Media Discussion on the Naturalization Policy for Syrians in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the public opinion on the naturalization policy for Syrians in Turkey. It analyses news media coverage in the religious, far-right newspaper (*Yeni Akit*), a centre-right newspaper (*Hürriyet*), a social democrat newspaper (*Cumhuriyet*), and a socialist-left news portal (*Solportal*). The research question is: What are the metaphors, arguments, and omissions produced by media of different ideologies about the possible citizenship of Syrians in Turkey? The results show that metaphors and arguments differ according to ideological stance, suggesting that the current political polarization in Turkey affects the public's acceptance of Syrians and challenges Turkey's established migration policy. Each ideological stance accepts Syrians on a selective basis, implying that universal naturalization of Syrians is not welcome; instead, there seems to be consensus favouring naturalization according to socio-economic criteria. These results indicate a need for a change in migration policy, especially concerning disadvantaged Syrians.

INTRODUCTION

In March 2018, the war in Syria will have entered its eighth year. The ongoing violence has resulted in more than two million dead or injured and 5.5 million refugees (UNHCR, 2017a:53). The UNCHR (2014) has called this "the biggest humanitarian emergency of our era". Syrian refugees have fled to different countries on all continents. The majority (3 million) are in Turkey. A further 1 million are in Lebanon, 0.6 million in Jordan and 0.2 million in Iraq (UNCHR, 2017a).

The forced migration of Syrians has given rise to challenges for neighbouring and European states. These challenges arise at the junction point of the protection of human rights, economic considerations, and the politics of identity. During the first months of the crisis, camps were established in Turkey as temporary humanitarian aid systems. They kept refugees and their host society separated. But as numbers continued to grow, the camps turned out to be insufficient. Currently, nine out of ten Syrian refugees live in cities, not camps (UNCHR, 2017b). City life not only offers more opportunities, but also brings challenges related to basic rights, such as discrimination, tensions with host communities and difficulties in accessing social services. As the conflict in Syria continues and the duration of the Syrians' stay is extended, the question of the sustainability of the status quo arises. The search for more durable solutions has seen naturalization policy move to the front of the political agenda. In July 2016, the President of Turkey publicly proposed the option of a naturalization policy, prompting a tense media discussion, although as yet no concrete action has been taken to implement such a plan. The current status quo – which impacts millions of lives – being clearly unsustainable, policy shifts are inevitable. These developments highlight the need to

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understand the relations between naturalization policy and public opinion, as the latter will invariably shape policy developments as they unfold.

Recent studies (Merolla et al., 2013; Watson, 2011) on the development of migration and integration policy underline the importance of public opinion in that process. The literature draws attention to the reciprocal relationship between policymakers and public opinion. In the first place, public opinion serves as a key input for decision-makers as they develop migration policy. At the same time, political elites strive to shape community and media perceptions and attitudes around refugees and migrants to avoid a public backlash (Watson, 2011). In this context, Merrolla et al. (2013) have shown that media framing of migration policy has an important effect on how it is perceived and assessed by society.

This study focuses on news media to analyse public opinion on the government's recent migration policy proposal on naturalization, which would affect Turkey's migration management and impact the lives of three million people. Promising citizenship to Syrian refugees at a fast-breaking ceremony (*iftar*) in Kilis on 2 July 2016, President Erdoğan stated that "in Turkey, Syrians may not be in their own houses but they are in their fatherland and are embraced by *Ansar*.[1] Some Syrians want to gain citizenship; they will achieve it" (02.07.2016, *Hürriyet*). A public debate started after this naturalization policy was announced, peaked during the constitutional referendum on a presidential system in April 2017, and continues to this day. President Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi,* AKP) is involved in this debate, as are the social-democrat main opposition Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP), the third party represented in parliament, the right-wing Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP) and the fourth parliamentary party, the pro-Kurdish, Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi,* HDP), all with their own points of criticism. Understanding this public debate about durable solutions is crucial for obtaining some clues about the applicability of such solutions.

After reviewing the literature, this study analyses news items in four different media outlets, representing different ideological stances, and investigates the metaphors, arguments and omissions within each stance. The research is based on content analysis and covers news in the religious, far-right newspaper *Yeni Akit* (The New Contract), the centre-right newspaper *Hürriyet* (Liberty), the Kemalist, social democrat newspaper *Cumhuriyet* (Republic) and the socialist-left news portal *Sol-portal* (Left Portal). The research question is: what are the metaphors, arguments, and omissions produced by published news media of different ideological persuasions about the possible granting of citizenship to Syrians in Turkey? The findings are discussed in terms of the potential of each ideological approach to challenge Turkey's established migration policy. The results show that metaphors and arguments about naturalization policy differ according to ideological stance and closeness to the government, suggesting that the current political polarization affects the public's acceptance of Syrians in Turkey. The conclusion focuses on the wider policy implications posed by the Turkish case.

POLICYMAKING ON NATURALIZATION AND PUBLIC OPINION

Starting from the end of the First World War, naturalization policy was initially discussed in the literature as an issue of social acceptance depending on social resemblance or assimilation. An assimilation policy assumes that immigrants should become more similar to the receiving society in terms of education, occupation, family status and lifestyle, thus effectively becoming a part of that society (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Assimilation-oriented naturalization was a policy that reflected the societal mainstream but came under general criticism from the 1990s, as segmented or partial assimilation theories emerged. Portes (1997) suggests that foreigners who gained the citizenship of

the receiving country do not simply forget their original culture; rather they experience both cultures jointly. Hence, whether fully or in part, social harmony and the resemblance of host and immigrant groups – as perceived by the host community – has been the relevant yardstick.

As migration policy answers the question of *who can stay*, naturalization policy was first discussed on a parallel track, namely with the question: *who can be one of us?* In time, the Western experience of living together with immigrant populations has brought about a new political discussion. This discussion transcends identity politics and addresses the acquisition of citizenship as a matter of acquiring rights. It has delivered new questions on how to guarantee and facilitate basic human rights for migrants, such as the right to health, education, work and political participation. Huddleson and Vink (2015) argue that naturalization policy is either a complementary or a subsidiary way of regulating immigrants' rights under the broader agenda of integration. It can be conceptualized as complementary to migratory rights and integration when it serves to grant political rights, or as subsidiary when it operates as a selective strategy of including some migrants instead of broadening the scope of migratory rights in general.

Turkey initially applied an open-door policy to Syrian immigrants fleeing from war but did not grant refugee status according to the geographical limitation it negotiated in ratifying the 1951 Geneva Convention. The Law on Foreigners and International Protection was amended in 2013, defining the *refugee*, *conditional refugee* and *international protection* statuses as types of protection for individuals, and *temporary protection* for mass influx. Hence, Syrians immigrants are given temporary protection that provides residence, access to health and social services, and limited work permits – all for an unspecified time. Naturalization would bring an end to the temporary nature of existing rights and bring about new rights to work and political participation.

From Huddleson and Vink's (2015) perspective, mass naturalization would be complementary to migratory rights and integration. However, in the Turkish Nationality Law, citizenship is based on *jus sanguinis*, namely Turkish descent (Ekşi, 2015). Additionally, Turkish citizenship can be acquired either by being married to a citizen for more than three years or by working in Turkey more than five years, with the intention to settle and meet other criteria. Time spent in Turkey as an asylum seeker or in education is excluded, meaning the period the current group of Syrians have lived in Turkey doesn't count in the citizenship application.

However, the law also defines an exception: citizenship can be granted to people who cannot meet the general criteria via cabinet council decisions. This method allows mass or selective naturalization of Syrians who would like to apply for citizenship (Ekşi, 2015). With the current legislation it is clear that naturalization of Syrians would be a political decision of the ruling party. Nevertheless, such a decision requires some degree of public acquiescence, especially when elections are forthcoming.

A naturalization policy is an outcome of the interaction between the government's approach and public opinion. Migration policymaking, including naturalization options, is subject to societal processes. Public debate not only influences governments' decisions on migration policy but also sends either welcoming or excluding signals to the immigrants who are concerned with citizenship and who track the media from that perspective. Media coverage influences the ways in which migrants are perceived, and this perception has a range of consequences for migrants' everyday lives (Buchanan et al., 2004:37). Identity politics and its capacity for flexibility determine who can be naturalised. Identity politics is a complex field of hegemonic discourse reproduced by the state and by strong social groups dominating public opinion.

From a constructivist view, one can assert that public opinion on any subject is seldom frozen in place. Public opinion is shaped and reshaped in public discussion and the hegemonic discourse defining, indicating or hiding commonalities that may form ties between host and migrant societies. Cultural and ethnic ties are therefore constructed in hegemonic discourse. Portes and Rumbaut suggest that "the more minorities are similar in terms of physical appearance, class background, language and religion to society's mainstream, the more favourable their reception and integration"

(2001:47). But in cases like Turkey and Syria, in which both the host and immigrant societies are very heterogeneous and even polarized among several socio-political axes (such as Islam and secularism), the common qualities which would constitute the paramount criteria for social acceptance are an issue of contention. For example, Sunni Syrians may be seen either as religious brethren or, conversely, as people living according to Sharia law and hence culturally distant from Turkish society. The media discourse constructing the image of migrants and producing arguments about naturalization policy affects the host peoples' willingness for cross-cultural encounters.

Portes and Rumbaut (2001) present a taxonomy of the government approach which varies between three options: *exclusion* (precludes immigration), *neutral* (grants legality without any special effort to integrate or compensate unfamiliarity) and *encouraging* (welcoming a particular inflow and its resettlement). In their study, social responses are either neutral or prejudiced. Janoski (2010) relates this taxonomy to naturalization as (i) positive responses from government and society result in assimilation with straightforward naturalization, (ii) mixed or discordant responses from government and society lead to segmented assimilation and a preference for dual nationality, (iii) hostile acculturation produces countercultural reactions where immigrants avoid naturalization. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) also stress that positive attitudes harboured by the state and by society produce positive outcomes in the long run, while negative attitudes lead to the continuation of poverty among migrant groups, the formation of an underclass and the production of countercultural identities. There is a strong link between public opinion and naturalization policy outcome. Hence, it makes sense to analyse the public discussion in newspapers as an indicator of public opinion with respect to government policy framing. This can give us an indication of the future of naturalization policy in Turkey.

METHODOLOGY

Media research has been used in studies focusing on public debates about migrants, refugees, and migration policy (Sharaby, 2011). It is important to stress that public opinion is not an externally and objectively created phenomenon to which political elites respond. Rather, it is strongly influenced by political elites and by the media (Watson, 2011). The media can be conceptualized as a reflection of this complex dialogue. "Media have the ability to tell the public how to think about issues in their news reports" (Cheng et al., 2010: 199). News media is clustered according to differing ideological stances: each newspaper has its own political stance and reader group. Analysing the debate about the naturalization policy option for Syrians in ideologically different news media reflects this complex dialogue between political elites and the public. This study focuses on four published media with different ideological stances that also enjoy the highest print-run figures: *Yeni Akit*, an Islamist far-right newspaper with a 50,000 print-run; *Hürriyet,* a centre-right liberal newspaper with the highest print-run in Turkey, namely 306,000;[2] the social-democrat newspaper *Cumhuriyet,* a strong proponent of modernization, secularism, Kemalist and social democrat values, with a print-run of 40,000; finally, *Solportal,* a socialist news portal opposing both the government and the opposition parties, the 32nd most visited news site in Turkey.[3]

The research covers 257 news items about the naturalization of Syrians published between President Erdoğan's citizenship proposal on 2 July 2016 and 15 July 2017, the anniversary of the failed coup attempt.

The news was analysed via the Atlas.ti qualitative research software, using the content analysis method. Content analysis is the categorization of texts for the purposes of classification, summarising and interpretation. The conventional content analysis technique starts with observation of the data. Codes are subsequently defined during data analysis and derived from the data. In this study, news content was coded and the codes aggregated in two main categories:

metaphors and arguments. Additionally, a cross comparison of news across the newspapers was undertaken to investigate omissions, revealing silent points about the issue. A metaphor is not only a rhetoric tool; it is a way of thinking, understanding and expressing a phenomenon (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003). By connoting similarities, both open and hidden, metaphors are important tools in the ideological conception of a phenomenon and in imposing a viewpoint. They therefore play a crucial role in the construction of social and political reality (Ottati et al., 2014). Metaphors make arguments seem more accurate and plausible. Arguments include propositions, predictions and proposals based on information, reasoning, emotions, ethics and religion. Omissions exclude those parts of the phenomenon that do not fit into the continuum of dominant metaphors and arguments.

DATA ANALYSIS

What are the metaphors, arguments, and omissions produced by news media of different ideologies about the naturalization policy option for Syrians in Turkey?

Yeni Akit (New Contract)

The news coverage predominantly consists of politicians' statements on the naturalization of Syrians. Among the 34 relevant news items, 20 were AKP-related and three were CHP-related news, the others being editorials and interviews. Immediately following the President's declaration in July 2016, the news suggested that naturalization studies were still in progress and persuasively extolled the benefits of the naturalization policy. Metaphors and arguments based on religion and emotion were used to propagate and legitimize the naturalization policy. Syrians were termed *guests* and *Ansar* : for example "our Syrian religious brothers as Ansar", "our guests embraced by Ansar", "Syrians are our guests and brothers". The constitutional referendum of 16 April 2017 stopped the discussion.

The *guest metaphor* found in 12 items, while highlighting peace and courtesy, also implies two parties with unequal power relations. The host owns the space and resources and has the power to decide how to share them and how to treat the guest. The guest is expected to defer to the host, to sit where the host asks them to, and preferably to be grateful, or at least appear so. Traditional hospitality requires that the host offer good service and that the guest be dignified, moderate and abstemious. The metaphor also connotes something unforeseen, as the term *Guest of Allah*, meaning an unexpected guest, and a sign of future blessing for the host. Hosting a guest implies future reciprocity. The guest is in the host's debt, and the host is also expected to visit the guest sometime in the future as a rule of courtesy. All these discussed factors make this a metaphor that presents the immigrant as the *other*. "The guest element is remarkably flexible and open to negotiation and renegotiation; questions of who is and who is not welcome are repeatedly raised and debated. Thus, the boundaries between brother and cousin, friend and ally, stranger and enemy are continuously reformulated according to local and political contexts" (Jenkins, 2012:276).

The guest relation is slippery ground and depends a great deal on the host's goodwill. It substitutes for the modern alternative: rights-based, contractual relations.

As for the *Ansar metaphor*, used in 14 articles, a direct reference is made to Islamic history. Muslims in Medina were subject to the cruelty of the "*mushrik*" (tribes who did not believe in Allah) and were forced to flee. After the *Hajira* (the emigration of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina), the Prophet declared *Muhajirs* (the Muslim immigrants of Mecca) and *Ansar* (citizens from Medina who helped them) to be his brothers: "This project ensured that the Muhajirs of Mecca and the Ansar of Medina would act with the sense of brotherhood

throughout their lives in service to Islam. It was the brotherhood sense – realized in the frame of faith – that held them together" (Akbaş, 2010: 25). This brotherhood brought about "beautiful memories of their fraternity in the axis of living together, visits and love" (Akbaş, 2010: 25) and also the union of *Muhajir* and *Ansar* for the spread of Islam. This union paved the way for the establishment of an Islamic state under the religious and temporal leadership of the Prophet Muhammed.

This metaphor paints the Assad government as *mushrik,* cruel to Muslims, the Syrian refugees as *Muhajir* and the Turkish people as *Ansar*. Hence, the metaphor also indicates that good Muslim Turkish people should embrace these immigrants, thus paving the way for political and military success – as was the case in the past. However, this simile totally omits Syrians refugees who are not Sunni Muslims.

The news and editorials underline the following *arguments* as quoted and summarised below:

- "Even if peace were attained in Syria, it would be impossible for the Syrians to go back immediately; we should embrace our Syrian brothers as guests, as *Ansar*." (15.07.2016).
- Syrians deserve Turkish citizenship because they fought against the coup attempt of 15 July. Some news items (21.07.2016) suggest that "Syrians' previous war experience was helpful", "they fought with us shoulder to shoulder", "Syrians support Erdoğan especially because of his promise to grant them citizenship"; interviews with Syrians who state that they attended the public events protesting the coup attempt (20.09.2016).
- Not only citizenship but also unity, because Said-i-Nursi[4] wanted and foresaw the unification of Turkey and Syria (13.02.2017).

An interview with a Syrian ex-astronaut suggests the urgent need for citizenship, emphasises the common struggle against the 15 July coup attempt and religious brotherhood, and also stresses the determination of Syrians return to Syria when the war is over (21.09.2016). This implies that those who are guests deserve citizenship, in effect a de facto dual citizenship, which is in keeping with Turkey's general approach.

News about Said-i Nursi (13.02.2017) reintroduces the *Ansar* metaphor, providing not only legitimization but also a discursive turn suppressing the temporary connotation of the guest metaphor and suggesting a new possibility: the unification of Turkey and Syria as once foreseen by Said-i Nursi.

The news content shifts in March 2017, a month before the constitutional referendum; the relevant arguments are quoted and summarized as follows:

- "the CHP is lying and citizenship will not be not granted to everyone" (06.04.2017).
- Syrians will not vote in the elections (22.02.2017).

A year after the announcement of citizenship for Syrians, the debate seems to be fading away. *Yeni Akit* published an article entitled "How should we behave towards Syrian refugees?" (05.07.2017), suggesting coexistence on the grounds of religious brotherhood. The argumentation was based on verses of the Koran and hadith[5] advancing the view that all Muslims are brothers, that conflict between them is an offense to God, and that the real enemy is the West.

Omissions: News about citizenship directly omits statements of politicians other than those from the AKP, or any other opposition group and initiative. The only exception is two news items covering the CHP leader's statements suggesting another referendum on the naturalization of Syrians. These news items adopt discourse that belittles the politician in question, as with the header "Kılıçdaroğlu talks nonsense" (06.04.2017).

In sum, the far-right Islamist ideological approach uses the guest and *Ansar* metaphors, indicating who is welcome is always subject to renegotiation in line with Islam, either as a citizen or not. It gives no information on non-Sunni or non-Muslim Syrians, the conflict between hosts and

immigrants, rights abuses or the problems of women and children (such as early marriages and problems in school enrolment). The Islamist approach is a strong proponent of the naturalization of Sunni Muslims, complying with the expected political stance.

Hürriyet (Liberty)

Hürriyet covered the issue with 80 articles in total. Between Erdoğan's announcement and the coup attempt (2–15 July 2016), 47 articles suggested mild opposition to the naturalization policy via metaphors based on economics, the guest concept and the idea of Turkishness.

The 15 July coup attempt is the turning point in the discussion. In this second period, 33 related news items were published; most of them presented news about politicians' statements without commentary, and others were interviews with businesspeople and upper middle-class Syrians stressing the need for citizenship.

The *economics metaphor* takes up the issue in terms of the burden it imposes, the benefits and costs of naturalizing Syrians, and the impact on business. Hence, the naturalization policy is discussed in terms of the costs of the current situation, the high costs of granting refugee status, and citizenship as an option for lowering these costs, with the caveat being the possible expense of losing free movement of Turkish citizens to the EU (14.07.2016). In addition, during the first period of mild opposition, *Hürriyet* used the *guest metaphor* together with the *economics metaphor* in all related columns, underlining the time limit for return, i.e. "In our culture, you can be a guest for three days. We do not have enough resources, the power or the patience to welcome guests for years" (15. 07. 2015).

The *Turkishness metaphor* was used in the MHP news, underlining that "Turkey belongs to Turks" and condemning the naturalization policy as "treason" (04.07; 08 .07;12.07.2016). It was also used in news concerning ethnic-Turkic NGOs (13.01.2017) underlining that thousands of ethnic-Turk migrants were living in Turkey and had not been considered for citizenship, and that there was an increase in violence against Syrians after the President's proposal on naturalization. This metaphor assumes ethnic homogeneity in Turkey and suggests ethnic similarity as a criterion for "deserving" citizenship.

Arguments suggested mild opposition and alternative policies until the coup attempt. They are summarised as follows:

- Syrians are guests in Turkey. Eventually, they should return, because of high costs (06-13.07.2016).
- We must consider the costs of the Syrians' current stay, of sustaining the current situation in the long run and of granting citizenship (14.07.2016).
- Not all the three million Syrians should be granted citizenship. A win–win strategy is possible if naturalization is limited to qualified Syrians (04.07.2017).

The newspaper ceased its opposition towards the naturalization policy after 15 July. It started to use a supportive tone for a class-based, exclusive naturalization policy. During this period, the AKP also softened its rhetoric about citizenship. News concerning AKP politicians stated that citizenship would be granted mainly to business owners and their families – those with capital and willing to purchase two million dollars' worth of real estate. This was extended, subsequently, to include university graduates and highly skilled refugees, and in the third phase to some Syrians with work permits; the government was reported to be expecting to offer 90,000 Syrians citizenship in total (13.01.2017). This was followed by news about Syrian entrepreneurs, underlining their success and importance for the Turkish economy and reporting their assertion that "in case we are granted citizenship, we can do more business" (27.02.2017). Critical views on the naturalization policy were only published as a subtitle in the CHP news about upcoming referendum.

The liberal centre-right ideological approach also has some *omissions*: it presents no discussion on different Syrians groups (in terms of gender, religion, and ethnicity), nor on citizenship as a right to political participation and social inclusion. The religion aspect is not underlined, either in column argumentation or in news language. This discussion does not relate Syrians' current rights and hardship, nor does it touch upon the possibilities provided by citizenship, especially for the lower classes or unqualified individuals.

The centre-right approach seems to follow a cost-management reasoning and to suggest a shift from ethnic perspectives and burden-oriented opposition to a business-oriented approach that offers a class-based, exclusive naturalization. However, it provides no practical suggestions concerning existing migrants who are facing poverty.

Cumhuriyet (Republic)

Cumhuriyet has 56 articles about the issue. News coverage consists of columns, articles, and news concerning politicians' statements from both the AKP and the CHP (these are relatively longer than in other newspapers). The debate stopped for three months after the coup attempt, then the newspaper continued its argument in the same vein. Columns and news items use the *crisis metaphor* to denote Syrian migrants, politics, and related issues.

The *crisis metaphor* implies an unexpected, damaging and risky situation that should be resolved with decisive action. Crisis, in this version, is a hazard that has materialised, like the ruining of an apartment building by flooding, one that ought either to have been prevented by sound engineering or to have been insured against. Hence, the newspaper criticises the government's foreign policy before and after the beginning of the Syrian war, especially for its deficiency in preventive and protective measures (05-11.07.2016).

A crisis implies harm; therefore, the metaphor also has a limiting and channelling effect and leads to a negative approach. Generally, Syrians are described as a large mass of poor, illiterate people; the published photos accompanying these stories consistently display masses of destitute individuals. This completely omits the sturdier parts of this refugee group, which should in fact be a baseline for an efficient migration policy.

The general criticism about the citizenship debate concentrates on voting and "1.5 million possible votes for the government in the constitutional referendum" (03.07.2016). The damaging effect continues with the "introduction of more cheap labour" (12.07.2016).

The *crisis metaphor* also links with another catchphrase the AKP government has used for over a decade, namely "turning crisis into opportunity". Thus, Syrian refugees as a crisis also represents an opportunity for the AKP: "Erdoğan is preparing to use the Syrian crisis as a tool" (05.07.2016); "He will use it as cement in the construction of the new Turkey"; "These three million people will accelerate the demise of the republican project" (12.07.2016). The *crisis metaphor* depicts Syrians in Turkey as supporters and actors in the realization of Islamist projects.

Cumhuriyet runs longer articles about statements by CHP politicians opposing the naturalization policy and calling for a specific referendum to decide the question. It publishes long columns on the issue. The *arguments* are summarised as follows:

- The naturalization policy approach contradicts Erdoğan's previous statements on the issue, which presented the Syrians as guests, their situation in Turkey as temporary, and their likelihood of returning to Syria as soon as the Assad regime is toppled (03.07.2016).
- The government's policy towards Syrians is inconsistent. Syrians were not even granted refugee status, but now the government is suddenly talking about citizenship (06.07.2016).
- The timing of Erdoğan's citizenship announcement coincides with the introduction of the presidential system and the constitutional referendum; hence, the naturalization policy is a plan to garner new votes (03-05.07.2016; 23.02.2017).

- In some cities, like Kilis, the demographic ratio of Syrians and hosts is 50/50; hence, were Syrians to be granted citizenship, their votes would be a determining factor in local election outcomes (03-05.07.2016).
- Erdoğan's announcement leads to xenophobic public reactions, such as the social media hashtag "I don't want Syrians in my country". The writers are also critical about such manifestations of xenophobia (04.07.2016; 17.05.2017).
- Research on public opinion about Syrians showing limited acceptance and xenophobia (05.07.2016). Some columns criticise strong opposition to public budget spending on Syrians by the MHP and the CHP as xenophobia.
- Shaping the naturalization policy without any public discussion is not compatible with democracy and the constitution. Therefore, it is authoritarian (05 – 12.07.2016).
- The current situation of Syrians in Turkey is critical. There is an increase in human trafficking. Syrian women and children are forced to beg or are sold in transnational sex markets. In addition to xenophobia, LGBT refugees face homophobia both in their own country and in Turkey. Syrian children are facing hard poverty and have problems in schooling. The use of child labour is increasing (10.07.2016; 22.03.2017).
- Syrians in Turkey have low human capital. Nearly half of them are illiterate, making them potential citizens that would lower Turkey's chances of EU accession, especially in terms of free movement of labour (07.07.2916).
- The AKP's demographic policy is false. Erdoğan's statements about having three children, etc., mean an increase in quantity without quality, which could make labour cheaper in the coming years and also increase the demand for goods. This in turn would raise the short-term profit of capital. Unqualified labour is not profitable in the long run. Granting citizenship to three million Syrians is also a part of this project of increasing the supply of poorly qualified labour (11.07.2016).
- Will citizenship be granted to non-Muslim and non-Sunni refugees from Syria? The newspaper suggests that, in practice, being Sunni will be the main criterion (13.07.2016).
- Granting citizenship to qualified Syrians such as doctors and nurses is not realistic; after seven years most of the qualified Syrian labour has already left Turkey (14.07.2016; 22.06.2017).
- Refugee status, rather than citizenship, should be granted (14.07.2016; 17.05.2017).
- Citizenship is matter of common identity, of being Turkish, having Turkish as a common language and sharing a common history. Hence, taking in three million people coming from a different culture is not appropriate (15.07.2016).

During this discussion *Cumhuriyet* published only one direct news article on the nationalist party view: on the MHP leader stating that "granting citizenship is unacceptable and would be a historical mistake" (04.07.2016).

The relevant news items and discussion in *Cumhuriyet* omit positive aspects of Syrians in Turkey, such as successful people or good local practices. Although focusing on the voting issue, the discussion omits Syrian immigrants' views on this issue.

Cumhuriyet suggests criticism of the naturalization policy on an economic, class-based, ethno-cultural and secular basis. There is a strong identity differentiation from Syrians, as well as from the AKP government. The social-democrat Kemalist approach is a strong opponent of naturalization and prefers refugee status, which would provide relevant rights in line with international standards.

Solportal (Left Portal)

Solportal (SP), as a socialist news portal, has a class-based approach. It covered the issue with 37 news items, including five columns. The discussion lost speed after the coup attempt; the metaphors and argumentation, however, continued as before. SP uses the *victims of imperialism metaphor* and describes Syrian migrants as a group of workers who are currently highly exploited in Turkey's informal sector. In addition, through the *working class metaphor*, SP underlines the commonality between Turkish citizens working in precarious conditions and Syrians exploited by the same enemy, namely capitalists and imperialism. Hence, it calls for solidarity between workers of all nations. One column (07.07.2016) describes Syrians in Turkey as people who had to leave their country due to a "proxy war" conducted by "imperialists", in which Turkey also plays an active role. It is the only one among the four outlets examined here that reports on HDP statements on the issue (09-12-14.07.2016), calling for Turkey to abandon its geographical reservation to the Geneva Convention and grant Syrians refugee status, which would cover many rights. It stresses that there will then no longer be a need for citizenship.

The *arguments* of SP can be summarised as follows:

- The government has instrumentalised Syrians as a tool for internal politics and as a bargaining chip with the EU (09.07.2016).
- The debate about Syrian citizenship in the media is a failure within the ongoing conflict about secularism. This failure stems from the lack of scientific knowledge, among the public and the relevant authors, about the social structure of Syrians in Turkey, so everyone acts upon assumptions. People assume Syrians to be ultimately religious people supporting Erdoğan without any question. But in fact, most of the Syrians are secular and modern. These people have had to flee their homes because Islamist armed groups conquered their villages and forced them to live under the harsh Sharia law they imposed. And now, most of them are working under precarious conditions in informal jobs (09.07.2016).
- Syrians in Turkey are being turned into highly exploitable workers (05.07.2017).
- Secular people should support Syrians' rights, including their right to political participation, and try to gain their votes with good politics and by informing them of the government's role in the current situation in Syria (09.07.2016).
- The government is one of the instigators of the Syrians' current situation (11.07.2016).
- Xenophobia and indignation against Syrians is due to the existing hardships in Turkey such as unemployment, war, internal conflicts, fear of the future and the feeling of desperation. But racism and fascism are unacceptable, and ire directed towards Syrians will not solve any of these problems (11.07.2016).
- Most of the Syrians here have fled from jihadists. The jihadists attack not only Alevi and Christian people but also Turkmens (11.07.2016).

One important discourse difference is that *Solportal* strictly underlines that some people have fled from jihadists terrorist groups. The mainstream media, on the other hand, describes Syrians as fleeing from the Assad regime, and makes no mention of jihadist groups.

Omissions: Ethnicity, gender or religious- or sect-based divisions are completely *omitted*. Most of the nationalist party and NGO activities, as well as right-wing discussions, are also omitted. Despite the solidarity discourse, there are no direct interviews with Syrians; hence, the Syrian people's voice is not heard in SP discussions. The class-based discussion directs attention to Syrian workers, one of the groups omitted by other newspapers.

The socialist-left approach is strongly opposed to Turkey's Syrian policy as a whole, but at the same time it is a proponent of the naturalization policy for legalizing and securing the Syrian people's rights and working conditions.

DISCUSSION

Metaphors, public opinion and policymaking

The literature suggests that public opinion and migration policy-framing affect one another (Merolla et al., 2013; Watson, 2011). The findings of this study show that metaphors have a specific role in this relation. Especially the *guest metaphor* used by officials has right-wing implications. Hence, both policymakers' and journalists' choice of words in framing a policy is very relevant.

Both far- and centre-right politicians and officials – whose political leanings reflect those of the majority of the population – used the *guest metaphor* when referring to Syrian immigrants. It was chosen over another metaphor, *soydash*, (literally *kinsman*, used for Bulgarian immigrants fleeing from internal conflict in 1989). It was also preferred to the universal term refugee. This usage was based on the assumption that the conflict in Syria would be resolved in the short-term. As then-Foreign Minister Davutoğlu stated in August 2012, "the conflict will soon be over and Assad will go away in a couple of months, even weeks".[6] Instead of granting the rights and the status of a refugee, the *guest metaphor* evolved into a legal situation with a new 2013 migration law defining *temporary protection* status and granting the right to temporary stay. With a 2015 circular, having an official work permit was made non-obligatory for low-wage work – such as seasonal agriculture – for people under temporary protection. The duration of this protection status is not clear. Therefore, the rights associated with this status are not granted with certainty for a defined period of time. This, in turn, gives rise to a certain arbitrariness regarding persons under temporary protection.

Both the *guest* and *economics metaphors* brought about a hierarchical understanding between migrants and hosts, leading to an uncertain acceptance that is always subject to renegotiation, as those deemed welcome or profitable have that standing revoked at some future time. As for the *crisis metaphor*, it gave rise to a generally negative approach to immigrants. These metaphors exclude foreigners' rights and an integration debate. Recalling Huddleson and Vink (2015), all in all in this debate the naturalization policy discussion replaced a discussion on migratory rights in general.

The challenges that different ideological arguments present to established migration policymaking

Each ideological stance suggests basic arguments as propositions and expectations for policy. Despite the need for durable solutions, migration has been managed according to established migration policymaking logics, depending on three principles: (i) selective acceptance, (ii) case-by-case management, and (iii) partial commitment to the world refugee system. Discussing the findings vis-à-vis established migration policy might provide new insights.

(i) *Selective acceptance* is based on an identity politics that emphasizes both ethnic and religious harmony, even though Turkey has been a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multilingual country for centuries. Migration has been managed on the grounds of ethnic and religious similarity. Naturalization has been implemented according to ethnic Turkic origins and being part of Turkish culture (which denotes Sunni Muslim religious affiliation) as amended in the 1934 Settlement Act. The images of the social mainstream (Portes, 1997) or identity politics (İçduygu et al., 2014) have influenced migration policy. Since the Balkan Wars, Turkey has naturalised millions of Muslim immigrants (Kirişçi, 2000), whereas the emigration of non-Muslim (Christian and Jewish) communities continued until the 1990s (İçduygu et al., 2008).

(ii) *Case-by-case management* means implementing a specific migrant policy for each accepted group. Different immigration waves, such as Uzbeks from Afghanistan in 1982, Turks from Bulgaria in 1989, and immigrants from Chechnya in 1994, have been evaluated on a case-by-

case basis and accepted with different reception and settlement conditions and varying permission to access public service and the labour market. Among these recent immigrant groups, only Turks from Bulgaria have been systematically naturalised.

(iii) *Partial commitment to the global refugee system*: Turkey ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees with a geographical reservation on protection obligations, indicating that those arriving from non-European countries will not be granted refugee status. Nevertheless, such applicants are generally accepted as asylum-seekers and, in case of a positive assessment, the procedure for resettlement in a safe third country is initiated.

It is important to underline that people fleeing from war are not homogeneous in terms of ethnicity, religion and culture. They include Christians, Alevis, Yazidis, Arabs, Kurds and Turkmens. Turkey responded to the Yazidi influx from the war in Syria differently, which again confirms the implementation of the three principles. The Yazidis, being of Kurdish origin and having a different religion, faced more difficulties regarding acceptance and were not granted the same rights as Syrians. Their situation has been formalized as another case. They were not granted *temporary protection*; instead, a Cabinet Council Decision was amended for them in 2015, granting some access to health care only in the permitted settlement area and not granting the right to work. In terms of the Turkish state's approach, such instances show that established migration policy principles are still functioning with a slight shift in the balance to ensure that the newcomers conform to Sunni Islam rather than to ethnic unity, which have been the two discursive pillars of harmony.

The findings of arguments in media discussions on naturalization policy clearly challenge established migration policymaking.

All newspapers partly challenge the *selective acceptance principle* in terms of paramount criteria of acceptance. *Yeni Akit*, representing the far right, supports Sunni Muslim identity as the paramount selection criterion and as the integration basis for mass naturalization policy. *Cumhuriyet*, representing the social-democrat Kemalist ideology, emphasises cultural resemblance, strongly rejects religious similarity for acceptance and supports refugee status. *Solportal*, representing the socialist ideology, rejects both ethnic and religious criteria. *Hürriyet*, representing the centre-right ideology, keeps ethnic or religious identity out of the discussion, hence silently rejecting principle (i), and strongly opposing mass naturalization. Different arguments show that naturalization is discussed according to "who is/can be one of us"; all parties except liberals answer this according to their perceived social mainstream, thereby assuming different profiles and increasing political polarization.

Established decision-making for naturalization, based on both ethnic and religious similarity, cannot create holistic social acceptance due to this current political polarization. Hence, there is a need for new criteria in decision-making.

The case-by-case management principle has flowed through into the media discussion. Three of the examined outlets discussing Syrian immigrants propose either total acceptance or rejection and do not compare the Syrians with other immigrants in Turkey. Conversely, *Hürriyet* proposes a business-oriented, individual-based selection for naturalization. Even though naturalization might be implemented at the level of the individual, the development of new or additional group-based and case-specific policies is still grounded politically in public opinion.

Fulfilling the refugee definition but not coming from Europe, Syrians were not granted refugee status according to principle (iii); the far-left and far- and centre-right approaches did not criticise or comment on this policy. *Cumhuriyet* thematised refugee status only for Syrians with a case-management principle and instead of citizenship. Recalling the cost emphasis of *Hürriyet*, there is no public expectation for changing the geographical limitation.

All in all, no consensus exists on naturalization; however, there is an expectation for durable solutions for Syrians.

CONCLUSION

This study has focused on Turkish public opinion as it relates to the proposed policy to naturalise Syrian refugees in Turkey. Analysing the metaphors, arguments and significant omissions produced by media of diverse ideological backgrounds that public opinion is not univocal. Rather, it changes according to the relevant policy frame and is highly responsive to politicians' statements.

Analysing arguments according to established migration policymaking principles reveals that the paramount criteria for naturalization seem to be shifting, due to the polarization on the Islam/secularism axis, from ethnic/religious similarity to an exclusive selection based on business and the purported value of human capital. The partial commitment to the global refugee system is still unchallenged because Syrian immigrants are not defined as refugees but as people under *temporary protection*, and this will probably continue due to the perception of high costs.

Recalling Portes and Rumbaut's (2001) study, the Turkish government's approach can be classified as falling between *neutral* and *encouraging*, since it initially endorsed an open-door policy but made little effort towards integration of subsequent waves of Syrians fleeing the war. However, this study indicates that public opinion seems to include both sympathy and prejudice. Although the opponents of naturalization outnumber proponents, as demonstrated by surveys (Erdoğan, 2014; OECD, 2015), this study, in investigating the arguments of different ideological approaches, reveals that most of the public opposition is directed against mass naturalization and hence that there still is public acceptance for exclusive naturalization.

Therefore, in the near future, one may expect not one but two results, as suggested by Portes and Rumbaut (2001). The first is straightforward naturalization of affluent Syrians due to a positive stance from both the government and the public. The second is the possible formation of a migrant underclass due to negative judgments. This potential underclass of deportable refugees covers the bulk of Syrians with low human capital, who would probably remain condemned to temporary status and precarious lives.

In order to prevent such an adverse outcome, policymakers should shape a new agenda covering the rights and integration of disadvantaged immigrants. Omissions indicate the issues that need to be placed on such an agenda, like migrants' concerns and preferences, ethnicity, gender or religious- and sect-based divisions, war trauma, basic rights, working conditions, the needs of women and children, child labour, anti-discrimination, labour market mobility, education, family reunification, political participation and long-term residence. A multi-option framing of policy suggestions may also have a positive effect on public discussion.

On the other hand, the voices of the migrants themselves are nearly absent in the public discussion. Cross-cultural dialogue is essential for any policy of living together, regardless of the time frame. Hence, migrants should be included in the public deliberations. New research and academic initiatives should be encouraged and published in mainstream media for disseminating knowledge on migrants' opinions, life experiences and needs. Such research could provide sound grounds for new, custom-made policy options. In addition, increasing the use of international terminology and scientific information would probably enhance public discussion.

NOTES

1. "The Helpers" is an Islamic term for the local inhabitants of Medina who took the Prophet Muhammad and his followers into their homes when they emigrated from Mecca.
2. http://gazetetirajlari.com
3. http://haber.sol.org.tr/medya/turkiyenin-en-cok-okunan-haber-siteleri-sol-portal-okur-sayisini-arttiriyor-haberi-75069

4. Said Nursi (1877–1960) was a Kurdish Sunni theologian known for his ideas on Islamic unity.
5. *Hadith* means the deeds and sayings of the Prophet Muhammed: the term is also used to denote the theological branch studying them.
6. NTV news http://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/davutoglu-esada-omur-bicti,Nsez_e7zmEO7uz5O9Pv6hw

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