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A Poisoned Well: An Analysis of Divergent Narratives and their Consequences in Turkish Accession from 2013 to Present.

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Abstract

Since being accepted as a candidate in 2005, the Republic of Turkey has been part of erratic accession negotiations with the European Union. While initially hopeful, EU and Turkish narratives around this process have oscillated wildly between three separate states: convergence, cooperation, and divergence. This paper explores the steady changes in these themes and what they mean for Turkey's public opinion and its future accession negotiations. Through its analysis of these themes, this paper concludes that institutional narratives on accession have a substantial impact on the way accession is viewed by the Turkish public. With this in mind, an exploration of causal links in the narratives of EU and Turkish institutions on the matter are key to determining the path of future negotiations, or perhaps even their cessation. Considering that the success of accession is largely dependent on popular support, the severe divergence in accession narratives has consequences for the future of Turkey's accession bid. In light of this linkage of public opinion and narratives, it seems clear that the processes of accession actually lead to a culture of count-conduct amongst Turkish leaders and increased the strength of Eurosceptic sentiments, rather than inculcating European values. As such, the process of accession needs to be re-evaluated, instead being replaced with a strategic partnership.

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The Accession process has been one of the European Union's key foreign policy tools since its founding. Through it, the EU has consistently sought to induce reforms, thus bringing Europe's near abroad in to alignment with its objectives. In light of recent events in Turkey, there is cause now to doubt this process's efficacy. In fact, it seems to be clear that the accession process has led to lower trust in the EU within Turkey, and research indicates that the ongoing process has led to a culture of counter-conduct within the Turkish government. When viewed alongside Turkish attitudes towards accession, it becomes clear that narratives on the matter have a clear effect on the attitudes of Turkish citizens. With this in mind, close attention must be paid to the narrative being promoted by both sides of the accession process, as these narratives directly impact the legitimacy of the EU in the eyes of the Turkish people. It then follows that clear trends in these narratives could be viewed as harbingers of things to come, and this has dire implications for the future of the accession process in Turkey.

Literature Review

The topic of EU-Turkish relations and Turkish Accession has received a considerable amount of attention from the scholarly community, and this document draws heavily from their work. As this work is underpinned by an apparent increase in de-europeanization and counter-conduct inside of Turkey, Gozde Yilmaz's work on the topic must be mentioned. His use of counter-conduct in analyzing the EU-Turkey relationship lends credence to the increasing divergence in behaviors between Ankara and Brussels¹. Finally, Canan Balkır and Sedef Eylemer's piece on elite discourse inside of Turkey guided my work on the topic.² Regrettably, their work also fails to account for recent changes in the discourse, an issue this piece hopes to remedy. This piece's contribution to the existing literature is not that it explores a virgin landscape in the political sciences, so much as it draws disparate aspects of the sciences together in a unique fashion.

Methodology

Before engaging with EU-Turkish narratives, it is important to explain this paper's methodology. This paper is predominantly a thematic analysis of narrative structure in EU and Turkish public statements, paired with quantitative measurements of public opinion inside of Turkey. This analysis will ask what type of messages are being sent on the topics related to Turkish accession to the EU by both sets of actors. Once that is done, these messages will show the change in narrative over time and will be compared to changes in public opinion over time. We posit that the decreases in public trust in the EU, europeanization and faith in the accession process move in tandem with the narratives being presented by the EU and Turkish officials. Given the responsiveness of Turkish public opinion to elite rhetoric, it stands to reason that this can be a harbinger of future trends, indicative of a failure in enlargements purpose. When combined with the increase in counter-conduct amongst Turkish elite, this indicates that the

¹ Münevver Cebeci (2016) De-Europeanisation or Counter-Conduct?

Turkey's Democratisation and the EU, *South European Society and Politics*, 21:1, 119-132,

² Canan Balkır & Sedef Eylemer (2016) Shifting Logics: The Discourses of Turkish Political Elites on EU Accession, *South European Society and Politics*, 21:1, 29-43

accession process and the rhetoric around it are in fact achieving the opposite of its intended purpose. If the accession process is meant to achieve convergence in policy and action, then, in the case of Turkey, we can use elite narratives to judge the effectiveness of the process. This will be typified by three general narratives: Essentially, we will be tracking changes in the accession narratives and ask if the changes therein are reflected in public sentiment.

Overview of the Accession Process

Turkish accession to the EU has a long and turbulent history, and its import to the European Union cannot be overstated. In order to understand the state of accession narratives in during the Juncker commission, it is important to examine the key issues that have dominated the accession process since 2005. The accession process immediately following the opening of negotiations in 2005 was packed with acquis driven reforms in Turkey, with the Science and Research chapter opened and closed in less than a year. This process slowed considerably in December 2006, when disputes over Turkish recognition of Cyprus flared. This resulted in the freezing of eight accession chapters along with the statement from the Commission that no more chapters would be closed until a resolution was found. The next year saw France freeze the economic and monetary chapters of accession, prompting significant backlash from Turkish elites. For the purposes of this piece, what is important to note is that the narratives surrounding enlargement quickly shifted from convergence to, at best cooperation, and, at worst, conflict.

This leads us to the events transpiring under the 2014-2019 Commission, which have shaped the narrative considerably. The events of this commission must be framed in light of an understanding of Juncker Commission's stance on enlargement. Simply put, Juncker stated clearly at the start of his term that no enlargement would take place under his term, a statement that colors every aspect of the accession process during this period³. In the previous Commission, a single event stands out in the narrative of Accession: Gezi Park. Recep Erdogan, the President of Turkey was pushing demolition of public park in order to build a mosque, which prompted the largest public protest in Turkey's recent history. This protest was violently repressed, causing EU-Turkey relations to ebb. Interestingly, the current Commission's relationship with the EU was dominated by a single topic: migration. Despite the crackdown on freedom of speech during this time, the Commission was actively seeking Turkish assistance in stemming the flow of irregular migrants. Within months of the signing of the March 2016 Joint Statement on Migration, an attempted coup rocked the Turkish state, ending a key period of cooperation. The Erdogan presidency's response to this coup was almost more important than the coup itself, and now vies for prominence with the migration issue in EU-Turkey dialogues.

Changes in Document Narratives

2013 Document Narratives

First, it is imperative to examine how the Commission's perspective on Turkish Accession has changed, and, most importantly, how it has communicated that through official

³ Juncker, Jean-Claude. 2014. A New Start for Europe: My Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change. Strasbourg, 22 October 2014

documents from 2014-2018. As the reports have been issued over time, it becomes clear that the Commission has taken an increasingly harsh tone, following the deteriorating state of democracy in Turkey. While the reports are key to understanding the Commission's stance on the topic, what is particularly revealing is language used in its enlargement strategy papers and the progress reports. These documents set out the Commission's entire perspective, allowing us to contrast the narrative surrounding Turkey with that of the Western Balkans. For the sake of context, a brief look at the 2013 enlargement papers gives us a sense of the differing approach found in these two Commissions. The 2013 Strategy emphasizes Turkey's progress, drawing attention first to "important progress" on judicial reforms and its "much anticipated democratization package."⁴ It follows this up by lauding Turkey's "historic" peace talks with the PKK, only then mentioning the Gezi park protests and police responses.⁵ Even when addressing such a divisive topic, the Barroso Commission takes a soft tone, limiting its language to "serious concerns" over the "handling of demonstrations."⁶ This stands sharp contrast with later Commission documents on the subject. Furthermore, the Commission compares the Turkish economy with that of the Western Balkans, highlighting its "large, dynamic economy" while pointing out the lack of said economy in the Balkans.⁷ In fact, this Commission emphasizes that the Turkish economy is a "valuable component of EU competitiveness."⁸ It goes on to state emphasize that cooperation with Turkey would be "enhanced" due to its "strategic location and potential as an energy hub."⁹ Indeed, the Commission uses very positive language when discussing deepening the customs union, such as "looking forward" to it reviewing "further progress" in energy market integration.¹⁰ One of the few overt criticisms in the strategy involved the protection of minority rights and fighting discrimination. As will soon be seen, this language does not survive 2013.

This approach contrasts interestingly with the European Parliament's stance that year. The EP's resolution on the 2013 Commission Progress Report takes a different direction, though it is tamer in tone than later parliament documents. While the Commission notes issues, the Parliament brings the Gezi park incident to the fore early in the document by the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights report. This is provocative and far stronger in tone than the Commission documents, which note the Gezi Park protests only in passing, without taking a strong stance. Immediately thereafter, the document refers to the accession process as "long lasting and open-ended."¹¹ Despite this, it reaffirms Turkey's special status as a strategic partner and that it is key to the EU's competitiveness. It even goes as far as lauding various democratic changes and progress on human rights. Importantly, Turkey's role in energy provision is highlighted in bright language, such as "potential for... both to benefit," "pivotal" and "rich, renewable energy."¹² Additionally, this document points out Turkey's key role as an

⁴ European Commission. 2013. Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2013-2014.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ European Parliament. 2014. European Parliament Resolution of 12 March 2014 on the 2013 Commission Progress Report on Turkey (2013/2945(RSP))

¹² Ibid

“important regional player.”¹³ Key for our understanding of the EP’s perspective is the following statement, as it deviates substantially from later documents: “notes the transformative power of negotiations between the Union and Turkey.”¹⁴ It goes on to state that a credible accession process is key for promoting Turkish reforms. The Parliament’s praise on the reforms on the Constitution and the establishment of the Turkish National Human Rights Institution is loud, using strong language. As for points of contention, the document states its worry over dangers posed to democracy, urging the Turkish government to remedy this and that the profiling of public servants was worrying. The strongest oppositional language on Turkish accession only comes from the issue of Cyprus and Turkey’s refusal to recognize it. Only then does the Parliament state that it “deplores” Turkish actions.¹⁵ Interestingly, the Parliament only “deeply regrets” or has “great concerns” over problem areas in this document, but still make a point of highlighting Turkish failures just as often as praising them.¹⁶

2014 Document Narratives

While the Juncker commission was inaugurated in 2014, the enlargement strategy of that year was formulated and published by the Barroso Commission in October of that year. Interestingly, there is a substantial shift in Commission narratives over this time. Where once there was a tone of convergence and approval, now the Turkey’s prospects are presented as dimming. In this document, the Western Balkans are held to have a “credible perspective” with regards to EU enlargement, yet Turkey is conspicuously absent when this credibility is discussed.¹⁷ It applauds loudly the changes in the Balkan states but emphasizes its concerns about Turkey’s rule of law and judicial independence. Instead of lauding the reform packages and Kurdish peace talks, these are only mentioned in passing as “continuing” from previous years.¹⁸ Interestingly, the previous document emphasized the strength of the “dynamic” Turkish economy, but the 2014 strategy highlights the imbalances inherent in it, while emphasizing Turkey’s reliance on the EU economically. This does not seem to dampen the Commission’s fervor for a deepening of the customs union, however, which it drives home as in the “mutual interest” and of “strategic importance.”¹⁹ Energy market integration is highlighted once again, but without the positive signifiers of previous documents, citing the strategic elements. Oddly, the Commission chose to emphasize Turkish judicial reforms and protections of fundamental rights based on decisions of the Constitutional Court. Considering the Commission’s “serious concerns” this stands out sharply in an otherwise gloomy document.²⁰ It further calls attention to the failures with regards for women’s’ rights “particularly in Turkey,” juxtaposing it with Kosovo and omitting reference to any other Balkan states.²¹ This document felt the need to emphasize that “active and credible accession negotiations” could not be replaced by any

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ European Commission. 2014. Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2014-2015

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

alternative, noting its “unrivalled scope and depth.”²² It concludes that these negotiations “need to regain momentum.”²³ In a stark departure from 2013 dialogue, this strategy emphasized the EU’s appreciation of Turkey’s role as a regional security actor, stating that this growth should be coupled with European positions.

2015 Document Narratives

In 2015, the EP’s resolution on the topic becomes significantly less approving, with negative language both strengthening and expanding in use.²⁴ As a clear indicator of tone, the document quickly references the Parliament’s recognition of the Armenian Genocide, a highly contentious issue for Turkey.²⁵ Notably, every Resolution on the Commission Reports on Turkey following this include a less than positive signal to the Turkish people. This follows a clear name-and-shame narrative. It also brings the Charter of Fundamental Rights into the document early on as well as European Convention of Human Rights. This is a clear departure from earlier documents. It also lends its support to the Commission assessment of how further enlargement for the next five years. Soon thereafter, the EP pointedly highlights external reports by Freedom House and Reporters without Borders, both of which condemn Turkish human rights violations. Even with this assessment, the document still highlights the cooperative narrative, pointing out the need for Turkey to remain a strategic partner in energy, economy and foreign policy.²⁶ This statement is lengthy, highlighting its importance, and moreover, we begin to see considerable focus on “an effective functioning relationship” and mutual benefit. Additionally, this document goes on to condemn actions by the Turkish government against freedom of expression. Importantly, this is the first time these documents state that Turkey’s actions are “incompatible with the fundamental rights of the EU and thus in conflict with the accession process.”²⁷ Even so, it uses subdued language to praise continuing reforms, while increasing its criticisms of the Turkish state.

The 2015 Enlargement Strategy represents the Juncker Commission’s first foray into the Accession statements, and, as such, is a signal of things to come. In the introduction, the document quickly points out that Turkey is a key element of the Enlargement Strategy, but couples that with a distinct caveat. It emphasizes that the negotiations are “moving forward only slowly.”²⁸ This, it claims, comes from a variety of issues, not the least of which being “shortcomings of the judiciary.”²⁹ It points out that the Kurdish peace talks have broken down and “political confrontations.”³⁰ In keeping with Juncker’s statements at the start of his tenure,

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid

²⁴ It must be mentioned that this document is in response to the 2014 Report on Turkey but is published in 2015 under a new legislative term. From this we can assess a clear change in the tones of both Parliaments.

²⁵ European Parliament. 2015. European Parliament Resolution of 10 June on the 2014 Commission Progress Report on Turkey (2014/2953(RSP)).

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ European Commission. 2015. EU Enlargement Strategy.

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid

this document lauds the improvements of all accession states, but points out that none will be ready for accession during the term of his Commission.³¹ As previous documents, this one highlights how exceptional the Turkish economy is by comparison to the Western Balkans. In a distinct shift from previous documents, this Strategy “welcomes” the “encouraging positive steps on the Cyprus settlement talks.”³² The language here is important to note. While using very positive tones, the Commission emphasized that “it is now urgent” for Turkey to fulfil their “obligation” to implement the Additional Protocol, holding out the incentive of “new momentum” towards accession.³³ Importantly, this document places Turkey and the Western Balkans side by side in their failure with regards to freedom of expression and discrimination. As previous documents, this Strategy emphasizes the “high potential and continuing imbalances” in the Turkish economy, while emphasizing the continuing downturn in the market’s prospects and “moderate growth.”³⁴ In a further development of the previous documents, this strategy lists concrete efforts to deep economic cooperation with Turkey, such as “aligning positions in the G20” and the “comprehensive impact assessment” of the Customs Union.³⁵ This document emphasizes that despite these issues, this Commission “is ready to reengage with Turkey.”

2016 Document Narratives

2016 was turbulent year for EU Turkey relations, and the Enlargement Strategy for that year reflects it. In the introduction, the Commission granted pride of place to development inside of Turkey, a change of pace considering the prominence of the Western Balkans in previous Strategies. The Commission begins by highlighting the success of EU-Turkey Cooperation on the Migration Crisis, cooperation that were able “to revitalize” the relationship.³⁶ It followed this immediately by condemning the coup attempt of July 15 but notes that the events of that coup shook “democratic institutions and society as a whole.”³⁷ This is a very passive way of noting that these elements are not as the EU would like but will not come out against them. Importantly, the Strategy emphasizes the legitimacy of Turkey’s swift response, calling the coup an “attack on the democratically elected institutions.”³⁸ It follows this up later with an insistence on the proportionality requirement and the “respect for human rights.”³⁹ This indicates that the EU does not in fact believe that these are being followed. The Commission contrasts the judicial reforms in Serbia and Albania with failures in the Turkish arena, citing problems of judicial independence in the wake of the coup. It goes on to note “significant shortcomings” in the realm of fundamental rights, once again contrasting the “broadly stable” nature of the Balkans fundamental rights situation with significant retrenchment in Turkey.⁴⁰ It goes on to note that freedom of expression “deteriorated further significantly.”⁴¹ Once again, the Strategy contrasts Western Balkans reforms in the realm of public administrative reform with Turkish backsliding,

³¹ Ibid

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ European Commission. 2016. 2016 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy.

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid

highlighting the negative effects of the mass dismissals on the effectiveness of public administration. The language there is rather oblique, by way of criticism. It does not criticize the dismissal, rather noting that they may impact professionalism and efficiency.⁴² It notes the upturn in the Turkish economy but links worries about the response to the coup attempt to possible economic uncertainty. Additionally, this document reminds Turkey's attempt to reinstitute the death penalty, a move that directly contravenes the EU acquis. Regardless, this document ends its assessment of Turkey with a positive note, one indicative of how this relation has continued to progress.⁴³ In light of cooperation over the migration crisis and EU-Turkey Statement of 2016, the Commission emphasizes a deepening of "relations in key areas of joint interest."

The EP took a strong, anti-accession stance in the 2016 Resolution. Much of the previous Resolution was recycled into this one, including the recognition of the Armenian genocide and external reports on Turkey's press freedoms. Notably, the freedom of journalists was moved to the very front of the document, becoming part of the first line of the resolution. This sets the tone for the remainder of the document. As a result, this is one of the most strongly worded ever released on Turkish accession. Early on, the document calls attention to the EP's previous call for the freezing of accession negotiations with Turkey. Notably, the Commission ignored this call, perhaps due to the timing. It then goes on to recognize that economic difficulties in Turkey are due to defense and instability, but then pointedly expresses its doubts about Turkish economic stability by claiming that there are "deeper underlying problems with the economy."⁴⁴ Interestingly, there is a new addition to this document, an explicit recognition of the Turkish diaspora in the EU. It links the diaspora to EU prosperity directly and this addition follows a conflict between Erdogan and the Netherlands over said diaspora. Once again, a case of narratives clashing, even in a small portion of the text. In the Introduction, this document quickly states that the post-coup crackdown has had "disproportionate and long-lasting negative effects on a large number of citizens as well as on the protection of fundamental rights."⁴⁵ Even so, the document spends entire paragraphs outlining the necessity of close relations with Turkey, driving home the cooperation narrative at the exact same time that it castigates the Turkish elite for various flaws. This clear "regression in the areas of rule of law and human rights" is repeatedly highlighted, and the document makes explicit mention of weakening "public support for Turkey's full integration."⁴⁶ Soon thereafter, it reiterates its call for the suspension of negotiations. In yet another contentious point, it applauds member state actions in taking in Turkish refugees who were persecuted by the state and calls on the Commission to suspend pre-accession funds in yet another punitive measure. Finally, in one of the smallest, but most interesting additions, this Resolution asks to be translated into Turkish, a point absent in every iteration of this document since 2013.⁴⁷ But why? They already are being sent to relevant Turkish ministries, and no previous copies explicitly called for translation. It is the opinion of

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ European Parliament. 2017. European Parliament Resolution of 6 July 2017 on the 2016 Commission Progress Report on Turkey (2016/2308(RSP)).

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Ibid

this piece that the EP was translating this into Turkish for the benefit of the Turkish people. In other words, they were explicitly attempting to influence the narrative on accession in Turkey.

2018 Document Narratives

The 2018 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy is jarring in its tone, which is a continuation of disapproval from the previous documents coupled with a significant lack of positive signifiers found in previous documents.⁴⁸ This document begins with one of the most distinct signals for the Commission’s position. This document explicitly states a “credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced engagement with the Western Balkans,” notably excluding Turkey.⁴⁹ They go on to refer to Turkey as a “candidate country” and a “key partner,” where “dialogue... and cooperation in areas of joint interest have continued.”⁵⁰ As a further and more blatant signal, it states that Turkey is “moving away from the European Union” and that the EU has repeatedly brought this up to the Turkey as a “matter of priority.”⁵¹ The implication of this statement is that they are ignoring the EU’s pleas. It goes on to note the rule of law situation, claiming that it “continued to deteriorate.”⁵² In judicial reform, the Commission once again uses one of its favorite narrative devices, juxtaposition. It lauds Albanian judicial reform in bright, shining terms such as “unprecedented” and calling it a “boost” to the professionalism of its judicial branch.⁵³ The failures of Turkey are immediately contrasted with this Western Balkans success story, by highlighting its mass dismissals and failures in judicial independence. The same method follows in the area of fundamental rights, where efforts to enshrine these rights in legislation are successful in the Western Balkans but strongly deteriorating in Turkey. Additionally, freedom of expression in Turkey is “seriously backsliding,” explicitly mentioning 150 imprisoned journalists.⁵⁴ Despite the ongoing nature of this violation, this is the first time a concrete number of journalists jailed inside Turkey has made it into the communication strategy. It goes on to mention that rights to defense had been “curtailed” under the State of Emergency⁵⁵. It further goes on, calling into question the proportionality of Turkey’s response to the coup attempt, noting that democracy and legislative strength had been severely hindered as a result. As a bright spot, the Commission uses exceptionally positive language on the issue of Turkish efforts during the migration crisis, amplified even further by its proximity to so many dismal assessments. In this section, it calls Turkey’s work “an outstanding effort,” emphasizing that “cooperation...continued to deliver concrete results.”⁵⁶ As for economics, the tone continues to be positive, referring to “significant economic potential.” It points out that the Turkish economy “rebounded strongly,” but called into question the business environment and investor confidence.⁵⁷

⁴⁸ It must be mentioned that Commission changed the method of progress reporting on accession states. As such, there is no 2017 Progress Report on Turkey. This helps explain, in part, the jarring differences in Commission narrative between 2016 and 2018.

⁴⁹ European Commission. 2018. 2018 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy.

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Ibid

While not quite the same as the 2016 Resolution, the EP’s Resolution on the 2018 Progress Report on Turkey was the most anti-accession document to date. Following the pattern of the previous Resolution, the issue of press freedom and human rights violations set the tone for the document and soon thereafter we find a reference to Turkish violations of Cyprus’s exclusive economic zone. Additionally, the issue of Greek Orthodox property rights moves up in importance to the front of the document. The document references a study which found pre-accession assistance has only had limited impact on Turkish alignment with the *acquis*, which only amplifies the EP’s point that pre-accession funds should be cut.⁵⁸ It moves quickly into reminding everyone that it has repeatedly called for a suspension of accession negotiations, which quickly becomes a prime theme of the document. In a direct accusation, the document states that the Turkish government has carried out “illegal abduction and extradition” on Turkish citizens in third countries.⁵⁹ Furthermore, it accuses the Turkish government of using the Directorate for Religious Affairs to “pursuing opposition leaders from the Gulen movement.”⁶⁰ In one of the strongest statements as of yet, this document calls on the EU and member states to investigate “this serious violation of sovereignty and public order.”⁶¹ This is not simply a narrative of anti-accession, this is an open conflict narrative. With this in mind, the document calls once again for suspension of accession negotiations, but in language that is substantially stronger. It goes on to state that accession negotiations no longer have a positive effect on Turkey.⁶² In its boldest move, it calls for the relationship to be “redefined in terms of an effective partnership.”⁶³ The document emphasizes modernization of the Customs Union, visa liberalization, and foreign policy dialogues, framed as a replacement of the *status quo*. While other accession documents have recommended cooperation, none has gone this far. This is incredibly important, as this represents a tectonic shift in accession narrative. What this is effectively calling for is not, in truth a suspension, but an ending of accession negotiations.

Observations

In sum, we can see a clear trend on a variety of accession narratives. First, the stance of the Commission on Turkey’s accession credibility shifts from clear to uncertain, and, finally, to doubtful. This represents a slow but steady alignment with the language of EP resolutions, adhering from a convergence narrative towards a conflict narrative. This contrasts sharply with the official documents available from the Turkish government, which insist upon both Turkey’s progress on the *acquis* and its desire to accede to the Union. Second, the increase in references to a need for increasing customs ties, institutionalization of foreign and economic policy dialogues, and high level talks all increase as uncertainty about Turkey’s accession increases. The narrative shifts from one of alignment to one of joint interest, the essence of the cooperation narrative. Third, narratives of divergence proliferate over this period. This can be seen clearly as increasingly strong language is used to address Turkey’s accession issues, from rule of law to

⁵⁸ European Parliament. 2019. European Parliament Resolution of 13 March 2019 on the 2018 Commission Progress Report on Turkey (2018/2150(RSP)).

⁵⁹ *Ibid*

⁶⁰ *Ibid*

⁶¹ *Ibid*

⁶² *Ibid*

⁶³ *Ibid*

freedom of expression. As this narrative of divergence increases, there is an increase in the use of juxtaposition with other accession states, often used to highlight apparent disparities in the two.

Changes in Public Rhetorical Narratives

This leads us to the question of public narratives. In order to place these changes in their proper context, it is necessary to show how public rhetoric by political leaders on both sides of the accession process has shifted over time. How they frame the issue of Turkish enlargement demonstrates not only how these institutions view the process, but how they want the public to respond. Importantly, narratives do not seem to vanish entirely, simply losing prominence in discourse. While less concrete in nature than their legal cousins, analysis of the rhetoric of major players in the process yields considerable insight into actors' perspectives on enlargement. This analysis has gone through a number of cases but will highlight a few specific cases for study. In the case of the European Union, the opinions of three main actors are integral to understanding changing perspectives.

The European Union

When viewing the European perspective, the most important voice on the topic is that of the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker. As head of the commission, his voice on the matter can be held to be authoritative, and, moreover, he has the largest stage to present his view. In Juncker's case, this will be highlighted by excerpts from each of his State of the Union address as well as four separate speeches.

First, the most prominent example of EU public rhetoric is the State of the Union speech by the President of the Commission. This speech is meant to sum up the past year and establish the Commission's plan of action in the coming year. Consequently, one can judge the importance of an issue by how it is handled in this high-profile event. In this piece, we will walk through how Turkey and accession are handled in each speech between 2015-2018, noting the changing tone and perspectives.

After his statements at the beginning of his presidency, it would seem the President of the European Commission had little to say on the topic in 2015, and consequently, that State of the Union has little to offer us on the topic, and consequently, it can be concluded that this topic was not viewed as particularly important to the Commission that year. In the absence of his 2015 State of the Union, one need only look to his speeches during the Spitzenkandidat race and immediately thereafter. Juncker pointedly stated that Turkey would not enter the Union on his watch, while in the same breath shutting the door on enlargement for five years:

“No further enlargement will take place over the next five years. As regards Turkey, the country is clearly far away from EU membership. A government that blocks twitter is certainly not ready for accession.”⁶⁴

This gives us an idea of his stance during 2014. This needs to be born in mind when considering the drastic change in the following two years. Early in 2016, he notes that Turkey is “a difficult partner” and that he has grave concerns over human rights and press freedom there but concludes

⁶⁴ Juncker, Jean-Claude. 2014. A New Start for Europe: My Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change. Strasbourg, 22 October 2014

that the migration crisis required Turkish cooperation to fix it.⁶⁵ Later that year, enlargement garners substantially more attention from the State of the Union, held months after the coup in Turkey. Therein, he includes multiple paragraphs to the topic of accession, specifically noting that Turkey's cooperation on matters of migration had "brought new impetus" to its accession process.⁶⁶ He followed this up in his closing remarks to the European Parliament. Interestingly, he takes a remarkably lenient view of the accession process, urging his colleagues to "be more patient over certain aspects" of the process.⁶⁷ He stated that he was "certain that this would be done," though he doubted that it would adhere to the timeline.⁶⁸ This is remarkable in its timing, as the coup attempt was two months old at this point, and the issues that would later dominate the dialogue already had been noted by many Europeans, even in the Commission documents.

Considering these previous statements, the 2017 State of the Union stands in stark contrast. Herein, the President of the Commission pointedly states that the Western Balkans have a "credible enlargement perspective," pointing out that the EU will be "greater than 27 in number" in years following his term.⁶⁹ This is in sharp contrast to his following statements in Turkey. Here, instead of encouraging them as he did in the previous year, he instead takes an antagonistic stance, castigating them for failing in rule of law and justice. Pointedly, he rules out Turkish accession for the "foreseeable future."⁷⁰ This becomes an entire paragraph listing the wrongs of Turkish leadership in the Commission's highest profile statement of the year. Later that year, he raises the question of whether the EU should end accession negotiations, stating that "Turkey is moving away from Europe."⁷¹ Importantly, he also puts forth the idea that Erdogan wants the EU to end negotiations so that it is the EU's fault.⁷² In 2018, his state of the Union returned to silence on the matter once again, though his silence has not been total. After the Conference between the EU and Turkey in Varna, Bulgaria, Juncker spoke of his disappointment with how things have progressed, stating that Turkey needed to improve ties with Greece and Cyprus.⁷³ More importantly, Juncker referred to the relationship as a strategic partnership, yet again.⁷⁴ This term 'strategic partnership' further reinforces the cooperation narrative, but limits any progress on accession.

⁶⁵ Juncker, Jean-Claude. 2016. 14th November Schmeizer Lecture – Lecture by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, "The European Union – a Source of Stability in a Time of Crisis."

⁶⁶ Juncker, Jean-Claude. 2016. 2016 State of the Union.

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Juncker, Jean-Claude. 2017. 2017 State of the Union.

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ Juncker, Jean-Claude. 2017. Speech by President Juncker at the EU Ambassadors' Conference.

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ Yackley, Ayla Jean. EU fails to win concessions from Turkey on rights concerns. Financial Times. Last Accessed: 03/29/2019. <https://www.ft.com/content/dbefa9e6-313d-11e8-b5bf-23cb17fd1498>

⁷⁴ Ibid

Turkish Elites

On the Turkish side, it is clear that the President of Turkey is the prime signaler with regards to Turkish public rhetoric. With this in mind, his drastic shift in tone is a key indicator, not only of EU-Turkish Relations, but of how the issue is framed in the mind of Turkish public narratives on accession.

Recep Erdogan's stances have developed along a clearly antagonistic path since 2014. In this year, his tone is hopeful, stating that he expected progress on the matter, with help from his French counterpart.⁷⁵ He regretted the fifty year wait, but his tone avoided placing blame on any source, emphasizing instead amicable relations.⁷⁶ A year later, the tone is harsher. When asked about Accession, he stated that it was an ongoing process, and that even if the EU failed to admit Turkey soon, Turkey would "determine its own path."⁷⁷ His rhetoric takes a sharp turn when he mentions a conspiracy of Islamophobia and states that the Accession process is a key method of disproving this, explicitly saying "we are testing Europe."⁷⁸ He follows this up with a key statement. He directly challenges the EU, stating that Turkey will not beg for membership, and will "determine its own path."⁷⁹ It is worth noting that this statement follows the Commission's insistence that there would be no enlargement during its tenure by less than four months.

The spike in the irregular migration through the Anatolia in 2015 led to unprecedented cooperation between in the Turkey and the EU; this rapprochement is clearly reflected in Erdogan rhetoric. Later in 2015, Erdogan emphasizes the nearness of eastern Europe to Turkey, stating that these lands are no longer far away...we have the means to be together constantly."⁸⁰ During his trip to Slovenia, he garnered further support for Turkey's accession, stating that process was blocked due to political reasons.⁸¹ Importantly, he emphasized Turkey's desire to join the Union while pointing out the unevenness of EU support for Turkey.⁸² He furthermore emphasized that his goal of a new democratic Turkey can be achieved through a faster accession process.⁸³ Meeting with Belgium later that year, Erdogan stated that accession was Turkey's "most important international priority."⁸⁴ Later that year, he emphasized in his press conference with Donald Tusk that the enlargement process is "one of the EU's most effective political tools" and that the Europe's destiny is Turkey's as well.⁸⁵

⁷⁵ Erdogan, Recep Tayyip. 2014. Turkey is the Most Adjusted Country to Acquis of the EU.

⁷⁶ Ibid

⁷⁷ Erdogan, Recep Tayyip. 2015. Turkey's Accession to the EU: "Turkey is a Strong Country Now; It Will Not Come to You Begging for Accession."

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Ibid

⁸⁰ Erdogan, Recep Tayyip. 2015. The Relations Between Turkey and Slovenia Will Grow Stronger in All Spheres

⁸¹ Erdogan, Recep Tayyip. 2015. Turkey is Key to not only Political but Also Economic Stability for the EU.

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ Erdogan, Recep Tayyip. 2015. Turkey's Progress is a Success Story That Inspires Many Countries.

⁸⁵ Erdogan, Recep Tayyip. 2015. It is Not Possible to Consider Europe's Destiny and Future Apart from Turkey.

His rhetoric takes a truly sharp turn after the 2016 coup attempt. At the International Business forum late in 2016, he states that “No matter how far you advance in economy, culture, politics and trade, you can never escape being second class in the eyes of the West.”⁸⁶ Importantly, he calls on the EU to make its “final decision,” placing the onus on the Union.⁸⁷ Three days later, after criticism of Turkey’s re-adoption of the death penalty, he responded to the EU by saying “you do not control the fate of our nation, we do.”⁸⁸ This places Turkey and him at odds with accession criteria and signals a key divergence. He went on to state that his nation would take “matters into its own hands”, claiming that the EU should keep its promises.⁸⁹ The following year, he went on to emphasize that “We have never seen ourselves outside of the EU, yet they haven’t taken us into the EU.”⁹⁰ He went on to state that the EU had different criteria for states other than Turkey and that the people would have to reassess whether its EU perspective.⁹¹ According to Erdogan, a “new period will start” after the April 16 referendum.⁹² He goes on later that month to insist that the EU’s threats to freeze accession “does not mean much to us.”⁹³ In an interview with CNN, he accused the EU of increasing accession criteria arbitrarily to keep out Turkey, insisting that the “EU has closed its doors to Turkey.”⁹⁴ Later that year, he insisted that the EU was hypocritical in its criticism of Turkey, refusing to hold themselves to the same standard.⁹⁵ He went on to insist that Turkey “stood ready” join the EU, and that it would not be the one to end the accession negotiations.⁹⁶ As in previous statements, he insisted that membership was not important to Turkey, insisting that “it will make no difference to us, we will continue on our path.”⁹⁷ In 2017, he issues a clear stance on EU-Turkish Relations, Erdogan stated:

“My dear brothers, a battle has started between the cross and the half moon. There can be no other explanation.”⁹⁸

The shift in Erdogan’s rhetoric can be seen most clearly in his Europe day speeches, a key opportunity every year for him to comment on the EU and the idea of Europe. In each version of the speech between 2016 and 2018, he insists that accession is a strategic goal for Turkey. In 2016, he does not accuse the EU of keeping Turkey out, instead saying that visa

⁸⁶ Erdogan, Recep Tayyip. 2016. Orientalism Still Dominates West’s View of the East.

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ Erdogan, Recep Tayyip. 2016. Our Nation Makes Its Own Decisions

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Erdogan, Recep Tayyip. 2017. The EU Issue Will Be Talked Over Again after April 16.

⁹¹ Ibid

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Erdogan, Recep Tayyip. 2017. The Winner of the New System is Our Nation

⁹⁴ Erdogan, Recep Tayyip. 2017. All Must Respect the National Will.

⁹⁵ Erdogan, Recep Tayyip. 2017. We Cannot Turn a Blind Eye to Efforts Aiming to Sow Seeds of Sedition Next to Our Borders.

⁹⁶ Ibid

⁹⁷ Ibid

⁹⁸ DW. 2017. Erdogan accuses EU of 'crusade' against Islam. Last Accessed: 03/29/2019.

<https://www.dw.com/en/erdogan-accuses-eu-of-crusade-against-islam/a-37979126>

liberalization could “help relieve...weariness caused by Turkey being kept waiting.”⁹⁹ This contrasts sharply with 2017, where he claims that islamophobia is “poisoning EU-Turkey relations.”¹⁰⁰ In 2018, he continues this, blaming lack of accession progress on the “ambitions of some member states.”¹⁰¹ In his May5, 2016 address, he insists that the EU must pursue an “inclusive vision,” commending Europe for stepping up its commitment to solving the “humanitarian tragedy” of migration.¹⁰² Importantly, He insists that Turkey will “continue to work with EU.”¹⁰³ In contrast with his later speeches, he makes a brief mention of Islamophobia, saying that he hoped that the EU did not become a place defined by it. Importantly, this is not an accusation, and is hopeful in its tone. In his later versions of the speech, he accuses the EU of becoming captive of racism, discrimination and islamophobia, condemning the silence of Europe’s leaders. He insists that these values are alien to the EU and should be rejected.

Observations

It is quite clear from this examination that each side is playing a classic blame game. Both sides of the argument are placing the failings of the accession process at the feet of the other. Both have claims to back up their position, but this has resulted in a hardening of sentiments, not a backing down. Juncker’s statements as President of the Commission have never been very favorable to Turkish accession, as evidenced by his statements in his Foreign Policy priorities. The only time that they perk up, taking on a brighter more encouraging tone, is when the Migration Crisis requires Turkish support in 2016. In the wake of the Joint Action Plan with Turkey, he calls on his colleagues to be patient with Turkey, interesting since his statements in 2017 are anything but patient. His narrative moves from one of conflict in 2014 and 2015 to cooperation in 2016, and swings strongly back to conflict in for the remainder of the time. Erdogan, on the other hand, continually pairs conflict narratives with cooperation. While conflict is low in the 2014, his narrative of conflict slowly increases over time, but he uses inflammatory narratives of victimization regularly. While cooperation lessens slightly, it never evaporates entirely.

⁹⁹ Erdogan, Recep Tayyip. 2016. Message by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on the Occasion of Europe Day.

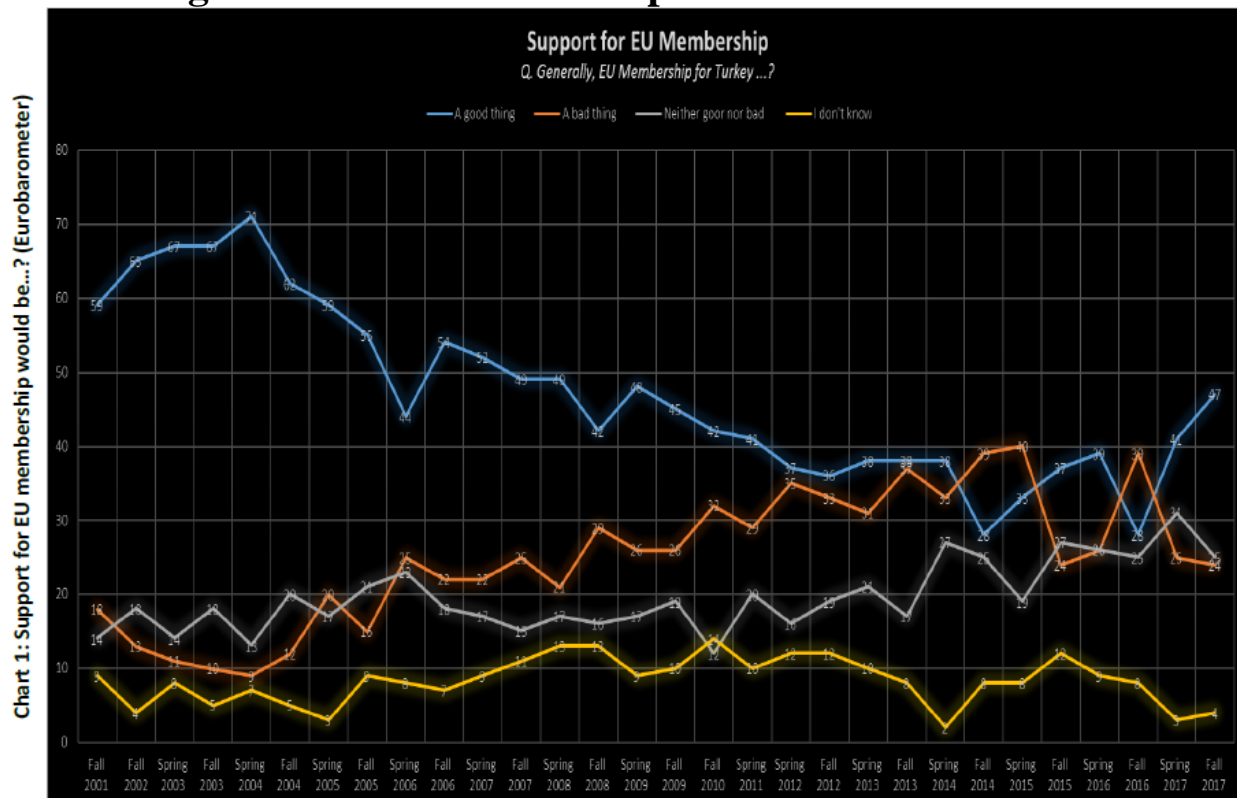
¹⁰⁰ Erdogan, Recep Tayyip. 2017. Europe Day Message by President Erdogan.

¹⁰¹ Erdogan, Recep Tayyip. 2018. Europe Day Message.

¹⁰² Erdogan, Recep Tayyip. 2016. Message by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on the Occasion of Europe Day

¹⁰³ Ibid

Correlating Narrative and Public Opinion



Senyuva, Ozgehan. 2018. Turkish Public Opinion and the EU Membership. The Future of EU-Turkey Relations.

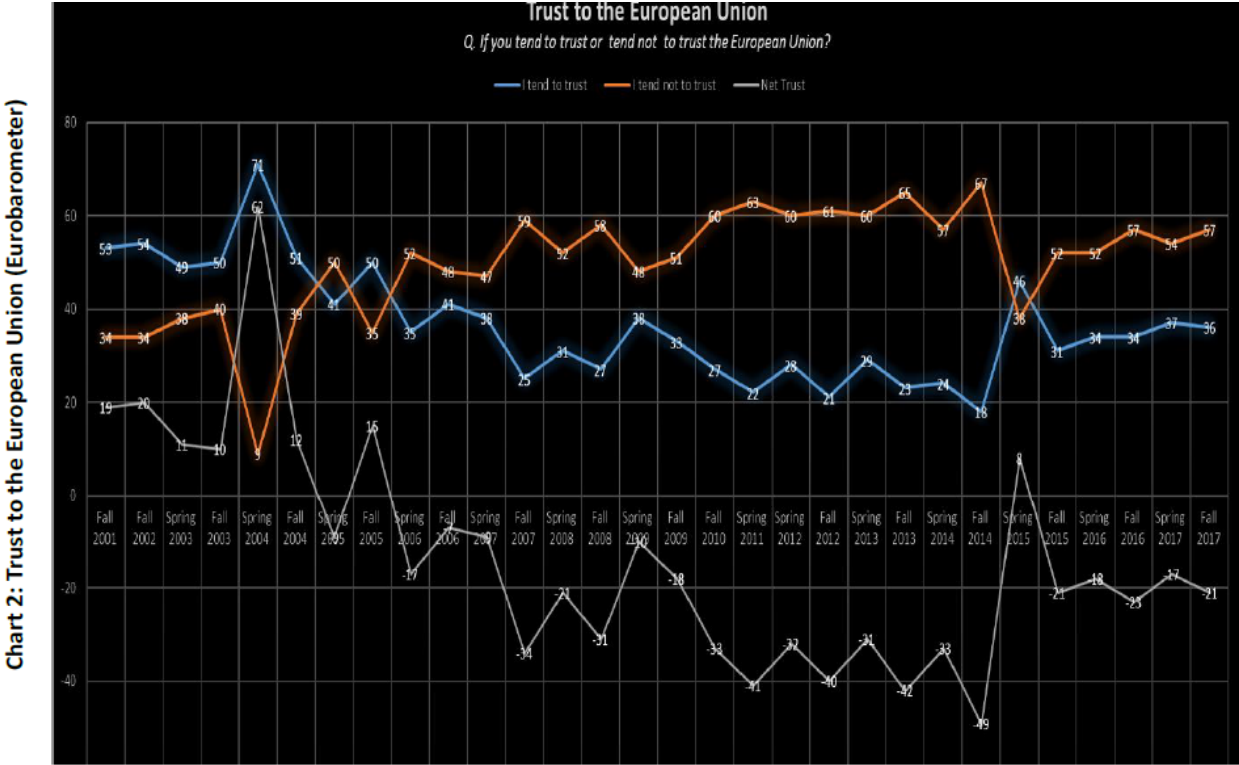
On the Accession Process

With these findings in mind, we need to place them in chronological perspective alongside changes in Turkish opinion. First, a look at Turkish opinions on accession is needed. An examination the graph above yields intriguing results. Support for EU membership clearly decreases over time, from the beginning of negotiations to present. By itself, this begs the question of whether the accession process has helped or hindered Turkey's view of the EU. Moreover, anti-membership sentiment hits all-time highs (39%) at the same time as the Commission states that accession is off the table for his tenure in Fall of 2014. Pro-Accession sentiment drops to its lowest point (28%) at exactly the same time. Considering the pro-accession narratives coming out prior to this, this change in the credibility of accession from the Commission has significant impacts.

In the following year, increased rhetoric of cooperation from both sides of the discussion result from the need to address the Migration Crisis. As a result, pro-accession views skyrocket whilst the narratives focused on cooperation, hitting 39% in the Spring of 2016. Anti-Accession sentiment drops proportionately to 24%. Narratives surrounding the coup attempt showed Commission support for the legitimacy of the Turkish response, while lauding their aid in dealing with the migration crisis. This joins with Erdogan's narrative of a pro-accession focus in early 2016, reinforcing the strong public support for accession. Interestingly, the events of the coup attempt and the narratives surrounding it saw a sharp reversal of this trend in fall of 2016.

It is at this time that we see Erdogan's narrative turn sharply anti-accession, and the blame game intensifies on both sides soon thereafter. This is also when we see the European

Parliament begin to propose freezing of the accession process. This turn of events has had a powerful impact on public sentiment. From fall of 2016 to fall of 2017, the threat of ending accession negotiations mobilized powerful pro-accession support (47%), likely amplified by the post-coup attempt crackdown. This culminates in the most recent surveys and polls out of Turkey in 2018. Now that there is yet another EP proposal to suspend accession talks entirely in favor of a strategic partnership, Turkish sentiments have become polarized. Over the period in question, there has been a continual increase in the levels of ambivalence towards accession, culminating in Spring of 2017 (31%). The crackdown and subsequent threats to remove accession entirely have resulted in a sharp decline in ambivalence, representing only 1% of the populace currently. Noticeably, the figures in favor sit at 49% while the figures against find themselves at 50%. Considering the 2017 numbers, this means that the majority of the anti-accession figures were likely drawn from the ambivalents. This runs true to the change in narrative being presented in the 2018 documents, the European Parliament reports and Erdogan’s statements.



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On Public Trust

Next, we must assess Turkish trust in the European Union and faith in Accession over the same time period. It is important to note that Turkish trust in the EU has been low ever since the Cyprus issue reared its head in 2006. Prior to this, trust in the EU predominated until accession, wherein it began to oscillate. After the freezing of accession chapters over Cyprus recognition, trust began to erode rapidly, with net trust hitting -31% in Fall of 2007. This trend continues until spring of 2009 when discussions on opening new accession chapters begins, and even then, net trust only raises to -10%. After this spike, public trust plummets to new lows, bouncing between roughly -40% and -30% between fall 2010 and spring of 2014. During this period, there is little

in the way of progress towards accession and narratives from the Barroso Commission were never strongly pro-accession, and narratives from Turkey begin to conflict with EU. It is worth noting that the lowest point of trust in the EU coincides with Juncker's statements on Turkish accession in fall of 2014, reaching a low of -49% at in the Fall of 2014. The spike in trust in the following year is remarkable, going from -49% to +10%, seemingly overnight. What can explain this? 2015 brought unprecedented dialogues between the EU and Turkey during this period. Several high-level dialogues and promises of visa liberalization, cooperation on migration and energy all permeated the narratives of both sides. The legacy of this cooperation narrative can be seen in a much higher average trust level after the 2015 spike, bouncing between -21% and -18% rather than the prior -40% and -30%. This trend has continued until the present. It bears mentioning that these findings demonstrate substantial seasonality, as spikes in net trust post 2007 nearly always occur in spring.

Conclusions

These correlations yield substantial implications. Prolonging the accession process begins to take on substantial negative consequences for Turkish perceptions of the EU, and arguably, the values it has come to represent. Over this same period, we have seen an increase in counter-conduct from Turkish elite and a precipitous drop in public trust in the EU and its accession process. This is borne out by the changing narratives present on both sides. While support for Turkish accession has never been terribly remarkable in the years following candidacy status, the tone of the narrative has shifted from one of convergence to cooperation, and of late, to outright conflict. Over the course of the Juncker Commission, the accession process has become a poisoned well from which both parties refuse to cease drinking. A focus on strategic cooperation is perhaps a safe third way out of this conflict, one that has been highlighted by both parties as time goes on. If the goal of the European Commission is alignment of Turkey with the EU acquis, then it needs to consider a new path. Turkey's progress in the economic sections of the accession process is difficult to dispute, and both sides of the process have recognized the necessity of deepening foreign policy ties. Neither of these things require accession. Perhaps more importantly, this route allows both to claim victory in the blame game they have both played, while preserving the necessary integration measures needed for the prosperity of each.

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