. Turkey's foreign policy shift from the West in general, and the EU in particular, towards Eurasia in general, and China in particular. During the period 2013–2022, the EU ceased to be a gravity centre for Turkey. In particular, the rise of authoritarianism in Turkey in the last decade has had negative consequences for its relations with the EU, as could be observed during the Gezi Park protests in 2013 and the failed coup attempt in 2016. While Erdoğan was highly criticized by the EU in his response to these crises for disproportionate use of force, as well as for using undemocratic policies to deal with these crises, EU's harsh criticism was mirrored by Erdoğan with his increasingly anti-European stance, both in rhetoric and linkage.

As Erdoğan regarded these crises as a threat to the survival of his authoritarian regime, and as he realized that he would not be able to receive the expected support and endorsement from EU member states, he harshly blamed the EU and made a swift turn towards the most authoritarian Eurasian powers in general, and towards China in particular. In other words, the course and nature of Turkey-EU relations in that period determined to a great extent the foreign policy shift and preferences of the Erdoğan regime.

Following the 15 July coup attempt against the Erdoğan regime, Turkey's foreign policy shift towards the Eurasian authoritarian gravity centres, for our purposes China, accelerated with a further downturn in the country's democratic standing at

home and abroad. Arguably, the JDP-led Turkey's abandonment of the Uygur Muslims under Chinese repression and neutral stance on the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine on a par with China are salient instances, revealing Turkey's shift in its foreign policy orientations away from the LIO in general and the EU in particular.

As a result, combined with regime survival theory's emphasis on the regime's policy preferences at home and abroad, linkage theories could still have explanatory value, especially in improving our understanding of the shift in authoritarian middle power Turkey's foreign policy from one gravity centre (i.e. EU) to anothers (i.e. Russia and China). The case of Turkey, in this regard, can act as an example of how linkage theories are relevant in explaining foreign policy orientations as regime-survival strategies determine, to a great extent, the course as the country slides away from being a democracy.

Notes

[1] D. Gönenç, E. İşeri, and Q. Huang, 'Editorial to the special issue on Asian Powers in the Eastern Mediterranean', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 25(1), 2023, p.40.

[2] J.Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2018.

[3] A.Acharya, *The End of American World Order*, John Wiley & Sons, 2018, pp.1–20.

[4] B.Zala (ed.), *National perspectives on a multipolar order Interrogating the global power transition*, Manscherster: Manchester University Press,2016; O. Tansey, K. Koehler, and A. Schmotz, 'Ties to the rest: Autocratic linkages and regime survival', *Comparative Political Studies* 50(9), 2017, 1221–1254, p. 1225; B. Gökay, *Turkey in the Global Economy: Neoliberalism, Global Shift, and the Making of a Rising Power*. McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 2021; A.Grzywacz and M. F. Gawrycki, 'The authoritarian turn of middle powers: changes in narratives and engagement', *Third World Quarterly*, 42(11),2021,pp.2629–2650; Abbondanza, 'Whither the Indo-Pacific? Middle power strategies from Australia, South Korea and Indonesia', *International Affairs* 98(2), 2022, pp. 403–421; C. Efstathopoulos, 'Global IR and the middle power concept: exploring different paths to agency', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 77(2), 2023, pp.213–232.

[5] Concurring with Dal (2018) postulating that defining the concept of 'middle power' is a futile exercise, the article treats the middle power hood of Turkey in an eclectic manner by taking into account both traditional, and non-traditional definitions along with various attributes (i.e., functional, positional, and behavioural). On that issue see E. P. Dal, 'Profiling middle powers in global governance and the Turkish case: An introduction' E. P. Dal (ed.), *Middle powers in global governance*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2018, pp. 1–31. And also see Z. Öniş and M. Kutlay, 'The dynamics of emerging middle-power influence in regional and global governance: the paradoxical case of Turkey', *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 71(2), 2017, pp. 164–183. For an academic article discussing Turkey's foreign policy orientation as of a 'modified middle power' due to the recent rupture from its traditional trajectory of embracing its in-betweenness (eastern and western, insider and outsides, Mediterranean and Asiatic) as an asset; M. A. Benli, 'The trajectory of a modified middle power: an attempt to make sense of Turkey's foreign policy in its centennial', *Turkish Studies*, 24(3), 2023, pp.658-672. With an emphasis on domestic front, Aydın-Düzgit categorizes Turkey as an 'authoritrain middle power'. See; S.Aydın-Düzgit, 'Authoritarian middle powers and the liberal order: Turkey's contestation of the EU', *International Affairs*, 99(6),2023, pp. 2319–2337.

[6] G. E. Fuller, 'Turkey's strategic model: Myths and realities', *The Washington Quarterly* 27(3), 2004, pp. 51–64.
[7] S. Cagaptay, *The rise of Turkey: the twenty-first century's first Muslim power*. Potomac Books, Inc., 2014.
[8] O. Bayulgen, E. Arbatli, and S. Canbolat, 'Elite survival strategies and authoritarian reversal in Turkey', *Polity*, 50 (3), 2018, pp. 333–365.
[9] A. A. Stein, 'The politics of linkage', *World Politics*, 33(1), 1980, p.62.
[10] G. Pridham, 'Linkage politics theory and the Greek-Turkish rapprochement', D. Constas (ed.), *The Greek-Turkish Conflict in the1990s*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1991, p.73.
[11] Ibid., p.74.
[12] B. B. Mesquita and A. Smith, 'Domestic explanations of international relations', *Annual Review of Political Science* 15, 2012, p. 162.
[13] Ibid., p.163.
[14] H. Noone, 'Two-Level Games and the Policy Process: Assessing Domestic—Foreign Policy Linkage Theory'. *World Affairs*, 182(2), 2019, p. 183.
[15] A. A. Stein, 'The Politics of Linkage', *World Politics*, 33(1), 1980, p. 81.
[16] S. Levitsky and L. A. Way, 'Linkage versus Leverage. Rethinking the International Dimension of Regime Change'. *Comparative Politics*, 38(4), 2006, pp. 379–400.
[17] M. Kneuer, 'Autocratic Regimes and Foreign Policy', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. 2017.
[18] O. Tansey, K. Koehler, and A Schmotz, 'Ties to the Rest: Autocratic Linkages and Regime Survival'. *Comparative Political Studies*, 50(9), 2017, pp.1221–1254.
[19] Ibid,p.1225.
[20] S. Levitsky and L. A. Way, *Competitive authoritarianism: Hybrid regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010, pp. 23–24.
[21] M. Kutlay and Z. Öniş, 'Liberal Democracy on the Edge? Anxieties in a Shifting Global (dis) order'. *Alternatives*, 48(1), 2023, p.23.
[22] V. Fouskas and B. Gökay, *The Fall of the US Empire: Global Fault-Lines and the Shifting Imperial Order*. London: Pluto press, 2012; P. Dicken, *Global Shift*. New York: Guilford Press, 2015; C. Layne,'The US—Chinese power shift and the end of the Pax Americana', *International Affairs*, 94(1), 2018, pp. 89–111.
[23] Mearsheimer, op. cit.; R. Adler-Nissen, and A. Zarakol, 'Struggles for recognition: The liberal international order and the merger of its discontents', *International Organization* 75(2), 2021, pp.611–634.
[24] V. Fouskas and B. Gökay, *The Disintegration of Euro-Atlanticism and New Authoritarianism*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2019.
[25] R. Sakwa, 'Statis and Change: Russia and the Emergence of an Anti-hegemonic World Order' in E.Parlar-Dal and E.Erşen (ed.), *Russia in the Changing International System*, Cham:Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, pp. 17–38.
[26] M. Kneuer, and T. Demmelhuber (eds), *Authoritarian gravity centers: A cross-regional study of authoritarian promotion and diffusion*. Routledge:Oxon, 2021.
[27] EIU Democracy Index. 'The China Challenge'. *Economist Intelligence*, 2021, https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2021/ (accessed on 10 September 2022).
[28] P. Krugman, 'Of Dictators and Trade Surpluses', *New York Times*, 22 August 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/22/opinion/russia-china-trade-surpluses.html (accessed on 25 August 2022).
[29] EIU Democracy Index, op. cit., p.17.
[30] N. Kuhrt and M. Kaczmarski, 'Ukraine invasion: why China is more likely to support Russia than in the past', *The Conversation*, 25 February 2022, https://theconversation.com/ukraine-invasion-why-china-is-more-likely-to-support-russia-than-in-the-past-177854 (accessed on 10 September 2022).

[31] D. Adler, 'The west v Russia: why the global south isn't taking sides', *The Guardian*, 28 March 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/mar/10/russia-ukraine-west-global-south-sanctions-war

[32] J. Dempsey, 'Judy Asks: Is Russia's War in Ukraine Dividing the World?', *Carnegie Europe*, 7 April 2022, https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/86831 For an academic account situating Russia's war against Ukraine in the broader historical context of the post-Cold war relations in which Russian and the American grand strategies collides; see, A. Cafruny, V. K. Fouskas, W. D. E. Mallinson, and A. Voynitsky, 'Ukraine, Multipolarity and the Crisis of Grand Strategies', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 25(1), 2023, pp. 1–21.

[33] Dempsey op. cit.

[34] A. Lührmann, and S. I. Lindberg, 'A third wave of autocratization is here: what is new about it?', *Democratization* 26(7), 2019, pp. 1095–1113.

[35] EIU Democracy Index, op. cit.

[36] A. Güney, 'Turkey's Relations with the EU from a Critical Perspective: From Europhilism to Anti-Europeanism (2002–2021)', in B.Erdoğan and F. Hisarlıoğlu (eds.) *Critical Readings of Turkey's Foreign Policy*, Switzerland, Palgrave, 2022, pp. 211–232.

[37] C. B. Tansel, 'Authoritarian neoliberalism and democratic backsliding in Turkey: Beyond the narratives of progress', *South European Society and Politics*, 23(2), 2018, pp.197–217.

[38] A. Bilgiç, 'Reclaiming the national will: Resilience of Turkish authoritarian neoliberalism after Gezi', *South European Society and Politics* 23(2), 2018,pp. 259–280.

[39] Ö. Kaygusuz, 'Authoritarian neoliberalism and regime security in Turkey: Moving to an 'exceptional state'under AKP', *South European Society and* Politics, 23(2), 2018, pp.281–302.

[40] Y. Cilliler, 'Revisiting the authoritarian pattern in Turkey: transition to presidential system', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 21(4), 2021,pp. 263–279.

[41] S. Aydın-Düzgit, 'De-Europeanization through Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis of AKP's Election Speeches', *South European Society and Politics*, 21(1), 2016, p. 47.

[42] Z. Öniş, 'Contesting for Turkey's Political "Centre": Domestic Politics, Identity Conflicts and the Controversy over EU Membership', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 18 (3), 2010, p. 362.

[43] B. Saatçioğlu, 'AKP's "Europeanization" in Civilianization, Rule of Law and Fundamental Freedoms: The Primacy of Domestic Politics', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 16 (1), 2014, p. 88.

[44] G. Avcı, 'The Justice and Development Party and the EU: Political Pragmatism in a Changing Environment', *South European Society and Politics*, 16 (3), 2020, p. 410.

[45] B. Ökten Sipahioğlu, 'Shifting from Europeanization to De-Europeanization in Turkey: How AKP Instrumentalized EU Negotiations', *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, (48), 2017, p. 60.

[46] G. Yilmaz, 'From Europeanization to De-Europeanization: The Europeanization Process of Turkey in 1999–2014', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 24 (1), 2016, pp. 86–100

[47] Ibid., p. 97.

[48] While the disputes between Turkey and the EU member Greece revolve around the Aegean issues (e.g., maritime boundaries, militarization of Greek islands), the Cyprus question has transformed them into 'chronic political problems'. Briefly put, it is an ongoing dispute between Turkish Cypriots in the north and Greek Cypriots in the south. The involvement of Turkey and Greece along with others has transformed into an intractable conflict. Indeed, its origin goes back to the British Empire's occupation of the island in 1878. The question has various international political implications including intensifying rivalry between Turkey and Greece since the mid-1960s, poisoning Turkey's relations with the West in general and the EU in particular. Considering that Turkey refrained from extending its customs reductions to the Republic of Cyprus—contrary to the Additional Protocol's stipulation—the Cyprus question has blocked the ongoing accession negotiations between Turkey and the EU in 2016. Then onwards, in parallel to the AKParty's transforming outlook

towards the Union, Turkish public opinion turned negative towards the EU. See; P. G. Ercan, 'The Cyprus Question: At an Impasse for Too Long', in P.G. Ercan (ed.), *Turkish Foreign Policy: International Relations, Legality and Global Reach*, Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, 2017, pp.321–342. N. A. Eralp and A. Eralp, 'What went wrong in the Turkey-EU relationship?', in K. Öktem vd. (eds), *Another Empire? A Decade of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the Justice and Development Party*, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, İstanbul, 2012, pp. 163–184. For a recent academic study argues that the ongoing Cyprus problem has been leveraging twin interests: the JDP's survival in domestic politics and Turkey's regional power aspirations; see, N. Christofis, and A. Logotheti, 'Between political survival and regional power: the justice and development party and Cyprus, 2002–2017', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 2021, pp. 1–18.

[49] Ö. Yaka, 'Why not EU? Dynamics of the Changing Turkish Attitudes towards EU Membership', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 24 (1), p. 154.

[50] Z. Öniş and Ş.Yilmaz, 'Between Europeanization and Euro-Asianism: Foreign Policy Activism in Turkey during the AKP Era', *Turkish Studies*, 10 (1), 2009, p 15.

[51] Ö. Yaka, p.162.

[52] 'In May 2013, a group of activists staged a sit-in at Istanbul's Gezi Park, protesting the Turkish government's plans to demolish the park to build a replica of the Ottoman-era Taksim Military Barracks that would include a shopping mall. The forced eviction of protesters from the park and the excessive use of police force sparked an unprecedented wave of mass demonstrations. Around 3 million people took to the streets across Turkey over a three-week period to protest a wide range of concerns'. Ö. Zihnioğlu, 'The Legacy of Gezi protests in Turkey', *Carnegie Europe*, 24 October 2019, https://carnegieeurope.eu/2019/10/24/legacy-of-gezi-protests-in-turkey-pub-80142

[53] S. Aydın-Düzgit, 'De-Europeanization through Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis of AKP's Election Speeches', *South European Society and Politics*, 21(1), 2016, p. 50.

[54] M. Cebeci, 'De-Europeanization or Counter-Conduct? Turkey's Democratization and the EU', *South European Society and Politics*, 21(1), 2016, p. 121.

[55] Güney, op. cit., p. 221.

[56] Council of the EU, EU-Turkey Statement, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/pdf (accessed on 3 January 2023)

[57] Büyükelçiler ile İftar Programında Yaptıkları Konuşma [The Conversation They Had with the Ambassadors at the Iftar Program], 10 May 2019, https://www.tccb.gov.tr/konusmalar/353/105348/buyukelciler-ile-iftar-programinda-yaptiklari-konusma (accessed on 10 September 2022).

[58] S. Aydın-Düzgit, 'De-Europeanization through Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis of AKP's Election Speeches', *South European Society and Politics*, 21 (1), 2016, p. 52.

[59] Ibid, p.54.

[60] 'Avrupa Ülkelerinin Bir Kısmı Türkiye'nin Yükselişini Hazmedemiyor' [Some of European Countries Cannot Digest Turkey's Rise], 13 March 2017, https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/72307/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-atv-a-haber-ortak-yayinina-katildi (accessed on 4 January 2023).

[61] President Erdoğan, 'Bugünün Hasta Adamı, Artık Avrupa Birliği'dir' 5 April 2017, https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/74624/bugunun-hasta-adami-artik-avrupa-birligidir (accessed on 4 January 2023).

[62] President Erdoğan, 'Avrupa Türkiye'yi Kendinden Görmüyor' [Europe doesn't see Turkey as one of its kind], 9 April 2017, https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/74680/avrupa-turkiyeyi-kendinden-gormuyor (accessed on 4 January 2023).

[63] Aydın-Düzgit, op. cit, p. 56.

[64] 'Statement on the referendum in Turkey', *European Union External Action*, 16 April 2017, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/24709_en (accessed on 4 January 2023).

[65] B. Esen and S.Gumuscu, 'Building a competitive authoritarian regime: State—business relations in the AKP's Turkey', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 20(4),2018, pp.349–372.
[66] G.Yılmaz and N. E. Yıldırım,'Authoritarian diffusion or cooperation? Turkey's emerging engagement with China', *Democratization*, 27(7), 2020, pp. 1202–1220.
[67] 'Türkiye Barolar Birliği Heyetini Kabulünde Yaptıkları Konuşma' [Speech at the Reception of the Delegation of the Union of Turkish Bar Associations], 16 August 2016, https://www.tccb.gov.tr/konusmalar/353/50979/turkiye-barolar-birligi-heyetini-kabulunde-yaptiklari-konusma (accessed 17 November 2023).
[68] O.Sert, '15 Temmuz ve Dış Politika' [July 15 and Foreign Policy], *Perspektif*, 30 July 2020, https://www.perspektif.online/15-temmuz-ve-dis-politika/ (accessed on 17 November 2023).
[69] E. Erşen, 'Turkey and the Eurasian Integration: Ideology or Pragmatism?', *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, 22(1), 2022, pp.111–125.
[70] S. Çolakoğlu, 'The rise of Eurasianism in Turkish foreign policy: Can Turkey change its pro-Western orientation', *Middle East Institute*, Washington, 2019.
[71] S. Kınıklıoğlu, 'Eurasianism in Turkey', *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, 2022,p. 29.
[72] Ç.Üngör,'China Is Playing by Turkey's Media Rules', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2022, pp.10–14.
[73] S. Adar and I. Toygür, 'Turkey, the EU and the Eastern Mediterranean Crisis', *The Centre for Applied Turkey Studies, SWP*, 2020.
[74] H. Mehmetcik, and A. C. Çelik, 'The Militarization of Turkish Foreign Policy'. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 24(1), 2022, pp.24–41; D. Soyaltin-Colella and T. Demiryol, 'Unusual middle power activism and regime survival: Turkey's drone warfare and its regime-boosting effects', *Third World Quarterly*, 44 (4), 2023, pp. 724–743.
[75] I.N.Grigoriadis, 'Turkey's Pivot to Eurasia:The Effect of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine', *ELIAMEP*, Policy Brief No.161,2022,p.5.
[76] A. Ö. Atmaca, and Z. Torun, 'Geopolitical visions in Turkish foreign policy". *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 24(1), 2022, pp.114–137.
[77] Erşen, 2022, op. cit.,p.111.
[78] E. Erşen and S. Köstem (eds), *Turkey's Pivot to Eurasia: Geopolitics and Foreign Policy in a Changing World Order*. Routledge, 2019.
[79] K. Akkoyunlu, 'The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP'. *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 88(2), 2021, 243–270, p.256.
[80] Erşen, 2022, op. cit., p.123.
[81] Öniş, 2010, op. cit., p. 374.
[82] Ibid., p. 374.
[83] F. Adaman, and B. Akbulut, 'Erdoğan's three-pillared neoliberalism: Authoritarianism, populism and developmentalism', *Geoforum*, 124, 2021,pp.279–289; See also, H. Özen, 'Interpellating 'the people'against environmentalists: The authoritarian populist response to environmental mobilizations in Turkey'. *Political Geography* 97, 2022, 102695.
[84] 'Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Suriye'de kantonculuk oynayanlar derslerini birer birer alıyor' [President Erdogan: Those who play cantonism in Syria learn their lessons one by one], *TRT Haber*, 21 June 2018, https://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-suriyede-kantonculuk-oynayanlar-derslerini-birer-birer-aliyor-370719.html (accessed on 10 January 2023).
[85] For a critical political economy perspective discussing the JDP's 'authoritarian consolidation attempt' as a response to the multiple crises as a combination of the state crisis and the crisis of capital accumulation; see, G. Altınörs, and Ü. Akçay, 'Authoritarian neoliberalism, crisis, and consolidation: the political economy of regime change in Turkey', *Globalizations*, 19(7),pp.1029–1053.
[86] See; V.Ş. Ediger and D. Durmaz, 'Energy in Turkey and Russia's Roller-Coaster Relationship', *Insight Turkey* 19(1), 2017,pp.135–156; D.Şahin and A.Sözen, 'Russia and

Turkey: A Roller Coaster Relationship between Securitization and Cooperation', *Uluslararasi Iliskiler*, 20(79), 2023, pp. 87–104.
[87] P. Kubicek, 'Strictly pragmatism?: prospects for a Russian-Turkish partnership', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, *23*(2), 2021, pp. 233–250.g
[88] Sert.
[89] 'Erdoğan ile Putin St. Petersburg'da bir araya geldi' [Erdogan and Putin met in St. Petersburg], *BBC News*, 9 August 2016, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-37020971 (accessed on 10 January 2023).
[90] See; D. Buhari Gulmez, 'The resilience of the US—Turkey alliance: divergent threat perceptions and worldviews', *Contemporary Politics*, 26(4), 2020,pp.483–485; Ç. Nas, 'The EU's Approach to the Syrian Crisis: Turkey as a Partner?', *Uluslararasi Iliskiler*, 16(62), 2019, pp. 61–63.
[91] 'Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan, Rusya Devlet Başkanı Putin ile Görüştü' [President Erdoğan met with Russian President Putin], 03 September 2016, https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/51217/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-rusya-devlet-baskani-putin-ile-gorustu (accessed 18.11.2023).
[92] For similar discussions see; T. Karako, 'Coup Proofing? Making Sense of Turkey's S-400 Decision', *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 2019, pp.15.
[93] E. İşeri, D. Günay and A. Almaz, 'Contending narratives on the sustainability of nuclear energy in Turkey', *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 36(1), 2018, pp.160–177.
[94] Kubicek, 2021, op. cit., p.237.
[95] Ç. Üngör, 'Heading towards the East? Sino-Turkish relations after the July 15 coup attempt' in Erşen and Köstem (eds), op. cit. p.64. For a counter-argument discussing the shortcoming of the Chine led Belt and Road Initiative's (BRI) engagements in transforming structural factors in bilateral relations with Turkey, see; C.Ergenç and D.Akder, 'BRI Engagement and State Transformation in the Middle East' in D.Pavlićević and N. Talmacs, (eds), *The China Question*. Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore 2022, pp. 93–112.
[96] 'Turkey attacks China "genocide"', *BBC News*, 10 July 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8145451.stm (accessed on 12 January 2023).
[97] 'NATO üyesi Türkiye, Şanghay İşbirliği Örgütü'ne üye olabilir mi?' [Can NATO member Turkey become a member of Shanghai Cooperation Organization?], *Euronews*, 20 September 2022 https://tr.euronews.com/2022/09/20/nato-uyesi-turkiye-sanghay-isbirligi-orgutune-uye-olabilir-mi (accessed on 12 January 2023).
[98] Ibid.
[99] In the Turkish context, 'strategic autonomy' denotes on the one hand aligning with non-Western Great Power to balance the US led order, legitimization instrument for increasingly authoritarian populist government. See; M.Kutlay and Z.Öniş, 'Turkish foreign policy in a post-western order: strategic autonomy or new forms of depedence?', *International Affairs*, 97(4), 2021,pp.1085–1104.
[100] Üngör,2019, p.74.
[101] S. Adar, 'Perceptions in Turkey about the War in Ukraine', *SWP Comment*, No.25 April 2022, p.3.
[102] ' Turkey Wants Russia to Delay Its Gas Payments Until 2024', *Bloomberg News*, 3 October 2022, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-10-03/turkey-asks-russia-to-delay-its-gas-payments-until-2024 (accessed on 12 January 2023).
[103] P. V. Shlykov, 'The State of Strategic Hedging: Turkey's Foreign Policy and Relations with Russia', *Russia in Global Affairs*, 2023, 21.3 (83), p.150.
[104] G. Tüysüzoğlu, 'The Impact of Eurasianism On Turkey's Role in the Ukraine War', *Middle East Policy*, 2023, pp.10–13. https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12715.
[105] Z. Öniş and M. Yalikun, 'Emerging partnership in a post-Western world? The political economy of China-Turkey relations', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 21(4), 2021, pp.507–529.

[106] B.Gürel and M.Kozluca, 'Chinese Investment in Turkey: The Belt and Road Initiative, Rising Expectations and Ground Realities'. *European Review*, 30(6), 2022, pp. 806–834.

[107] Turkey and China keep relations on track despite Uighur dispute, Middle East Eye, 5 February 2022 (accessed on 4 January 2023); S. Kulaksız, 'Financial Integration via Belt and Road Initiative: China—Turkey Cooperation'. *Global Journal of Emerging Market Economies* 11(1–2), 2019, p.58.; 'Is Istanbul (IGA) Airport Operation Sold to China?' 9 October 2020, https://www.havayolu101.com/2020/10/09/iga-havalimani-isletmesi-cine-satilir-mi/ (accessed on 4 January 2023).

[108] ' Turkcell, China Development Bank ink $590 M loan deal', Anadolu Agency, 10.08.2020, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/turkcell-china-development-bank-ink-590m-loan-deal/1937231; *'Great attention should be paid to China's investments in Turkey!'* GZT Gerçek Hayat, 21 March 2022, (accessed on 4 January 2023), https://www.gzt.com/gercek-hayat/cinin-turkiyedeki-yatirimlarina-cok-dikkat-edilmeli-3615971; *'AIIB signs $200 mln facility with TSKB for climate mitigation efforts'*, Reuters, 07.12.2022, https://www.reuters.com/markets/aiib-signs-200-mln-facility-with-tskb-climate-mitigation-efforts-2022-12-07/; Öniş and Yalikun, op. cit., p.517.

[109] Türkiye's Multilateral Transportation Policy, *Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-multilateral-transportation-policy.en.mfa (accessed on 10 January 2023).

[110] T. Eldem, 'Russia's war on Ukraine and the rise of the Middle corridor as a third vector of Eurasian connectivity: Connecting Europe and Asia via Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Turkey', *SWP Comment*, No. 64, 2022.

[111] The Canal project aims to build an artificial sea-level waterway that would bisect the European side of Istanbul. The project also includes the construction of various ports, logistics centres, and residential. For an academic article labelling this mega urban project as 'dystopia', see; E. C. Baba, 'The risks of mega urban projects creating a dystopia: Canal Istanbul'. *City and Environment Interactions* 6, 2020: 100039. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590252020300209. For a commentary on the project's controversies for the strait regime and regional stability, see; T. Eldem, 'Canal Istanbul: Turkey's controversial megaproject; its likely impacts on the Montreux Convention and regional stability'. *SWP Comment*, 2021: 8. https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/canal-istanbul-turkeys-controversial-megaproject

[112] G. Interesse, 'China-Türkiye: Bilateral Trade and Future Outlook', *China Briefing*, 23 August 2022, https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-turkey-bilateral-trade-and-investment-profile/

[113] See, M. Güneylioğlu, 'The Turkey-China rapprochement in the context of the BRI: a geoeconomic perspective', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 76(5), 2022, pp. 546–574; N. E. Yildirim and G.Yilmaz, 'Use/misuse of Chinese BRI investment? BRI-related crony capitalism in Turkey', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 23(2), pp.365-383

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments. The authors also express their appreciation to Zahide Melis Özün-Çöllüoğlu and Ahmet Çağrı Bartan from the Department of International Relations, as well as Ezgi Su Mete from the Center of Mediterranean Studies at Yaşar University for their valuable assistance.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This article was produced as part of the project 'Turkey, Asia and the EU in a Changing Global Order' which is a Project (22050) of the Centre for Applied Turkey Studies (CATS) Network. The CATS at Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) in Berlin is funded by Stiftung Mercator and the Federal Foreign Office. CATS is the curator of CATS Network, an international network of think tanks and research institutions working on Turkey.

ORCID

Aylin Güney http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2653-4134
Emre İşeri http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0142-1240