The EU-German-Turkish Triangle: A Conceptual Framework for Narratives, Perceptions and Discourse of a Unique Relationship

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1. Introduction

"Turkey has been moving further away from the European Union (EU)".[1] This narrative has been driving relations between the EU and Turkey for the past years. Yet, considering the complexity and interdependencies that determine these relations, such an assessment falls short of providing a full picture of this relationship. Ever since the Association (Ankara) Agreement of 1963, which aimed at establishing a Customs Union (Article 4) and referred to examining Turkey's possible accession to the Community[2] (Article 28), relations have grown deeper and become subject to multifaceted institutionalisation and formalisation.

Today, in general terms three frameworks structure the overall relationship. Firstly, the Association Agreement frames EU relations with Turkey, which is seen as a key partner in economy and trade. The Customs Union was successfully established in 1995. Secondly, in 1999 Turkey became a candidate country for accession to the EU, with accession negotiations starting in October 2005. However, this second framework of Turkey as a candidate for accession began to weaken almost from the outset, with negotiations starting to stagnate almost immediately following initiation, eventually culminating in a complete standstill with the Council's conclusions of June 2018, which consider "no further chapters […] for opening or closing".[3] Thirdly and finally, the EU engages with Turkey as a strategic

1 Council of the European Union. Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process. Council Conclusions. ELARG 41,10555/18. Brussels, 26.06.2018, p.13, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/35863/st10555-en18.pdf [20.07.2022].

2 The Accession Agreement was signed between Turkey and the European Economic Communities. The European Union was established only by the Maastricht Treaty in 1993.

3 Council of the European Union. Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process, p. 13.

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partner in multiple areas of mutual interest such as security, migration, counter-terrorism and energy. Institutionally, this third framework is structured most prominently by so-called 'High Level Dialogues'. Hence, the relationship between the EU and Turkey can be classified as 'unique' in the sense that it ranges from a rules-based integration perspective and association to purely interest-based transactional cooperation.

That being said, EU-Turkey relations have grown increasingly conflictual over the past years reaching an all-time low in 2020[4] for various reasons, ranging from the process of de-democratisation in Turkey, together with rising nationalism and populism on both sides to bilateral conflicts between Turkey and individual EU Member States such as Germany and the Netherlands in 2017 as well as Greece, Cyprus and France in the Eastern Mediterranean region during 2020. Yet, significantly such developments have not brought about a complete breakdown in relations. What we see instead is the EU considering targeted measures including sanctions against Turkey[5] and launching "a positive political agenda […] provided constructive efforts to stop illegal activities vis-à-vis Greece and Cyprus are sustained"[6] by Turkey, at the same time. Accordingly, the concept of "conflictual cooperation" best characterises the current state of EU-Turkey relations in which conflictual dynamics within certain dimensions such as politics and security are contained by demands and interests for cooperation in others such as the economy, trade, migration and energy.[7]

4 Cf. European Commission. Turkey 2021 Report. Commission Staff Working Document. SWD (2021) 290final/2. Strasbourg, 19.10.2021, p. 2, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2021-10/Turkey%202021%20report.PDF [20.07.2022].

5 Cf. Council of the European Union. Outcome of the Council Meeting. Foreign Affairs. 3720th Council meeting, 13066/19. Luxembourg, 14.10.2019, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/41182/st13066-en19.pdf [20.07.2022]; European Council. Press release. European Council conclusions on external relations, 1 October 2020. Brussels, 01.10.2020, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/10/01/european-council-conclusions-on-external-relations-1-october-2020/ [20.07.2022].

6 European Council. Conclusions. Special meeting of the European Council, 1 and 2 October 2020, EUCO 13/20. Brussels, 02.10.2020, p. 8, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/45910/021020-euco-final-conclusions.pdf [20.07.2022].

7 For a complete elaboration of this concept cf. Saatçioğlu, Beken/ Tekin, Funda (Eds). Turkey and the European Union. Key Dynamics and Future Scenarios. Turkey and European Union Studies. Vol. 3. Baden-Baden, 2021.

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Among EU Member States, relations between the EU and Turkey are more relevant to some than others[8] depending on: the size of a country's Turkish diaspora, the largest of which is in Germany; security interests in counter-terrorism, which is the case in France and Belgium; economic ties that are particularly strong with Germany and Bulgaria; as well as the degree of impact created by refugees from Syria and the middle east, most prominently the case in Greece currently, but previously crucially relevant for Germany in 2015.[9] Considering such structural factors, bilateral relations between Germany and Turkey are particularly close: Germany is Turkey's most important trading partner and source of Foreign Direct Investment, thus constituting a fundamental pillar of the Turkish economy. In 2020, bilateral trade volume amounted to EUR 36.6 million, with an estimated 7,400 German companies as well as Turkish companies with German partnerships being active in Turkey. Germany is the third largest importer of Turkish goods after Russia and China. Social and cultural ties are equally relevant with almost 3 million people of Turkish background living in Germany. Germany is thus home to the greatest share of an estimated 5.5 million people with Turkish roots living in Western European countries, followed by the Netherlands with just under 400,000 people. Those strong structural factors are one reason why Germany's Turkey policy has so far been able to exert influence over EU-Turkey relations.[10] Furthermore, motivated by the comparable size of Germany and its experienced leadership during the Merkel-era, Turkey's political elite tends to perceive the German government as a key access point to Brussels and any decisions taken there. This partial misconception was even enhanced somewhat when former German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, took "refuge in leadership" during the EU's negotiations for EU-Turkey statements on migration in November 2015 and March 2016, with Turkey's leaders apparently increasingly understanding Germany as representing the EU vis-à-vis Turkey at a political level.[11]

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8 Cf. FEUTURE EU 28 Country Reports. H2020 project. The Future of EU-Turkey Relations: Mapping Dynamics and Testing Scenarios. Cologne, March 2017, www.feuture.eu [15.06.2022].

9 For more details cf. Aydıntaşbaş, Aslı. The discreet charm of hypocrisy. An EU-Turkey power audit. European Council on Foreign Relations. March 2018.

10 Paul, Amanda/ Smith, Juliane. Turkey's relations with Germany and the EU: Breaking the vicious circle. Policy Brief. European Policy Centre. Brussels, October 2017.

11 Reiners, Wulf/ Tekin, Funda. Taking Refuge in Leadership? Facilitators and Constraints of Germany's Influence in EU Migration Policy and EU-Turkey Affairs

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The German General Election in September 2021 brought about a change in government from the 'grand coalition' of Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD), that had governed the country for eight years, to a so-called 'traffic lights coalition' of the SPD (red), the Alliance 90/The Greens (The Greens) and the Liberal Party (FDP) (yellow). This triggered a debate on what the new traffic lights shining on EU-Turkey relations would entail for the future.[12] The main question in this context is whether or not we can expect a change in Germany's Turkey policy and with this also a change in Germany's stance towards EU-Turkey relations. Considering the structural factors explained above, no fundamental change in Germany's political interests should be expected.[13] Yet, the Greens' influence can be expected to make a difference when it comes to narratives in policy-making, following their take-over of the Federal Foreign Office and the Federal Ministry of Economics and Climate as well as the head of the European Affairs Committee in the German Bundestag. They have introduced the climate issue as a cross-cutting element in the German government linking climate dossiers to the Ministries of Economics and Foreign Affairs. More importantly, the Greens' foreign policy approach is generally strongly values-based. They were the only party whose manifesto in the electoral campaign referred to the possibility of re- activating the EU's accession procedure with Turkey.[14] They formulated this prospect as a lever for motivating Turkey to return to democracy and the rule of law, as this was the condition for bringing accession back on the table.

To provide a solid assessment of EU-Turkey relations and its future prospects, this volume focuses on the triangular relationship between the block and Turkey on the one hand, coupled with bilateral relations between Germany and Turkey on the other hand. Informed by historical institutionalism, it builds on the assumption that a fundamental restruc-

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During the Refugee Crisis (2015–2016). In: *German Politics*, 2019, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 115–130.

12 Referring to the colours of the three political parties that form the new government, it is referred to as 'traffic-light coalition'; Tekin, Funda/ Toygür, Ilke. A traffic-light shining for Europe. Prospects after Germany's general elections. Berlin Perspective No. 9. Berlin, October 2021.

13 Tekin, Funda. EU-Turkey Relations and general elections in Germany – Headwinds for Turkey? In: Policy Brief Series. Berlin Bosphorus Initiative, April 2021.

14 The Alliance 90/The Greens. Deutschland. Alles ist drin. Bundestagswahlprogramm 2021. June 2021, pp. 230–231.

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turing of EU-Turkey relations requires "critical junctures"[15] that entail a 'paradigm shift'. The term 'critical juncture' refers to a significant turning point in path-dependent institutional relations,[16] whilst a 'paradigm shift' constitutes a fundamental change in the dominant narratives detailing how EU-Turkish relations are perceived and described by political actors. There is a comprehensive and substantial body of literature tracing EU-Turkey relations in institutional and policy terms.[17] Literature on narratives, though, is rather scarce. Our volume, therefore, contributes to filling this research gap by deconstructing the political discourse on EU-Turkey relations, in order to identify, analyse and assess the main perceptions and narratives not only in Germany and Turkey, but also at EU level in Brussels. We build on a contextualised definition of political discourse by considering texts and speeches of political actors, their recipients as well as the contexts to which those texts and speeches relate.[18] Consequently, we identify narratives on EU-Turkey relations by analysing (political) statements made by politicians, political institutions and stakeholders relevant for the relationship as well as public opinion in Turkey.

Narratives are understood as 'mental maps' that can provide an analytical grid for assessing the state of EU-Turkey relations. This can help structuring the analysis of the relationship that, in reality, represents a 'moving target' witnessing repeated fundamental changes in its scope and pace. This volume assembles a number of analytical contributions that within the framework of a research project on the triangle of EU/German-Turkish relations[19] aimed to answer the general questions of whether and at what point in time a paradigm shift can be identified; if so, what are the driving

15 Cf. Capoccia, Giovanni/ Kelemen, Daniel R. The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism. In: *World Politics*, 2007, Vol. 59, No. 3, pp. 341–369; Pierson, Paul. The path to European integration. In: *Comparative Political Studies*, April 1996, Vol. 29, No. 2, pp. 123–163.

16 Ibid.

17 E.g. Schröder, Mirja/ Tekin, Funda. Institutional Triangle EU-Turkey-Germany: Change and Continuity. In: Ebru Turhan (Ed.). German-Turkish Relations Revisited. The European Dimension, Domestic and Foreign Politics and Transnational Dynamics. Turkey and European Union Studies. Vol. 2. Baden-Baden, 2019, pp. 31–58.

18 Cf. van Dijk, Teun. What is Political Discourse Analysis? In: *Belgian Journal of Linguistics*, 1997, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 11–52.

19 „Blickwechsel in EU/German-Turkish Relations Beyond Conflicts – Towards a Unique Partnership for a Contemporary Turkey?" (TRIANGLE), funded by the Stiftung Mercator from 01.01.2017 to 31.12.2020.

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factors of such a shift; and do narratives of EU-Turkey relations change over time or are old patterns simply reborn or revisited. Consequently, the general research question of this volume is what impact narratives have on this relationship between the EU, Turkey and Germany including its institutional set-up.

In what follows we will briefly outline the research gap that this volume addresses and elaborate the concept of narratives together with its relevance for political science. Additionally, this chapter sets out the basic parameters that make an analysis of narratives on EU-Turkey relations relevant and conceptualises three different scenarios for future trajectories, depending on the scope of a narrative-induced paradigm shift. We conclude with an overview on how the individual chapters of this volume contribute to answering the general research question.

2. *A Narrative Approach – A New Perspective in Analysis of EU-Turkey Relations*

There is a very broad body of literature on relations between the EU and Turkey that is as rich and multifaceted as the relationship itself. This varied range of work includes: analysis of the institutional relationship including aspects of the EU's enlargement and alternative forms of differentiated integration or association; Europeanisation or de-Europeanisation in Turkey; geostrategic aspects of EU-Turkey relations in the realms of trade, migration, security and energy; as well as identity related issues.[20] Recently, the European Commission funded one of the largest research projects explicitly dealing with "The Future of EU-Turkey Relations: Map-

20 Cf. among others Adyın-Düzgit, Senem/ Kaliber, Alper. Encounters with Europe in an Era of Domestic and International Turmoil: Is Turkey a De-Europeanising Candidate Country? In: *South European Society and Politics*, 2016, Vol. 21(1), pp. 1–14; Müftüler-Baç, Meltem. Turkey's future with the European Union: an alternative model of differentiated integration. In: *Turkish Studies*, 2017, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 416–438; Nas, Çiğdem/ Özer, Yonca. Turkey and the European Union. Processes of Europeanisation. 2012, Routledge; Reiners, Wulf/ Turhan, Ebru (Eds.). EU-Turkey Relations – Theories, Institutions and Policies. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020; Saatçioğlu, Beken. The European Union's refugee crisis and rising functionalism in EU-Turkey relations. In: *Turkish Studies*, 2020, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 169–187; Schimmelfennig, Frank et.al. Enlargement and the integration capacity of the EU. Interim Scientific Results. Maximizing the Integration Capacity of the European Union, No. 1, May 2015.

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ping Dynamics and Testing Scenarios" (FEUTURE).[21] Although not as comprehensive or extensive, there is also a body of literature dealing with the bilateral relationship between Germany and Turkey. It analyses and assesses the European dimension of that relationship, the German-Turkish dialogue from the perspective of foreign and domestic politics, as well as the transnational space such as issues of election campaigning, media and education.[22]

However, regrettably there is very little literature dealing with narratives covering EU-Turkey relations outside of the main reference source which is rooted within FEUTURE's research. Hanna-Lisa Hauge, Ebru Ece Özbey, Atila Eralp and Wolfgang Wessels have compiled a comprehensive dataset on narratives from EU institutions and Turkey since the 1960s. Within a comparative approach both across time and geographical borders they have arrived at three main conclusions. Firstly, narratives are different in nature, meaning that Turkish and European narratives vary considerably. The former all share the same goal of full membership, albeit subject to changing plots and different lines of argumentation. Another work by Gözde Yılmaz, though, traces a change from EU-phoria to EU-phobia in Turkish narratives on EU-Turkey relations.[23] By contrast, EU narratives differ both in terms of their plot and the *finalité* of EU-Turkey relations. Secondly, it is clear that since the 1960s there has not only been a gradual increase in the number of narratives concerning Turkey and the EU, but the various debates have also become more divergent. Thirdly, narratives confirm that conflictual rhetoric is a recurring pattern and not new to debates on EU-Turkey relations, albeit over recent years the level of escalation on both sides has increased considerably.[24]

Narratives make up one significant factor that helps us periodise the EU-Turkey relationship. Wolfgang Wessels, for example, traces shifts in

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21 FEUTURE was funded by the European Commission under the Horizon 2020 programme and ran from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2019; its publications can be accessed here: www.feuture.eu.

22 For a concise overview cf. Turhan, Ebru (Ed.). German-Turkish Relations Revisited. The European Dimension, Domestic and Foreign Politics and Transnational Dynamics. Baden-Baden, 2019.

23 Yılmaz, Gözde. From EU-phoria to EU-phobia? Changing Turkish Narratives in EU-Turkey Relations. In: *Baltic Journal of European Studies*, June 2019, Vol. 9, No. 1.

24 Ebru Ece Özbey et.al. Narratives of a Contested Relationship: Unravelling the Debates in EU-Turkey Relations. In: Beken Saatçioğlu/ Funda Tekin (Eds.). Turkey and the European Union. Key Dynamics and Future Scenarios. Turkey and European Union Studies. Vol. 3. Baden-Baden, 2021, pp. 31–56.

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narratives since the beginning of European integration by referring to important milestones of that process, the EU's enlargement and EU-Turkey relations themselves.[25] Furthermore, narratives can shed light on the relevance of the three key institutional frames of EU-Turkey relations outlined above, namely accession, association and transactional cooperation, by identifying Turkey as an accession country, a key partner or a strategic partner for the EU respectively.[26] When negotiating the EU-Turkey statement on migration in November 2015 the then-German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, referred to Turkey as both an "accession candidate" and a "strategic partner" in the very same press conference,[27] perfectly reflecting the duality and ambiguity of a rules-based framework and the transactional character of this relationship. EU institutions in Brussels have also continued to produce various parallel narratives. The European Parliament's (EP) narrative on EU-Turkey relations is clearly linked to Turkey being an accession candidate. Its resolutions, statements and decisions, therefore, have a very strong focus on the accession criteria – particularly in regard to democracy, the rule of law and human rights issues. In 2016, the EP recommended "freezing of the accession negotiations"[28] for the first time. Thereafter, the tone has gradually hardened with the EP starting to call for the "suspension of accession negotiations" whilst emphasising that human rights and the rule of law must remain central within EU-Turkey relations. However, these issues are almost entirely absent from the European Council's conclusions. Since 2015 only two conclusions have contained references to the rule of law, with the latest mentioning this issue merely

25 Wessels, Wolfgang. Narratives Matter: In search of a partnership strategy, IPC-Mercator Policy Brief, April 2020; Suratlı, Harun/ Wessels, Wolfgang. The EU's Attitude towards Turkey – Shift of Narratives with Limited Actions? An Analysis of the Leaders' Narratives. VIADUCT Policy Paper. Issue No 5. Cologne, December 2020.

26 Wessels, Wolfgang/ Suratlı, Harun. How to understand the EU's Policy towards Turkey? A dual track strategy without effective results? An Analysis of the Leaders' Narratives. Policy Brief. Track – Teaching and Researching the European Council. Cologne, May 2021.

27 Merkel, Angela. Pressekonferenz von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel beim EU-Türkei-Gipfel am 29. November 2015. Brussels, 29.11.2015, https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Mitschrift/Pressekonferenzen/2015/11/2015-11-30-merkel-bruessel.html [30.03.2016].

28 European Parliament. EU-Turkey relations. European Parliament Resolution of 24 November 2016 on EU-Turkey relations, (2016/2993(RSP), 24.11.2016, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2016-0450_EN.pdf [20.07.2022].

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748924418-9 - am 03.12.2025, 03:29:50. https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

as a "concern".[29] The European Council's narrative is strongly driven by geostrategic considerations. On the one hand, this dual narrative-approach mirrors the relationship's multidimensionality and complexity. It also allows for a balanced approach vis-à-vis Turkey in which each institution is attributed a clear role – the EP being the values-watchdog versus the European Council and the Council being the interest-based actor open for package deals in areas of mutual interest. On the other hand, those two different approaches undermine a comprehensive and coherent strategy being adopted by the EU for framing EU-Turkey relations in the future.[30] This has contributed to postulating a new EU narrative of Turkey as the "distant and increasingly hostile neighbour".[31] Regarding the 'moving target' nature of EU-Turkey relations, Russia's invasion into Ukraine has actually changed geopolitical considerations, including those on Turkey's geostrategic relevance. Hence, without in-depth analysis it is difficult to assess whether or not this new narrative already constitutes a paradigm shift in EU-Turkey relations. By contrast, one analysis postulates that the EU is oscillating between various narratives with inclusively interlinked elements and a trend towards "a limited partnership with partial forms of cooperation […] [instead of] a master narrative for a fundamental, global and stable relationship in form of an upgraded partnership".[32]

To date, German narratives on EU-Turkey relations or German-Turkish relations respectively have been subject to very little analysis. Poststructuralist works identify different visions of Europe that are created in debates on Turkey's accession to the EU among German politicians.[33] Others have chosen an identity-related approach, analysing German discourse according to the concept of 'othering' and hence the question of whether or

29 Cf. European Council. Press release. European Council conclusions, 17–18 March 2016. 143/16. Brussels, 18.03.2016, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/european-council-conclusions/ [20.07.2022]; European Council. European Council meeting (24 and 25 June 2021) – Conclusions. EUCO 7/21. Brussels, 25.06.2021, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/50763/2425-06-21-euco-conclusions-en.pdf [20.07.2022].

30 Cf. also Toygür et.al. Turkey's foreign policy and its consequences for the EU. In-depth analysis requested by the AFET committee, European Parliament, 2022.

31 Suratlı/ Wessels, The EU's Attitude towards Turkey, 2020, p. 3.

32 Suratlı/ Wessels, How to understand the EU's Policy towards Turkey, 2021, p. 2.

33 Cf. Aydın-Düzgit, Senem. A Poststructuralist Approach to EU-Turkey Relations: Foreign Policy and Discourse Analysis in the Case of Germany. In: *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, 2011, Vol. 8, No. 29, pp. 49–70.

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not Turkey belonged to Europe.[34] For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that there is also work on the issue of 'othering' in France[35] and, vice-versa, in Turkey towards Europe.[36] Specifically in the early years of the European integration process after the end of the second world war narratives on the bilateral relationship between Germany and Turkey were more prominent than on relations between Europe and Turkey. Multilateral institutions were still in the making and therefore including narratives of German-Turkish relations in historical narrative analysis can facilitate our understanding of the matter.

We identify two main factors impacting the development of German narratives on EU-Turkey relations. Firstly, to some extent German narratives relate to milestones in EU-Turkey relations and the European integration process. The massive movements of refugees in 2015 when Angela Merkel underlined Turkey's dual character as accession country and key strategic partner is one example; another is the United Kingdom's (UK) exit of the EU, the so-called Brexit, when the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, Sigmar Gabriel, considered the new relationship between the EU and the UK as a potential blueprint for EU-Turkey relations.[37] Developments in bilateral relations between Germany and Turkey, though, might have even greater relevance. The years 2016 and 2017 mark a period in which those relations were heavily strained by diplomatic tensions over various issues: a resolution by the German Bundestag which declared that the killings of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire during 1915 should be regarded as a genocide for which the German Empire as closest ally

34 Cf. Erkem, Gul Pinar. Identity Construction of Europe by Othering: A Case Study of Turkey and the EU Relations from a Cultural Perspective. In: *Europolis. Journal of Political Analysis and Theory*, Vol. 5/2009, pp. 489–509.

35 Cf. Tekin, Beyza Ç. Representations and Othering in Discourse. The construction of Turkey in the EU context. Amsterdam, 2010.

36 Cf. Aydın-Düzgit, Senem. Foreign policy and identity change: Analysing perceptions of Europe among the Turkish public. In: *Politics*, 2018, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 19–34.

37 Gabriel, Sigmar. Der Brexit-Vertrag als Modell für die Türkei-Beziehungen. In: Die Zeit, 26.12.2017.

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must assume joint responsibility; [38] the so-called 'Böhmermann-affair'; [39] the aftermath of a failed coup-attempt in Turkey, during which German nationals were arrested in Turkey; and finally the question of Turkey's extra-territorial campaigning for the constitutional referendum in 2017. This increased the relationship's politicisation as well as brought about modification in both sides' rhetoric.

Secondly, changes in government can potentially impact German narratives on EU-Turkey relations. Traditionally, the SPD has enjoyed strong support within the Turkish diaspora. Most Turkish citizens initially came to Germany with the so-called *Gastarbeiter* programme in the 1960s and had therefore strong links with trade unions,[40] hence political affinity with the more left-leaning SPD. Links between the Turkish diaspora and the CDU/CSU are less straightforward. It was the CDU/CSU that coined the concept of "privileged partnership" for EU-Turkey relations;[41] furthermore a change from the Christian democratic and liberal democratic government to that of the SPD and Greens in 1998 is said ultimately to have contributed to granting Turkey the status of accession country in 1999 following its previous denial in 1997.[42] Currently, it is too early to tell, whether or not the new German government of SPD, Greens and FDP, that took office in December 2021, will mark yet another shift in Germany's narratives on EU-Turkey relations. The Greens place a strong focus on issues of democracy, rule of law and human rights. During her time in opposition, Annalena Baerbock, who became the Greens' *Spitzenkandidat* in Germany's 2021 general elections, took a highly critical

38 Deutscher Bundestag. Erinnerung und Gedenken an den Völkermord an den Armeniern und anderen christlichen Minderheiten in den Jahren 1915 und 1916. Antrag der Fraktionen CDU/CSU, SPD und Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, Drucksache 18/8613, 31.05.2016, https://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/18/086/1808613.pdf [16.06.2022].

39 The Guardian. The Guardian view on the Jan Böhmermann affair: no joke, 22.04.2016, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/apr/22/the-guardian-view-on-the-jan-bohmermann-affair-no-joke [16.06.2022].

40 Reichhold, Clemens et al. Migrantische Organisationen und Gewerkschaften in den 70er und 80er Jahren. Das Beispiel Frankfurt am Main. In: Hans Böckler Stiftung (Ed). Working Paper Forschungsförderung, No. 208, March 2021, p. 41.

41 Guttenberg, Karl Theodor. Preserving Europe: Offer Turkey a 'privileged partnership' instead. In: New York Times, 15.12.2004.

42 For more details, cf. Schönlau, Anke/ Schröder, Mirja. A Charged Friendship: German Narratives of EU-Turkey Relations in the Pre-accession Phase, 1959–1999. In this volume, p. 57-77.

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748924418-9 - am 03.12.2025, 03:29:50. https://www.inlibra.com/de/agb - Open Access -

stance towards Turkey and EU-Turkey relations.[43] The coalition agreement gives evidence of some continuity as well as some changes that might be less evident, albeit still noteworthy. Regarding the wording, the current coalition agreement uses almost the exact wording as the agreement of the previous coalition government by stating that "we will [therefore] not close any chapters or open any new ones in the accession negotiations".[44] It is interesting to note, though, that relations with Turkey are not part of the section dealing with the European Union Policy, but of chapter 7 "Germany's Responsibility to Europe and the World" in the section "bilateral and regional relations". The narrative communicated by the coalition agreement references Turkey as an "important neighbour of the EU and a partner in NATO".[45] Additionally, it applies a constructive approach to the relationship by aiming to "breathe life into the EU-Turkey dialogue agenda and expand exchanges with civil society and youth exchange programmes".[46] It seems as if Germany is still struggling to come up with an alternative narrative for EU-Turkey relations at times when the accession narrative is patently not an option.

In Turkey, changes in government cannot have had an impact on narratives on EU-Turkey relations since the early 2000s. Instead, during the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) long time in office it has been more relevant to analyse and assess which political actor or person made what kind of statements in front of which audience in order to identify narratives and their potential changes. Additionally, we can also view a high degree of politicisation in Turkish debates on various issues of EU-Turkey relations. One constantly repeating narrative in Turkish discourse, for example, links with the EU's Refugee Facility and Turkey's accusation that the EU is not keeping its financial promise of paying a total of EUR 6 billion. Discussing the validity of this statement would exceed the scope of this chapter, but such a narrative breeds on the country's general frustration regarding the stagnating accession procedure.

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43 Güzeldere, Ekrem Eddy. Germany's New Government Coalition: A Red, Yellow or Green Light for German-Turkish Relations? In: Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy. Eliamep Policy Paper, No. 90, December 2021.

44 Cf. CDU/ CSU / SPD. Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa. Eine neue Dynamik für Deutschland. Ein neuer Zusammenhalt für unser Land. Coalition Agreement 2018; SPD/ Alliance 90/The Greens/ FDP. Mehr Fortschritt wagen. Bündnis für Freiheit, Gerechtigkeit und Nachhaltigkeit. Coalition Agreement 2021.

45 SPD/ Alliance 90/The Greens/ FDP. Coalition Agreement 2021, pp. 154–155.

46 Ibid.

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One general challenge in EU-Turkey relations in view of EU, German and Turkish narratives is that each side claims the 'moral of the story' for itself expecting other parties to concede and acknowledge officially. This results in a blame-game of 'take-it-or-leave-it'-positions, leading to a vicious spiral of mutual accusations.

Accordingly, this volume puts at centre-stage narrative analysis for assessing EU-Turkey relations. The underlying idea is that such narratives are a "force in themselves" as they describe and analyse policy issues in a certain way.[47] In very broad terms we understand narratives as "stories people tell"[48] that mostly include a "moral of the story"[49] in terms of any normative statement on how the framework and intensity of EU-Turkey relations should be designed. Hence what we aim to understand with the collected contributions in this volume is whether or not we can observe a fundamental change of the story on EU-Turkey relations – and if so, what drives this change and which future scenario can be linked to it. Narratives can hence provide an important link between the analysis of past and current trends that inform an analytical assessment of prospects in EU-Turkey relations. To this end, "we need to identify mindsets as mental maps that use past interpretations of certain historical events as explanations for the unsatisfactory state of present-day political affairs".[50] This can provide the foundation for formulating strategies for achieving a certain future regarding any relationship.

3. Key Elements of the Narrative Analysis on EU-Turkey Relations

Narrative analysis does not feature heavily in political science. Yet, "narratives play a critical role in the construction of political behaviour insofar as they affect our perceptions of political reality".[51] They are either the object of research or the strategy of conducting research in terms of storytelling as a methodology of analysis. In this volume we focus prominently on the former with the aim of tracing collective memories and understandings

47 Roe, Emery. Narrative policy analysis: Theory and practice. Durham, 1994, p. 2.
48 Patterson, Molly/ Renwick Monroe, Kirsten. Narrative in political science. In: *Annual Review of Political Science*, 1998, Vol. 1, pp. 315–331.
49 Jones, Michael/ McBeth, Mark. A Narrative Policy Framework: Clear Enough to be Wrong? In: *The Policy Studies Journal*, 2010, Vol 38, No. 2, pp. 329–353.
50 Wessels, Narratives Matter, 2020, p. 2.
51 Patterson/ Renwick Monroe, Narratives in political science, 1998, p. 315.

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by political actors regarding the evolution of EU-Turkey relations and in doing so "interpret and understand the political realities around us".[52]

Nevertheless, as editors of this volume, we need to reflect on the fact that our analysis is also subject to a narrative strategy. Narratives can or cannot be used intentionally; they are invented or reproduced by way of human interaction. Since this book is a contribution to an academic debate, it might also contribute to narrative building. An example from the editing process is the notion of "EU-Turkey relations" employed here. Our Turkey-based contributors opted in the early drafts for "Turkey-EU relations", but changed this sequence of words so as to follow the rules that we as (German) editors had pre-defined in order to provide consistency in the use of terminology. The name mentioned first in a relationship is what usually draws our attention – hence, any name mentioned thereafter to some extent moves out of the spotlight.

3.1 Narratives in Political Science Analysis – What Do They Tell Us?

Narratives can broadly be defined as "a story constructed by a specific actor or a group of actors".[53] They provide an "insight on how different people organise, process and interpret information and how they move toward achieving their goals".[54] In this sense narratives have the potential to legitimise political actions and policy activities.[55] In fact, any narrative is a story about "events and actions [that] are drawn together into an organized whole by means of a plot".[56] Put differently, each narrative, which results from different sub-narratives, is a construct of reality consisting of two main elements: goal and plot. Whereas the goal indicates the narrative's intended objective (for example, Turkey's full membership in the EU), the plot is determined by three elements: time (when the narrative unfolds);

52 Ibid.
53 Wodak, Ruth. Discourse and European Integration. KFG Working Paper Series. Berlin: Technische Universität Berlin, May 2018.
54 Patterson, Renwick Monroe. Narrative in political science, p. 316.
55 Cf. Tekin, Funda/ Meissner, Vittoria. Political Differentiation as the End of Political Unity? A Narrative Analysis. In: *The International Spectator*, 2022, Vol. 57, No. 1, pp. 72–89; Bouza Garcia, Luis. 2017. The 'New Narrative Project' and the Politicisation of the EU. In: *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 2017, Vol. 25 No. 3, pp. 340–53.
56 Polkinghorne, Donald E. Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis. In: *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 1995, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 5–23, p. 5.

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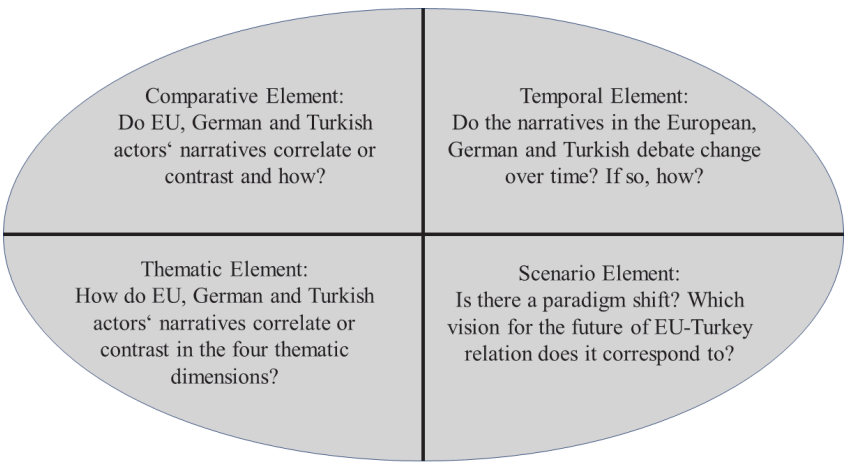
space (where actors constructing the narrative stand geographically and institutionally); and relationality (how actors constructing the narrative are regarded by their audience).[57]

3.2 Four Elements of Analysis

In relevant academic literature, different detailed definitions of narratives and their elements exist.[58] Accordingly, each contribution in this volume provides a concise definition and understanding of 'narratives' as a concept. At the same time, four general analytical elements guide those individual analyses tying them into a joint research frame (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Analytical Frame of Narrative Analysis in the Triangular Relationship Between the EU, Germany and Turkey



Source: own compilation.

57 Cf. Manners, Ian/Murray, Philomena. The End of a Noble Narrative? European Integration Narratives after the Nobel Peace Prize. In: *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2016, Vol. 54 No. 1, pp. 185–202, p. 186.

58 Cf. Özbey et.al., Narratives of a Contested Relationship, 2021; Patterson/ Renwick Monroe, Narratives in political science, 1998; Forchtner, Bernhard. Introducing 'Narrative in Critical Discourse Studies'. In: *Critical Discourse Studies*, 2021, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 304–313.

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Firstly, a comparative element produces stimulating insights and traces how narratives have varied in the EU, Germany and Turkey. Respective analysis contrasts and correlates those individual narratives.

Secondly, the analysis examines how narratives have changed over time, depending also on shifts at the national, regional or global level, such as the consequences of the end of the Cold War and of the bi-polar structure of the international system or most recently the Russian invasion into Ukraine.

Thirdly, narratives are clustered according to the dominant thematic dimensions of their respective plots, because they will vary in line with the viewpoint taken, for instance from political, security, economic or identity perspectives.

The political dimension links strongly with the so-called 'political Copenhagen Criteria' for accession, that is aspects of democracy, the rule of law and the EU's so-called "absorption capacity".[59] It relates to milestones such as: granting the status of candidate country for accession to the EU in 1999; the Gezi Park protests in 2013; the failed coup attempt in Turkey of July 2016; Turkey's 2017 constitutional referendum; and Turkey's resignation from the Istanbul Convention in 2021.

The geostrategic dimension deals with Turkey's geopolitical significance for the European continent and hence defence aspects are key. Plots that determine narratives are driven by regional and international conflicts and *détentes*. Prime examples are: the 1990s' Balkan wars that eventually impacted on Turkey's prospects of becoming a candidate country for accession to the EU; the Arab Spring that started at the end of 2010 and promoted the narrative of Turkey being a role model for the region; or tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea that put EU-Turkey relations on the verge of becoming openly hostile throughout 2020; and finally Russia's invasion of Ukraine that for some marks the return of NATO and Turkey within NATO.[60]

The economic dimension focuses on the importance of trade. While the potential for plots turning conflictual is rather high in the other three

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59 Soler i Lecha, Eduard/ Tekin, Funda/ Sökmen, Melike. It Takes Two to Tango: Political Changes in Europe and the Impact on Turkey's EU Bid. FEUTURE Online Paper No. 17. Cologne, April 2018.

60 For a discussion cf. Seufert, Günter. Erdoğan's tightrope act: In the conflict with Ukraine, Turkey is cautiously moving toward the West. Point of View, 9 March 2022, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik; Toygür, Ilke. Why is there no time for strategic ambiguity this time around on the European continent? Point of view, 2 March 2022, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik.

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dimensions, economic plots are more likely to highlight the potential for cooperation if not coherence between the two blocs. All components of EU-Turkey economic relations exhibit a high degree of cooperation and minimal conflict. Economic flows of finance as well as goods and services are not only sound but also more or less stable, giving little reason for conflictual plots in narratives on EU-Turkey relations.[61] Yet, the current downward spiral in Turkey's economy with the Turkish Lira having been the most depreciated currency across the emerging markets during December 2021 and a soaring inflation rate of around 50 percent in January 2022[62] might represent a source of tension affecting parts of the relevant constructed storylines. The modernisation of the Customs Union represents one of the key reference points for narratives relating to the economic dimension.[63]

In the societal dimension issues of identity as well as cultural and social ties come into play. Depending on the way in which identities are constructed, narratives can promote either closer or more distant relations between the EU and Turkey. The degree of "otherness" in identity representation is decisive in finding common grounds for cooperation.[64] This has not only created substantial conflict potential but also determined German debate in the early 2000s when the concept of 'privileged partnership' was coined.

Fourthly, our analysis aims to identify shifts in the constructed stories and thereby assess whether continuing and new narratives argue for or against Turkey's EU membership or point to other forms of collaboration. Accordingly, the analysis will reveal which narratives dominate political discourses; it will also highlight whether or not "counter narratives" pose any challenge to them.[65] Three ideal-type scenarios provide the framework for this analysis:

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61 Cf. Cömert, Hasan. The Financial Flows and the Future of EU-Turkey Relations. FEUTURE Online Paper No. 9. Cologne, November 2017; Mertzanis, Charilaos. Understanding the EU-Turkey Sectoral Trade Flows During 1990–2016: A Trade Gravity Approach, FEUTURE Online Paper No. 8. Cologne, November 2017.

62 The World Bank Group. Turkey Economic Monitor. Sailing Against the Tide. Washington, February 2022, p. ii-iii.

63 Cf. Saatçioğlu/ Tekin (Eds.), Turkey and the European Union, 2021.

64 Aydin-Düzgit, Senem/ Rumelili, Bahar. Contested Identities: Historicising and Deconstructing Representations in EU-Turkey Relations. In: Beken Saatçioğlu, Funda Tekin (Eds.). Turkey and the European Union. Key Dynamics and Future Scenarios. Turkey and European Union Studies. Vol. 3. Baden-Baden, 2021, pp. 57–76.

65 Roe, Emery. Narrative policy analysis: Theory and practice. Durham, 1994, p. 3.

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- the '(re-)energised accession process' builds on narratives linking geostrategic, economic, political and identity-related arguments that suggest a return to a conventional accession paradigm in the EU, Germany and Turkey alike.
- the 'Unique Partnership with privileges specific for Turkey' requires narratives linking geostrategic, economic, political and identity-related arguments that constitute a 'paradigm shift' by accepting a partnership with privileges in the EU, Germany and Turkey alike.
- the 'stagnating and increasingly conflictual relations with a difficult neighbour' relates to narratives linking geostrategic, economic, political and identity-related arguments that eventually result in giving up on the empty promise of potential accession in the distant future; the key focus will be on Turkey as an important though increasingly non-reliable and problematic neighbour.

Bearing in mind that scenarios "do not serve as descriptive but rather analytical tools, mapping out variations of oversimplified realities that can serve as terms of reference for scholarly assessment of future relations",[66] the aim of the collected contributions is not necessarily to identify one of those three scenarios as the most likely option for the future of EU-Turkey relations. Instead, the guiding assumption is that narratives will find the truth somewhere in the middle. For example, elements of conflict may have become more dominant within the identity-dimension during recent decades, whereas security considerations were more present during the Cold War period. They re-emerged in recent years with rising conflicts in the region and now form one of the prime concerns in view of the war in Europe. Scenarios help to navigate within the complex context of EU-Turkey relations, structure analysis and identify elements that steer the relationship in a more conflictual or more cooperation-prone future.

3.3 Methodological Considerations

In terms of methodology, contributions in this volume use different sets of data depending on the debate, which is the key object of analysis. Generally, all sources represent documents that are well prepared and aim to

66 Tekin, Funda. The Future of EU-Turkey Relations: Exploring the Dynamics and Relevant Scenarios. In: Beken Saatçioğlu, Funda Tekin (Eds.). Turkey and the European Union. Key Dynamics and Future Scenarios. Turkey and European Union Studies. Vol. 3. Baden-Baden, 2021, pp. 11–28.

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convey a special message. Research on narratives at EU level operationalises European Council conclusions and statements, resolutions and debates in the European Parliament as well as European Commission statements as data sources. For Germany and Turkey, this analysis focusses on government statements, press conferences and statements by high-ranking political officials, as well as debates in the German Bundestag and the Turkish Grand National Assembly. Occasionally, though, public speeches can include elements of spontaneous adjustments. Full information on whether or not this is the case may not be available, because either the written document or oral file of the delivered speech is lacking. Nevertheless, our analysis pays due heed to the potential for spontaneous adjustments which can display the speakers' feelings and assessment of the situation as they might also convey a special message. For instance, one chapter deals exclusively with narratives promoted by the Turkish Republic President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Considering many different views and perceptions in the Turkish public sphere one chapter refers to public opinion polls to identify public opinion narratives in Turkey across the four thematic dimensions. Building on Forchtner, analysis in this volume perceives narratives as a notion of discourse[67] and hence operationalises the respective methodology mostly using MaxQDA-coding software.

Our aim is to provide a comprehensive analysis and assessment of narratives in Germany, the EU and Turkey on EU-Turkey relations and hence considers data that reaches as far back as 1958. This does not mean, though, that each chapter covers the entire period spanning across more than half a century. Both the chapter on identity representations in narratives and that on German narratives of EU-Turkey relations in the pre-accession phase apply a historical approach and take the early years of the relationship into detailed and structured consideration. The chapter on EU leader's narratives similarly refers to conclusions from the European Council since its inauguration. Yet, initially the European Council paid hardly any attention to Turkey. Empirical evidence starts becoming richer only in the 1990s. All remaining chapters are concerned with an in-depth analysis of narratives since the early 2000s – in other words following Turkey's attainment of accession candidate country status in 1999. Because all chapters reflect situations up to the end of 2021, this volume will not provide a full account of the impact caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Nevertheless, the findings presented by each chapter provide

67 Forchtner, Introducing 'Narrative in Critical Discourse Studies', 2021, p. 305.

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detailed information on how to assess the effects that war in Europe might have on both narratives and EU-Turkey relations.

4. Findings and Outlook: The Moral of The Story

The contributions in this volume provide for a very good understanding of exactly what perceptions and narratives constitute political discourse within the triangular relationship between the EU, Germany and Turkey. Each chapter takes another angle to analysing and assessing the topic at hand and hence contributes an important piece that completes the jigsaw of narratives on EU-Turkey relations.

4.1 Findings

In the first chapter, *Özbey, Hauge* and *Eralp* revisit the historic roots of narratives both in the EU and Turkey, track their evolution over time. This analysis showcases the identity dimension in EU-Turkey relations. The authors stress that, since 1958, identity perceptions and descriptions have changed. This, in turn, has had different implications on both sides. Whilst mutual acknowledgement of each other's importance on the world stage is a dominant feature, narratives – after a short period of convergence on Turkey's 'Europeanness' in the 1960s and 1970s – increasingly deviate over the following decades. Since the 2000s, Turkey's dominant self-perception of strength does not find any equivalent on the EU side. The authors highlight that a common vision of relations is lacking, which increasingly leads to conflictual narrations. It is argued that a dissolution of this conflictual atmosphere would require the EU to perceive Turkey as European. Their almost reconciliatory conclusion is that narratives in EU-Turkey relations have always been subject to ups and downs and, in view of the identity dimension, they expect this trend to continue in the future.

The analysis by *Schönlau* and *Schröder* supports the previous chapter's findings and takes a closer look at Germany's role in the triangle. This analysis also applies a historical approach by covering the period from 1958 to 1999. The two authors identify the narrative of Turkey as an important geostrategic factor and ally. Furthermore, this is found to be a continuing feature of Turkish-German relations and German narration of Turkey's place in European and international alliances. Perception and narration of cultural incompatibility put a brake on Turkey's EU candida-

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cy bid in 1997, which was largely driven by German concerns. It required a different German government and a different narrative to be put in place, before Turkey was able to receive candidate status in 1999. Though the geopolitical landscape between 1997 and 1999 had not changed much with ongoing war in the Balkans, the narration of Turkey's importance as a geopolitical actor and lesser emphasis on identity-based narratives led to this institutional break-through.

Weise and *Tekin* continue where the analysis of Schönlau and Schröder left off. They investigate German narratives between 2002 and 2018 based on debates in the German *Bundestag* and elaborate on how identity-based narrations compete with geostrategic arguments. The authors discuss the extent to which the change in Germany to a conservative-led government during 2005, which coincided with the opening of Turkey's accession negotiations, impacted German interests and perceptions of Turkey as well as EU-Turkey relations. They identify the Gezi Park protests of 2013 as marking an important turning point in German narratives on EU-Turkey relations when political actors started questioning in fundamental terms whether or not Turkey would be capable of returning to the path of necessary institutional and political reforms. Generally, they observe that political narratives dominate parliamentary discourse. Looking at recent years, the two authors identify an unspoken 'twin-track strategy' among parliamentarians' positions on EU-Turkey relations. On the one hand, they seem to promote continuation of accession negotiations, because they do not want to isolate Turkey. On the other hand, they perceive as essential reconsideration of how institutionalised EU-Turkey relations should be taken forward. Narratives reflect this strategy by less references to 'EU membership' and more to 'Strategic Partnership'.

While the previous chapters examined narratives of political institutions, *Gedikli*, *Bedir* and *Şenyuva* analyse Turkish narrations of the relationship by focusing on speeches and statements by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, president of the Turkish Republic. Their analysis is driven by an assumption that key narratives in today's Turkey are shaped by the president himself, rather than a group of people or political parties. Their findings give evidence of Erdoğan's narratives being dependent on historical and conjunctural contexts, which are sometimes even contradictory. While a focus on cooperation is characteristic over the first decade of this century, here too the Gezi protests of 2013 mark a turning point, with accusations and conflict beginning to dominate. The authors find that while narratives certainly lead to a conflictual cooperation scenario, Erdoğan's simultaneous use of different narratives enables him to pursue several strategies (conflict or cooperation oriented) at the same time.

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Erdoğan's group of counterparts in Brussels, the Heads of States or Governments in the European Council – communicating only at an extreme of diplomatically agreed language – structured the narration of EU-Turkey relations over the years along the lines of Turkey being a potential member, a transactional partner and a problematic neighbour, as *Rau*, *Ersoy* and *Wessels* analyse in their chapter. They argue that narratives have become increasingly conflictual over recent years, whilst at the same time no far-reaching changes in the institutional set-up for cooperating with Turkey have been made. The authors, therefore, expect an increasingly transactional relationship, rather than a common vision for cooperation.

Finally, *Şenuyuva* and *Çengel's* chapter on public opinion in Turkey completes this analysis of political discourse covering EU-Turkey relations. Their findings seem unexpected at first sight: Germany remains one of Turkish societies' favourite cooperation countries. Furthermore, public perception of Germany's long-term former leader Angela Merkel is extremely positive. This, as the authors argue, reflects intense and good long-term relations as well as comparatively extensive knowledge of Germany. Though Germany is not spared from general Turkish scepticism towards foreign countries, analysis highlights that attitudes towards Germany are not influenced by party political preferences. The authors' conclusion is that Germany should invest more in public diplomacy to increase trust levels.

4.2 Outlook

Throughout the decades, EU-Turkey relations have resembled a roller-coaster ride. This means that there have been ups and downs with several U-turns in the relationship. Since the failed coup attempt in Turkey of July 2016 relations have been on a steep downward ride that almost led to a train crash in 2020 because of the conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea and Turkey's increasingly assertive foreign policy. Yet, we have not reached a critical juncture that would completely derail EU-Turkey relations. Since beginning of 2021 relations have neither drifted further apart nor can we witness any sort of rapprochement. Narratives can contribute to finding an explanation to this state of affairs.

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