

**T.C.**

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MASTER'S PROGRAM**

**POSITION OF TURKEY'S SIX-PARTY OPPOSITION  
BLOC ON DIFFERENTIATED EUROPEAN  
INTEGRATION: CHASING THE (IM)POSSIBLE DREAM?**

**MASTER'S THESIS**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the stance of the Nation Alliance (or Table of Six), six opposition parties in Turkey, towards the country's European integration. Instead of focusing on their level of Euroscepticism or simply evaluating if they are in favor of EU membership, this study aims to look into their positions on European integration from the angle of differentiated integration. This research rejects the EU membership-non-membership dichotomy, instead proposing the inclusion of external differentiated integration as a position on the spectrum, rather than non-membership. Specifically, it is worthwhile to investigate the reasons behind the opposition's failure to offer alternative integration models beyond the full membership pledge in its campaign in a country that has been a candidate for EU membership since 1999. Interviews with opposition parties' top foreign policymakers and analysis of party declarations and official statements provide primary data. The findings shed light on Turkey's unique candidacy process and its implications for other candidate countries.

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Purpose of Thesis

The elections in Turkey, held in May 2023, are widely regarded as a turning point for Turkish democracy and also for its relations with the European Union (EU). In the case of an election victory of the current governing party AKP, and President Erdoğan, it was anticipated that democratic backsliding in the country would continue. Yet, it remained uncertain whether or not the European Union would tolerate a candidate country that is not a democracy<sup>1</sup> at all. Rather than the continuation of cooperation, the crux of the matter was lying in the very framework of relations between the European Union and Turkey.

The position and arguments put forth by the Turkish government, particularly under the leadership of President Erdoğan and the AKP, regarding the future of EU-Turkey relations have been extensively examined in the existing literature since Erdoğan assumed power in 2003. However, insufficient attention has been given to the stance of opposition parties on this matter. (e.g. Yılmaz 2011; Gülmez 2020; Aydın-Düzgit and Şenyuva 2021) Additionally, in the wake of opposition parties winning 2019 local elections in major cities like İstanbul and Ankara, new political parties were established. The main opposition bloc, known as the Nation Alliance (Millet İttifakı, Mİ) or the ‘Table of Six’, consisting of six opposition parties – the main opposition social democratic Republican People’s Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP), the centre-right/nationalist Good Party (İYİ Parti, İYİP), the islamist Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi, SP), the centre-right Democrat Party (Demokrat Parti, DP) and two splinter parties from ruling AKP: the Democracy and Progress Party (Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi, DEVA) and the Future Party (Gelecek Partisi, GP) - has pledged to initiate constitutional reforms aimed at transitioning to a ‘strengthened parliamentary system’<sup>2</sup> reinstating the prime ministership.

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<sup>1</sup> On the debate of defining the regime in Turkey, see e.g. Esen and Gumuscu (2021)

<sup>2</sup> Gözler argues that the proposal presented by the Table of Six should be classified as a semi-presidential system, not as a strengthened parliamentary system due to its suggestion for the direct election of the president by the public rather than by the parliament (Gözler 2022).

This proposed change was seeking to foster democratic institutions and ensure the separation of powers. Notably, this objective has formed the cornerstone of the opposition's narrative during the 2023 election campaign. Yet, the opposition did not actively campaign for EU membership despite the EU's democratic standards have been frequently invoked as an exemplar.

The opposition bloc carefully avoided tying its narrative of 'democratic Turkey' with the full membership goal of the country. As literature agrees that EU membership was once a strong inspiration when it comes to democracy, for both candidate countries and the other European countries as well, it seems like it was not the case in Turkey. (Saatçioğlu 2016) Even though the Nation Alliance agreed on implementing Copenhagen criteria, the Alliance or any of six parties did not campaign for the EU membership or explore alternative integration models within the EU framework. In order to understand the concerns and challenges of campaigning about European integration for the opposition bloc and also why they avoid taking a clear stance on wowing alternative models instead of 'full membership', this thesis will focus on the elements that helped the opposition to establish their stance. Specifically, it is worthwhile to investigate the reasons behind the opposition's failure to present alternative integration models, other than full EU membership, as part of its campaign in a country that has been a candidate for membership since 1999, despite public support for greater EU integration.

*If the opposition parties do not find the full membership realistic, why did/do/will not they campaign for alternative integration models in a country that is the only candidate country that has been granted the status for 24 years, and the membership negotiations are frozen by the EU?* This research proposes to answer this question and look into the challenges in the framework of 'differentiated integration' that was created in the field of European studies in the late 1990s as an alternative to the simplistic membership/non-membership dichotomy. Turkey is a particularly good laboratory to explore external differentiated integration and also a good example for the other candidate countries whose 'membership dreams' will not come true in the foreseen future.

## 1.2. Argumentation of the Thesis

The foundations of European integration trace their origins to the post-World War II era. The European Union, as it is recognized today, emerged as a result of collaborative efforts between France and Germany aimed at achieving commonality, particularly within the coal and steel industries. This initiative was driven by the profound desire to foster lasting peace and economic cooperation in a war-ravaged continent. Presently, the European Union comprises 27 member states. In addition to these member states, there exist 8 candidate countries, including Turkey, which aspire to attain full EU membership. The uniqueness of Turkey's protracted wait for European Union membership, spanning many decades, is a distinct and multifaceted aspect of its relationship with the EU. Unlike other candidate countries, Turkey's journey toward accession has been marked by a prolonged and intricate process, defined by both progress and setbacks.

Turkey's historical ties with the European Union have endured over several decades, with the establishment of formal relations dating back to 1959 through the signing of the Ankara Agreement, which laid the foundation for a partnership. Subsequently, in 1987, Turkey formally applied for membership to the European Economic Community (EEC), which later became the European Union. This application paved the way for the establishment of a customs union as a natural consequence of the association agreement. Despite facing various challenges, the bilateral relationship continued to evolve, particularly after Turkey was granted candidate status in 1999. The commencement of membership negotiations in 2005 marked a significant milestone, although progress has been slow, with only one chapter having been closed thus far. However, the momentum of Turkey's European integration process waned in subsequent years. The negotiations, which had encountered difficulties since 2015, encountered a complete standstill in 2018 due to the *de facto* decision taken by the Council of the European Union.

By the time of the 2023 elections, discussions on EU accession were notably absent during the campaign. Curiously, despite a considerable level of public support (*see* Table 1) for European integration in Turkey, the opposition parties refrained from actively placing the EU issue on their political agendas, except for some mentions of topics such as visa liberalization and the migration issue.

**Table 1: Level of public support for European integration**

	<b>2022 Respondents</b>	<b>2021 Respondents</b>
Consider EU Membership Positive for Turkey (%)	58.6	55.9
Consider EU Membership Negative for Turkey (%)	24.2	24.9
Positive Opinion of EU in 18-24 Age Group (%)	72.8	58.6
<b>Voting in a Possible Referendum</b>		
Yes (%)	61.4	60.1
No (%)	29.6	29.7
Yes in 18-24 Age Group (%)	75.0	61.4
<b>Predicted Timeframe for Turkey's EU Accession</b>		
Within 5 years (%)	13.5	12.9
Within 10 years (%)	15.8	17.1
Not before 15 years (%)	19.7	19.2
Never (%)	43.9	39.7
<b>Perceived Personal Benefits of EU Membership</b>		
Personal Benefits (%)	55.7	56.7
No Personal Benefits (%)	37.9	36.8
Positive Opinion in 18-24 Age Group (%)	73.9	55.7
<b>Knowledge about EU Policies and Institutions</b>		
Not Knowledgeable (%)	21.1	23.7
Medium Knowledge (%)	55.8	59.7
Knowledgeable (%)	21.0	14.6
<b>Opinion about Europeans</b>		
Positive Opinion (%)	60.0	59.6
Negative Opinion (%)	35.0	33.1
Positive Opinion in 18-24 Age Group (%)	76.6	60.2
<b>Belief in Turkey's EU Membership</b>		
Definitely Become EU Member (%)	15.5	21.5
Not Ready for Membership (%)	26.7	22.9
EU has No Intention of Accepting (%)	53.0	52.1
<b>Factors Facilitating Turkey's Membership</b>		
Improving Turkish Economy (%)	49.6	58.9
Improving Human Rights (%)	40.4	47.2
Legal Reforms (%)	34.7	29.8
<b>Benefits of EU Membership for Turkey</b>		
Economic Development and Decrease in Unemployment (%)	21.9	19.4
Promoting Democracy and Widespread Participation (%)	14.6	17.3
Increased Power in the International Arena (%)	14.4	17.5
<b>Benefits of Turkey's EU Membership for the EU</b>		
Opening Turkish Market to European Companies (%)	25.2	25.1
Inclusion of Turkey's Younger Population in Europe (%)	25.0	20.4
Boosting Cultural Pluralism (%)	19.0	21.1
<b>Perception of EU Countries' Willingness</b>		
EU Countries Truly Want Turkey as a Member (%)	6.2	8.4

Majority of EU Countries Want Turkey to Join (%)	36.6	29.2
EU Countries Don't Want Turkey to Join (%)	53.8	57.8
<b>Approval of Steps for EU Accession Process</b>		
Necessary Conditions for Freedom of Thought and Expression (%)	43.3	47.0
Abolition of the Death Penalty (%)	30.4	27.9
Abolishing Laws Preventing Learning in Mother Tongue (%)	38.3	40.1
Removing Legal Obstacles to Broadcasting in Various Mother Tongues (%)	37.6	39.9
Establishing Conditions for Freedom of Religion and Conscience (%)	41.5	41.7
Resolving Problems with Greece through Mutual Compromises (%)	18.7	20.9
Creating a Solution for Problems in Cyprus through Mutual Compromises (%)	17.7	19.7

*Source* Own compilation based on Akman-Canbalek, Ünlühisarcıklı, and Taştan (2022)

The conspicuous absence of discussions surrounding European integration during the 2023 elections calls for a nuanced examination. In the context of the 2023 elections, it is reasonable to comprehend the relatively subdued prominence of Turkey's accession negotiations with the European Union from the vantage point of Erdoğan and the ruling AKP. This muted prominence can be comprehended by considering the backdrop of pronounced criticism leveled against the Erdoğan government by EU institutions, notably within the context of concerns related to democratic backsliding. European leaders have consistently underscored the pressing need for Turkey to reintroduce democratic norms and uphold the Copenhagen Criteria. Moreover, it is plausible to suggest that President Erdoğan may have been tempted to frame EU criticisms as emblematic of a broader anti-Western stance, thereby aligning such critiques with a narrative that resonates with certain segments of the Turkish populace. (Özpek and Tanriverdi Yaşar 2018) Consequently, the AKP's ability to maintain its influence and deflect criticism, even in the face of significant challenges from the EU, represents a noteworthy factor shaping the political landscape.

The issue of EU accession has been imbued with historical significance in Turkey. The pursuit of membership has spanned decades, marked by fits and starts, periods of optimism, and frustrating setbacks. This long and winding journey has engendered a degree of fatigue and skepticism among the Turkish populace, including segments of the opposition. Consequently, crafting a compelling narrative around EU accession, one that resonates with a diverse and at times ambivalent electorate, poses a formidable

communication challenge for opposition forces. Still, there remains an imperative to delve deeper into the inquiry as to why the opposition has seemingly faltered in articulating a novel perspective, particularly in the face of evident and widespread popular support for deeper integration with the European Union.

In connection with the points mentioned above, this thesis aims to explain *the perception of differentiated integration in Turkey* by focusing on opposition parties. Accordingly, the overarching question to be investigated is: **How has the opposition bloc in Turkey shaped its stance on differentiated European integration before the 2023 elections?** This research rejects the EU membership-non-membership dichotomy. Therefore, I propose the inclusion of external differentiated integration as an integration model on the spectrum, rather than non-membership.

This perspective becomes especially relevant when considering the persistent stagnation in Turkey's EU accession process. The persistent stagnation in Turkey's EU accession process juxtaposed with the resounding calls from a progressively integrated society for deeper European integration and the opposition bloc's pledge to restore democratic values, may lead one to consider whether an alternative approach to the EU-Turkey relationship would have yielded more favorable outcomes. Notably, the persistent issue of Turkey's non-recognition of the Republic of Cyprus and the enduring animosity with Greece, irrespective of changes in governmental leadership, stands out as a significant foreign policy discrepancy that possesses the inherent capacity to deadlock the negotiations for full membership.

In light of these complex challenges, the proposition of differentiated integration emerges as a prospective pathway that could have fostered a novel conceptualization of EU-Turkey relations, diverging from the traditional candidacy model and potentially facilitating smoother further integration. Differentiated integration, as an approach within the EU framework, permits member and non-member states to participate in varying degrees and forms of cooperation, based on their specific needs, capabilities, and willingness to engage in EU initiatives. By adopting differentiated integration, Turkey could have explored tailored mechanisms of collaboration, particularly in areas where full alignment

with EU norms and requirements proved contentious or politically unfeasible. This approach might have enabled the country to maintain a certain level of autonomy in areas of sensitive national interest while simultaneously benefitting from closer integration in sectors where mutual goals aligned with EU policy objectives. Moreover, in the realm of foreign policy, differentiated integration could have provided a more flexible platform for addressing longstanding disputes with neighboring EU member states. Rather than being bound by rigid conditions tied to candidacy, Turkey could have pursued diplomatic initiatives targeted at conflict resolution, seeking to establish constructive dialogue and reconciliation with the Republic of Cyprus and Greece. By employing such a differentiated approach, Turkey might have presented itself as an earnest and constructive partner, demonstrating its commitment to peaceful resolution while avoiding the impasses that often accompany the candidacy process.

Furthermore, differentiated integration could have mitigated the risk of stalled progress due to domestic political fluctuations. Given the changing political landscape in Turkey, characterized by varying governments with differing priorities and approaches, traditional candidacy negotiations might have faced disruptions each time a new government assumed power. In contrast, a differentiated integration model would have allowed Turkey to maintain steady and consistent engagement with the EU, regardless of political transitions, as the intensity and nature of cooperation would be tailored to the country's specific circumstances and commitments.

In addition to that, Turkey's experiences through the accession process provide valuable insights for other candidate countries grappling with similar challenges and uncertainties. For aspiring EU members facing considerable roadblocks to full accession, the Turkish case underscores the importance of realistic expectations and pragmatic approaches. It highlights the need to recognize that full EU membership may not be attainable within the foreseeable future for some candidate countries, and that pursuing alternative models of engagement with the EU, such as differentiated integration, could offer viable avenues for enhancing cooperation and reaping the benefits of the European project.

## Chapter 2. Research Design and Methodology

As discussed in the previous chapter, this thesis aims to explain the perception of differentiated integration in Turkey by focusing on opposition parties. The overarching question is: *How has the opposition bloc in Turkey shaped its stance on differentiated European integration before the 2023 elections?*

In order to answer the main question, this study investigates the position of Nation Alliance parties toward European integration, more specifically differentiated European integration. Although there exists, it is an extensive body of literature concerning the relationship between Turkey and the European Union, the predominant emphasis has typically revolved around Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his AKP party, which has governed the nation since 2003. Yet, just before Turkey commenced negotiations for EU accession, a proposal for a so-called privileged partnership was put forth. During the period when Turkey's accession to the EU was actively discussed, German Chancellor Angela Merkel's proposal for a privileged partnership with Turkey emerged as a focal point of debate regarding differentiated integration. (Karakaş 2007; İçener 2007; Köksal 2011; Ermağan 2012; Arslantaş 2018; Turan, Akçay, and Kanat 2019) This proposal, put forward in the early 2000s, had the potential to offer insights into the practical application of differentiated integration in the EU-Turkey relationship. However, despite its relevance and potential implications, the debate surrounding the privileged partnership proposal ultimately fell prey to politicization, resulting in its rejection by various parties involved. The proposal served as a catalyst for discussions on alternative forms of integration and cooperation, prompting stakeholders to contemplate varying degrees of engagement beyond the conventional accession model.

The available scholarly discourse on the concept of differentiated integration, albeit somewhat limited, is predominantly situated within the framework of the privileged partnership in the context of Turkey's relations with the European Union (EU). Nevertheless, within the scope of this limited examination of opposition parties in Turkey, the analytical focus has primarily revolved around ascertaining their inclination toward Euroscepticism. (Yılmaz 2011; Gülmez 2020; Aydın-Düzgit and Şenyuva 2021) Regrettably, due to the constrained scope of previous investigations, it was not feasible to

comprehensively explore the nuanced stances of these opposition parties concerning alternative models of integration with the EU, aside from full membership. This scholarly gap underscores the necessity for more comprehensive research endeavors that delve into the multifaceted dimensions of Turkey's engagement with the EU, encompassing not only the ruling AKP party but also the diverse array of opposition parties and their perspectives on integration paradigms within the EU framework. Furthermore, it is imperative to note that the Good Party, established in the year 2018, the Future Party, which emerged in 2019, and the Democracy and Progress Party, founded in 2020, have thus far remained relatively unexplored within the realm of scholarly research. These nascent political entities, while still in their formative years, represent important actors in Turkey's political landscape, and their positions, orientations, and potential roles in shaping Turkey's relationship with the European Union have yet to receive the thorough academic scrutiny they warrant. This deficiency in scholarly exploration offers an opportunity for the present study to address this lacuna and shed light on the stances of political parties vis-à-vis differentiated integration within the framework of Turkey's pursuit of EU membership.

This thesis focuses on Turkey's European integration. Therefore, the case study was chosen as a research method. Through the research, it was undertaken an examination of the main opposition bloc in Turkey, known as the Nation Alliance, comprising six parties. The Democrat Party (DP), one of the parties of the opposition alliance, remained relatively small and was often perceived as a minor player in Turkish politics. (Aktan 2023) While the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Felicity Party (SP) were two well-established parties in Turkey's political landscape, research and literature primarily focused on their general approaches toward Western and European integration. Although the examination of Euroscepticism is not directly relevant to the primary objectives of this study, it is worth acknowledging the presence of related literature that evaluates the CHP's stance in this context.

This research drew upon three distinct types of data sources to comprehensively explore parties' stances on European integration. Firstly, an extensive analysis of official documents was conducted to evaluate the positions of five political parties<sup>3</sup> on matters

related to Europe. These documents encompassed the party programs of the five parties, as well as the ‘Memorandum of Understanding on Common Policies’ of the Nation Alliance. Through this examination of official sources, a precise and reliable depiction of each party’s priorities concerning European integration could be discerned.

Secondly, in order to enrich and corroborate the findings derived from the official documents, a series of five semi-structured interviews were conducted with key political elites just after the 2023 elections. Each interviewee was engaged in neutral discussions centered around three core themes: firstly, an exploration of the historical evolution and underlying ideologies of their respective political parties; secondly, an in-depth examination of the party’s specific stance and approach towards European integration; and thirdly, an investigation into the broader perception and reception of European integration.

The present research aims to elucidate the Nation Alliance’s stance on differentiated integration and its underlying justifications by employing the classifications put forth by Holzinger and Schimmelfennig (2012) and Leuffen, Rittberger, and Schimmelfennig (2013) as analytical frameworks.

Holzinger and Schimmelfennig (2012)’s classification, which delineates differentiated integration based on its permanence or temporariness, is instrumental in understanding the MI’s position. This classification of differentiated integration in terms of permanence or temporariness constitute a valuable lens for comprehending the nuanced approaches of the MI towards integration within the EU framework. By distinguishing between permanent and temporary forms of differentiation, this analytical framework enables a nuanced understanding of how the alliance envisions its relationship with the EU and the degree of commitment it seeks to foster. Moreover, this classification allows for the identification of specific policies and measures advocated by the alliance that align with either a permanent or temporary model of differentiation.

Additionally, Leuffen, Rittberger, and Schimmelfennig (2013)’s categorization, which identifies external differentiated integration as a subgroup of horizontal differentiation, is

also utilized. This classification, which situates external differentiated integration as a subset of horizontal differentiation, provides an additional layer of analysis. Through this lens, the research can discern how the MI positions itself in relation to other member states and aspiring candidates within the EU.

The analysis proceed in two phases, commencing with an examination of each party's individual positions on differentiated integration, followed by an exploration of their collective stance as an alliance. By adopting these analytical frameworks, the study seeks to elucidate the alliance's position as pertaining to permanent or temporary models of differentiation, as well as its external differentiation vis-à-vis other EU member states and aspiring candidates. Through a comprehensive analysis of each party's individual positions and the alliance's collective stance, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics of differentiated integration within the context of the MI's pursuit of EU objectives.

## **Chapter 3. Theoretical Framework**

### **3.1. European Integration**

The foundations of European integration can be traced back to the post-war period, particularly with the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951. (Dinan 2010) The ECSC, initiated by France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, sought to pool coal and steel resources under a common authority to ensure joint management and prevent these crucial war materials from being used for military purposes. This laid the groundwork for further integration efforts.

One of the primary drivers of European integration has been economic cooperation and integration. The subsequent establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957, through the Treaty of Rome, aimed to create a common market among member states, facilitating the free movement of goods, services, capital, and labour. Over time, this evolved into the European Union's (EU) Single Market, with harmonized regulations and standards, facilitating intra-European trade and investment. As European integration

progressed, efforts were made to develop common policies and institutions in areas of shared interest, such as agriculture, environment, competition, and regional development. The Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 marked a significant milestone, transforming the EEC into the European Union and adding new pillars of cooperation, including the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Justice and Home Affairs (JHA). Furthermore, subsequent treaty changes, spanning from the Single European Act (SEA) to the Lisbon Treaty, have expanded the domains of majority voting within the Council and fortified the legislative powers vested in the European Parliament (EP). (Leuffen, Rittberger, and Schimmelfennig 2022)

Over time, several European countries joined the European Union<sup>5</sup>. The first enlargement took place in 1973, with the inclusion of Denmark, Ireland, and the United Kingdom. In 1981, Greece became the 10th member state of the EU. Spain and Portugal joined in 1986 during the second Southern enlargement. In 1995 Austria, Finland, and Sweden became members of the EU. The most significant enlargement occurred in 2004, when ten countries from Central and Eastern Europe joined, including Republic of Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Bulgaria and Romania became EU members in 2007. Croatia was the last country to join the EU in 2013, becoming the 28th member state. Additionally, the United Kingdom left the EU in 2020 as part of the Brexit process, reducing the EU to 27 member states.

**Table 2:** Turning points of European integration

1952	Treaty of Paris - ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)
1958	Treaties of Rome - EEC and Euratom	European Economic Community (EEC) and European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom)
1967	Merger Treaty	Merged the executives of the ECSC, EEC, and Euratom into a single institutional structure
1973	EC 9	Denmark, Ireland, and the United Kingdom joined the European Community
1981	EC 10	Greece joined the European Community
1986	EC 12	Spain and Portugal joined the European Communities
1987	Single European Act	Introduced the Single Market
1990	German Reunification	Following the fall of Berlin Wall, East and West Germany reunified, and the united Germany remained an EU member
1993	Maastricht Treaty	Established the European Union (EU) and added new pillars including the CFSP and JHA
1995	EU 15	Austria, Finland, and Sweden joined the EU

<sup>5</sup> Thereafter, the use of the term ‘European Union’ is used as a synonym of ‘European Community (EC)’

1999	Amsterdam Treaty	Amended the EU's governing treaties
2003	Nice Treaty	Reformed the EU's institutional structure
2004	EU 25	Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia joined the EU
2007	EU 27	Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU
2009	Lisbon Treaty	Streamlined decision-making and enhanced the role of the European Parliament
2013	EU 28	Croatia became the 28th member state of the EU
2020	EU 27	United Kingdom left the EU (Brexit)

*Source* Own compilation

The United Kingdom's decision to leave the EU, officially initiated through the triggering of Article 50 in March 2017, marked a significant turning point in the history of European integration. The Brexit referendum, held on June 23, 2016, resulted in a narrow majority of British citizens voting in favor of leaving the EU. This outcome sent shockwaves throughout Europe, provoking profound debates on the factors driving the UK's decision and the potential ramifications for both the departing nation and the EU as a whole.

Also, the Brexit process has reignited debates on the future direction of European integration, particularly regarding the level of integration desired by member states. While some advocate deeper integration and closer alignment of policies and institutions, others seek to maintain a more flexible and differentiated approach, where varying degrees of cooperation are permissible based on national priorities and capacities. The diverging perspectives on the optimal path for the EU's development have heightened interest in exploring differentiated integration as a viable model for accommodating diverse member states' interests and reconciling their varied policy preferences. Furthermore, the UK's withdrawal has brought to the fore the issue of opt-outs and opt-ins, which exemplify differentiated integration within the EU. The UK had negotiated several opt-outs from EU policies during its membership, and post-Brexit, these arrangements have prompted further considerations about the use and implications of such differentiated approaches within the EU.

In conclusion, the Brexit process has had a profound impact on the discourse surrounding differentiated integration within the EU. The departure of the UK has sparked robust debates on the future direction of European integration, prompting a re-evaluation of the EU's institutional frameworks and mechanisms for accommodating diverse member

states' interests. As the EU grapples with the complexities of Brexit and seeks to maintain unity and cohesion among its remaining members, the concept of differentiated integration has gained increased significance as a potential avenue for addressing the varying degrees of commitment and policy preferences exhibited by member states. The intensification of the differentiated integration debate underscores the relevance and timeliness of examining this concept in the context of the evolving European project.

### 3.2. Differentiated Integration

Basically, the concept of integration refers to the process of harmonizing policies and governance across Europe to foster cooperation and collaboration. Leruth (2014), in his study on the differentiated European integration of the Nordic countries, especially draws attention to two distinct classifications employed by Holzinger and Schimmelfennig (2012) and Leuffen, Rittberger, and Schimmelfennig (2013).

**Table 3:** Holzinger and Schimmelfennig’s categorisation of differentiated integration

Dimension										
1	Temporary			Permanent						
2	Territorial									Functional
3	Differentiation at nation-state level						Multi-level differentiation			
4	Only inside EU treaties				Also outside EU treaties			Only inside	Also outside EU treaties	
5	EU decision-making					Club decision-making (Intergovernmental)				
6	Only member states			Also non-members	Only members	Also non-member states		Only members	Also jurisdictions outside EU	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Models	Multiple Speed	Multiple Standards	Avantgarde Europe	Core Europe, Concentric Circles	Flexible Integration	Variable Geometry	Europe à la carte	Optimal Level of Jurisdiction	Flexible Co-operation	FOCJ
Examples	Many in secondary law	In secondary law, e.g. environmental policy	EMU, basic rights charta	EMU; EEA, associated states	Enhanced Co-operation, Bologna (at the start)	Schengen	Bologna	Competence allocation in Lisbon Treaty	EUREGIOS	No example

Source Holzinger and Schimmelfennig (2012)

Holzinger and Schimmelfennig (2012) explains differentiated integration basically by dividing it into 6 subgroups. Firstly, differentiation may appear as a permanent or temporary arrangement. Secondly, differentiation can occur, as Telle, Badulescu, and Fernandes (2023:84) explains, ‘between policy centralization (differences in the intensity of cooperation between policies) and policy extension (differences in the participation of member states in EU policies).’ Thirdly, differentiation may take place between member

states or within a member state. Fourthly, it can be realised in the context of the European Union treaties or it can be formulated outside of this, as in the Schengen example. Fifthly, a differentiated EU can either maintain EU-wide decision-making processes, which apply uniformly across all member states, or embrace a more decentralized approach through intergovernmental clubs, allowing groups of states to forge specific agreements and arrangements that might differ from the broader EU framework. Finally, it can occur within the EU or also include non-EU states.

While the former classification, mentioned in the table above (*see* Table 3), comprises six fundamental classifications, the latter by Leuffen *et al.* (2013) examines differentiated integration through the lens of vertical and horizontal differentiation. Vertical integration pertains to changes in the centralization of policy-making. It involves the shifting of decision-making authority from individual member states to EU institutions, leading to a more cohesive and unified approach in policy formulation and implementation. On the other hand, horizontal integration concerns changes in the territorial extension of policies, encompassing the enlargement of policy domains to include a greater number of member states. As such, it entails the broadening of policy scope across different geographic regions. The varying degrees of vertical and horizontal integration across different policy areas contribute to the phenomenon of ‘vertical and horizontal differentiation’, highlighting the diversity of policy arrangements and governance structures. (Leuffen, Rittberger, and Schimmelfennig 2022)

In the realm of horizontal integration within the European Union (EU), the process of enlargement assumes a paramount role. This procedure entails the inclusion of new member states, which are required to adopt the entirety of EU law, known as the *acquis communautaire*. Consequently, accession to the EU results in a simultaneous increase in horizontal integration across all EU policies in principle. (Leuffen, Rittberger, and Schimmelfennig 2022) However, it is essential to recognize that EU member states do not equally participate in all of the EU’s activities, and new member states are not compelled to immediately join all policies upon accession. (Leuffen, Rittberger, and Schimmelfennig 2022) The phenomenon of countries opting out or choosing to opt into specific policies introduces a degree of variability, where certain states may selectively

abstain from certain policies while others, including some non-member states, opt to participate. These fluid boundaries stand as a significant aspect of differentiated integration. (Leuffen, Rittberger, and Schimmelfennig 2022) Leuffen *et al.* (2013) divides horizontal differentiation into four distinct categories (Leruth 2014):

- 1) No horizontal differentiation: *refers* to the situation where EU rules apply uniformly to all member states and there is no differentiation between them in terms of the application of these rules. This means that all member states are subject to the same provisions governing a particular policy area, such as the free movement of goods and services.
- 2) External differentiation: *refers* to the situation where EU rules apply not only to member states but also to non-member states that have adopted these rules. This means that non-member states participate in EU policies and are subject to the same provisions as member states in certain policy areas. An example of external differentiation is the free movement of goods and services, where non-member states that have adopted these rules are subject to the same provisions as EU member states.
- 3) Internal differentiation: *refers* to the situation where EU rules cease to apply uniformly to all member states because individual member states decide to opt-out from participation with respect to a particular policy area. This means that some member states are exempted from certain EU policies or regulations, while others are not. An example of internal differentiation is the euro, where some member states, such as Denmark, negotiated concessions allowing them to opt-out from taking part in the single currency. An additional example of internal differentiation within the European Union (EU) is the enhanced co-operation procedure, which was introduced by the Treaty of Amsterdam. (Leruth 2014) This mechanism permits a minimum of one-third of EU member states to adopt a particular policy within the EU framework, while respecting the sovereignty of other states that may not be willing to participate in that specific co-operation endeavor.

- 4) Internal and external differentiation: *refers* to a scenario arises where certain EU member states, referred to as ‘insiders’, choose to ‘opt out’ from specific policies, while ‘outsiders’ comprising non-EU member states, elect to ‘opt in’ by voluntarily subjecting themselves to EU rules. A prominent illustration of this differentiated integration is the Schengen border regime. Over time, numerous EU member states have become part of the Schengen zone. However, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Ireland and Romania remain exempted from its provisions. Conversely, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland, despite not being EU members, actively participate in the Schengen zone.

In sum, this thesis will draw upon two seminal works by Holzinger and Schimmelfennig (2012) and Leuffen, Rittberger, and Schimmelfennig (2013), which serve as crucial analytical frameworks. By delving into the dimensions of permanence, temporariness, and external differentiation, the study aims to provide nuanced insights into how the alliance envisions its relationship with the EU and the policies it advocates to further its integration objectives. Through this comprehensive analysis, the research contributes to the broader scholarly discourse on differentiated integration and its implications for the European project.

### **3.3. Conceptualization of EU-Turkey Relations**

#### **3.3.1. Relations between Turkey and the European Union**

EU-Turkey relations have traversed a convoluted historical path, underscored by intricate geopolitical and socio-economic dynamics. Turkey’s unique geographic location has historically placed it at the crossroads of the East and West, rendering it a strategic player in global affairs. Early aspirations for integration with the Western world came to fruition with the signing of the Ankara Agreement in 1963, forging an association between Turkey and the European Economic Community (EEC), a predecessor of the EU. This landmark agreement set the groundwork for fostering economic cooperation and the gradual creation of a customs union. The Customs Union between the EU and Turkey was

subsequently established on December 31, 1995, as a result of the Ankara Agreement. Its primary objective was to facilitate trade in goods between Turkey and the EU member states by eliminating customs duties and quantitative restrictions on most goods traded between them.

The European Council meeting of 1999 marked a pivotal moment in EU-Turkey relations as Turkey was granted the status of a candidate country. This recognition was not only a nod to Turkey's commitment to democratic reforms but also aimed to consolidate stability in the region. Accordingly, this delayed advancement accelerated in 2001 when the outgoing three-party coalition, led by Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit of the Democratic Left Party (DSP), successfully implemented extensive reforms. (Avci and Çarkoğlu 2013) Yet, the attainment of candidate status heralded Turkey's potential future EU membership, although it also exposed contentious issues such as human rights, political reforms, and concerns over religious and cultural differences.

The formal commencement of accession negotiations on October 3, 2005, further cemented the intentions of both parties to deepen their engagement. Structured around various policy chapters, these negotiations aimed to align Turkey's legal and institutional framework with EU standards. While some chapters witnessed progress, others encountered substantial obstacles, hampering the overall pace of negotiations. Fundamental issues surrounding human rights, freedom of expression, minority rights, and the long-standing Cyprus dispute posed significant challenges, fueling skepticism and reservations among certain EU member states.

Despite persistent efforts, the EU-Turkey relationship has faced numerous setbacks, leading to suspensions of the accession process. The lack of progress on contentious issues, coupled with domestic political developments within Turkey, added to the complexity of the negotiations. Public opinion within some EU member states remained divided, with concerns over the implications of Turkey's full membership on the EU's cultural and religious landscape. The accession negotiations eventually reached an impasse with the Council conclusions of June 2018. The Council's conclusions explicitly indicated that no further chapters would be opened or closed, signaling a significant

setback in the negotiations. Additionally, the modernization of the EU-Turkey Customs Union was no longer under consideration, reflecting the depth of the impasse. The situation warranted a reevaluation of the future prospects for engagement between the EU and Turkey, presenting significant challenges for the way forward.

### **3.3.2. Turkey's External Differentiated Integration**

As explained above, external differentiation refers to the situation where non-member states participate in an integrated EU policy. This means that EU rules apply not only to member states but also to non-member states that have adopted these rules.

Although Turkey has not been admitted as an EU member state due to its unwillingness to meet the EU's political conditions for membership and negotiations are frozen, Turkey maintains a significant level of integration with the EU. (Müftüler-Baç 2021) The Turkish integration with the European Union (EU) is substantial, evident from its adherence to EU regulations through the Customs Union Agreement and its alignment with various EU legislation encompassing areas such as research, education, environment, and energy. (Müftüler-Baç 2021) While a considerable portion of Turkey's alignment with EU policies can be attributed to its accession process, it extends beyond this specific context, as Turkey has established a well-defined and institutionalized rapport with the EU over time, even in the absence of immediate accession prospects. (Müftüler-Baç 2021)

Turkey's integration with the European Union (EU) encompasses various areas and tools. The basis of this alignment lies, as mentioned above, in Turkey's 1963 Association Agreement, its Customs Union Agreement signed in 1995, and its candidacy since 1999. This alignment is further reinforced by Turkey's participation in EU agencies, which is considered a crucial aspect of external differentiated integration. (Kaeding and Milenković 2023)

Turkey has achieved integration with the European Union (EU) in various domains through a series of agreements and participations. Turkey has signed agreements to participate in several EU programs, including Horizon 2020, Erasmus+, and Creative

Europe. Furthermore, Turkey's observer status in the EU Energy Community and the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity (ENTSO-E) further solidifies its association with the EU's initiatives. (Müftüler-Baç 2021) In addition to the Customs Union and the alignment with multiple EU legislation areas such as research, education, environment, and energy, the foundation of this integration also lies in EU agencies. (Müftüler-Baç 2021) Through bilateral and ad hoc working arrangements between EU agencies and Turkey, country's involvement extends to 18 EU agencies. (Kaeding and Milenković 2021) Furthermore, Turhan and Yıldız argue that Turkey's cooperation with the EU in the field of migration governance should be also classified as external differentiation. (2022)

In summation, the dynamics shaping EU-Turkey relations are characterized by two primary factors. Firstly, Turkey's progress in fulfilling the necessary accession criteria has been marked by hesitancy and reluctance, resulting in impediments to advancing the accession negotiations. Secondly, the inclusion of Turkey within the existing framework of the European Union has remained a subject of uncertainty. 'Turkey fatigue' has been caused by member states and societies questioning whether Turkey could actually ever belong in the EU for cultural, economic, geostrategic, and political reasons. (Tekin 2021) As a result, with combination of factors, as well as specific concerns about Turkey's place require thinking Turkey 'out(side) of the accession box (Turhan 2019)'.

## **Chapter 4. The Turkish Party System and European Integration**

### **4.1. Introduction**

#### **4.1.1. Political System in Turkey**

In 2017, a significant milestone in the Turkish political landscape occurred through a referendum, wherein 51.41% of voters supported a constitutional amendment proposal. These amendments brought forth a fundamental transformation of the government system

in Turkey, transitioning from a parliamentary system to a presidential system. Under this new system, the prime ministership was abolished, executive power resided solely with the president, and presidential candidates were required to secure a majority of 50%+1 of the total votes. This constitutional change consequently opened avenues for political parties to engage in electoral cooperation.

Subsequent to the constitutional amendment, legal revisions were implemented to facilitate party participation in parliamentary elections through alliances. According to these, if the total votes of the parties forming an alliance surpassed the 10% electoral threshold, all constituent parties within the alliance were considered to have met the threshold. Furthermore, a significant regulation was introduced concerning the allocation of parliamentary seats. In each electoral constituency, votes would be initially apportioned between alliances and individual parties outside of alliances, and subsequently among parties within alliances. Consequently, the allocation of parliamentary seats within a constituency was contingent upon the collective votes obtained by the parties within the alliance. This particular regulation served to heighten the significance of minor parties within the dynamic of Turkish political life.

In 2022, an amendment was enacted to lower the electoral threshold to 7%. However, the allocation of parliamentary seats within a constituency was made independent of party alliances. This amendment aimed to prevent the opposition from forming a multi-party alliance model and gaining an advantage in terms of the number of seats in the parliament. Consequently, in the 2023 elections, although the six-party Millet Alliance fielded a unified presidential candidate, DEVA, GP, SP, and DP candidates ran on the CHP's list whereas the İYİP participated with its own separate list<sup>6</sup>.

In the context of Turkey's presidential system and the distinct political decisions made by various parties, it can be argued that differentiating between the ruling parties and the

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<sup>6</sup> In a total of 16 provinces, both the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Good Party (İYİP) refrained from competing against each other and made strategic decisions to support one another's candidates. Furthermore, in certain provinces, İYİP candidates contested the elections from the CHP's list instead of fielding their own separate lists.

opposition parties is a challenging task. During the 2023 elections, several parties formed the People's Alliance, including the AKP, the ultra-nationalist MHP, the ultra-islamist, ultra-nationalist Great Unity Party (Büyük Birlik Partisi, BBP), and the ultra-islamist New Welfare Party (Yeniden Refah Partisi, YRP). These parties competed individually with their own lists in the parliamentary elections. However, candidates from the center-left party DSP and the ultra-islamist, pro-Kurdish HÜDAPAR ran on AKP lists. Despite this collaboration during the parliamentary work, none of the parties supporting President Erdoğan were included in the presidential cabinet after the elections. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this thesis, these parties will not be considered opposition parties or included in the analysis. Also, as they were not part of the Nation Alliance, the far-left and pro-Kurdish Labour and Freedom Alliance and the ultra-nationalist Ancestral Alliance, are not within the scope of this thesis.

Accordingly, the following section will now study the formation process of Nation Alliance (Mİ), also both the alliance's and five parties' positions on European integration.

#### **4.1.2. Formation of the Opposition Bloc**

As mentioned above, the 2017 Turkish referendum marked a significant milestone in Turkish politics, as it brought forth a crucial decision regarding constitutional amendments that aimed at fundamentally altering the structure and functioning of the Turkish political system. The proposed amendments sought to transition the country from a parliamentary system to an executive presidency, thereby diminishing the authority of the parliament and the judiciary. This shift involved abolishing the office of the prime minister and consolidating executive powers, including the authority to appoint and dismiss ministers, issue decrees with the force of law, and dissolve the parliament. Consequently, the president would assume greater control over the executive branch, enabling them to exert a more decisive influence on policymaking and implementation.

The proposed constitutional amendments evoked diverse reactions and generated contentious debates among political actors and civil society groups. Proponents argued that the changes would lead to a more efficient and stable governance system, enabling

faster decision-making and effective implementation of policies. They contended that a strong executive presidency would enhance political stability and provide a more decisive leadership in tackling the challenges facing the country. However, opponents expressed concerns about the concentration of power in the hands of the president, undermining democratic checks and balances. They argued that the proposed amendments would erode the separation of powers, diminish the role of the parliament, and undermine judicial independence. Scholars also highlighted the potential risks of authoritarianism and the lack of adequate mechanisms for accountability and oversight.

The campaign leading up to the referendum witnessed the mobilization of various political parties and groups, both in support and opposition to the proposed amendments. (Esen and Gümüşçü 2017) President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) led a forceful campaign advocating for a 'Yes' vote. On the other side, the 'No' camp consisted of a broad coalition of political parties, including the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) and the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP), alongside diverse ideological groups. Furthermore, within the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), the party leadership's decision to support the amendments faced criticism, leading to the emergence of a vocal opposition movement known as the 'Turkish Nationalists Say No Campaign'. (Esen and Gümüşçü 2017) The opposition movement within the MHP, fueled by dissatisfaction with Bahçeli's leadership and the constitutional amendments, laid the groundwork for the subsequent establishment of the Good Party (İYİP). In October 2017, the Good Party was officially founded, with Meral Akşener assuming its leadership. Many dissatisfied MHP members joined the newly formed party.

In the aftermath of the constitutional amendment, several modifications were introduced to the electoral legislation. These changes encompassed the removal of the electoral threshold for parties participating in an alliance, provided that their total vote share exceeded 10%. Furthermore, adjustments were implemented to favor parties participating in alliance formations for the calculation of parliamentary seats. Consequently, these changes prompted the social democrat CHP and the right-wing, nationalist Good Party to collaborate under the banner of an alliance. Additionally, the Islamist Felicity Party (SP)

and the Democrat Party (DP) joined the alliance which was later named Nation Alliance (Millet İttifakı, Mİ).

The CHP and the İYİP continued their collaborative efforts by abstaining from fielding candidates in select cities during the 2019 local elections. Subsequently, in anticipation of the upcoming 2023 elections, former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu established the Future Party (GP), while former Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan founded the Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA Party). In addition to these four parties, with the participation of the leaders of the SP and the DP, six leaders started a series of talks.<sup>7</sup> Although the parties were initially reluctant to form an electoral alliance, their promises to change the constitution and return to a parliamentary system opened the door to a new alliance. With the agreement reached only a few months before the elections, the parties decided to run together as the Nation Alliance.

## **4.2. Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP)**

The Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) holds a significant position as Turkey's oldest political party. Founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923, subsequent to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, the CHP emerged as a central pillar of Kemalism, a political ideology that sought to shape the country's trajectory based on secularism, nationalism, statism, and reformism. This has not remained stagnant, but instead, it has continuously faced challenges and undergone reformulations brought about by various generations. (Yavuz and Öztürk 2023)

Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, assumed the role of chairman in CHP in 2010 and later emerged as the joint candidate of the Nation Alliance in the 2023 elections. Under his leadership, the party underwent a significant transformation, marked by a discernible shift in its ideological orientation. Previously recognized for its nationalist, centre-left, and secular positioning, the party gradually gravitated towards the political center during Kılıçdaroğlu's tenure. Yet, the party aligns itself more closely with social democratic

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<sup>7</sup> Later, the cooperation came to be known as the Table of Six, in reference to the meetings of the six-party leaders.

ideologies and adopts populist leftist discourses in terms of economic policy. Also, CHP is affiliated with the Socialist, Democrats and Greens Group in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

In the early 2000s, CHP held a generally supportive stance towards Turkey's membership in the EU despite Eurosceptic tendencies. In 2005, CHP maintained a supportive stance on Turkey's European Union membership and welcomed the commencement of accession negotiations. The party viewed EU membership as an opportunity to enhance Turkey's integration into the European community and promote political and economic cooperation with EU member states.

The early stages of Turkey's European Union (EU) accession process necessitated significant efforts to harmonize Turkish legislation and institutions with the EU *acquis communautaire*. This task entailed a comprehensive and extensive agenda that demanded substantial reforms in various areas. In 2003, following the assumption of power by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, CHP demonstrated a degree of cooperation with the ruling party, despite their divergent worldviews. This period of cooperation between the CHP and AKP on constitutional changes reflected a pragmatic approach driven by the mutual understanding that EU membership necessitated substantial transformations in the country's political and legal systems.

Despite the support given on constitutional issues, the party had also Eurosceptic tendencies. Gülmez offers two distinct approaches to explain this. (2020) The first approach delves into the historical and ideological foundations of Euroscepticism within the CHP, tracing its roots to a broader scepticism towards Europe and the West. (Gülmez 2020) This perspective highlights the influence of the 'Sèvres Syndrome' which references the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920, perceived as an attempt by European powers to dismantle the newly established Turkish Republic. (Gülmez 2020) This historical context, coupled with a more general suspicion towards Western powers, shaped the CHP's cautious attitude towards EU integration. Whereas the second approach emphasizes the strategic utilization of Euroscepticism by the CHP as a means to undermine the

government and discredit its policies in the eyes of the public. (Gülmez 2020) According to this perspective, the CHP strategically employed Eurosceptic rhetoric and arguments to challenge the ruling party's pro-EU stance, exploiting popular sentiments and scepticism regarding EU membership. (Yılmaz 2011) (Gülmez 2020) By positioning themselves as defenders of national sovereignty and interests, the CHP sought to appeal to a broader segment of the electorate. (Gülmez 2020)

As mentioned above, under the leadership of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, CHP experienced significant ideological changes that resulted in a shift towards the political center. However, Kılıçdaroğlu's impact extended beyond the party's ideological positioning, also influencing the party's stance on European integration and reducing its Eurosceptic voice. This transformation became particularly pronounced in areas concerning human rights and, more prominently, democracy. (Aydın-Düzgüt and Şenyuva 2021) Kılıçdaroğlu prioritized these issues within the party's agenda, recognizing the importance of upholding democratic principles and aligning with international standards, including those advocated by the European Union. As a result, the CHP exhibited a more positive and open attitude towards European integration, embracing the significance of democratic values and institutions as fundamental prerequisites for EU membership.

The CHP holds a steadfast position in favor of Turkey's membership in the EU as it is stated in its party program. The party views Turkey's aspiration for full EU membership as a social transformation project that aligns with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's modernization revolution and vision. Also, the party firmly advocates for full membership on equal terms, respecting the foundational values of the Turkish Republic. Consequently, the party categorically rejects alternative options or special statuses for Turkey that deviate from the norms applied to other EU member states. As mentioned in the party program<sup>8</sup>:

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<sup>8</sup> Author's translation: AB ile ilişkilerimizde koşulumuz; eşit koşullu, Cumhuriyetimizin kuruluş değerlerine saygılı, onurlu tam üyeliktir. CHP bunun dışındaki hiçbir seçeneği kabul etmez. CHP Türkiye'ye diğer üyelere farklı, özel bir statü verilmesini kabul etmez. Eşit haklara sahip olacak bir Türkiye'nin AB üyeliği için diğer bütün üyelerin kabul edip uyguladıkları koşullara, bu arada Kopenhag ve Maastricht kriterlerine uyulmasını, AB hukukunun benimsenmesini kabul eder. Ancak, başka ülkelere istenmeyen koşulların tek taraflı tavizler gibi Türkiye'ye dayatılmasına karşı çıkar. Bu arada, Serbest dolaşım, tarım destekleri, bölgesel kalkınma alanlarında AB tarafından getirilmiş olan kalıcı kısıtlamaların kaldırılmasını ister. AB'nin üçüncü ülkelerle yaptığı serbest ticaret anlaşmalarının, eş zamanlı olarak Türkiye ile söz konusu üçüncü ülkeler arasında da paralel anlaşmaya dönüşmesini hedef alır. Bazı AB ülkelerinin coğrafi veya kültürel farklılıklar gibi nedenlerle Türkiye'yi tam üyelikten dışlamayı ve

In pursuing EU membership, the CHP acknowledges and accepts the conditions and criteria that are standard for all EU member states, including the Copenhagen and Maastricht criteria, as well as the adoption of EU law. It also aims to transform the existing free trade agreements between the EU and third countries into parallel agreements between Turkey and these respective countries. If certain EU countries' policies, which seek to exclude Turkey from full membership and grant it a special status based on geographical or cultural differences, become the official stance of the EU, the CHP asserts that existing commitments, notably the Customs Union, will be reviewed. In such situation, decisive steps would be taken in alignment with Turkey's national interests. The CHP firmly rejects the linkage of Turkey's EU membership to the Cyprus issue and opposes any unilateral concessions demanded from Turkey for the continuation and finalization of the membership process. Furthermore, the party opposes arbitrary conditions that are inconsistent with the Treaty of Lausanne. It advocates for necessary reactions and measures against countries seeking to hinder Turkey's membership.

Simultaneously, the CHP supports expediting and completing a reform process in line with EU legislation and practices observed in other countries. This approach is seen as serving Turkey's interests. The party also advocates for the EU to establish a target date for Turkey's full membership, emphasizing the importance of setting a clear timeline in the accession process.

The CHP holds a moderately diluted Eurosceptic stance while firmly rejecting alternative models of integration. An interviewee<sup>9</sup> explicitly asserted their refusal to engage in

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Türkiye'ye özel bir statü vermeyi öngören politikalarının AB'nin resmi görüşü haline dönüştürülmesi halinde, başta Gümrük Birliği olmak üzere, mevcut taahhütlerimiz gözden geçirilerek, ülkemizin çıkarlarının gerektirdiği adımlar kararlılıkla atılacaktır. Türkiye'nin AB üyeliğinin Kıbrıs konusu ile ilişkilendirilmesini ve üyelik sürecinin sürdürülmesinin ve sonuçlandırılmasının Türkiye'nin vereceği tek taraflı tavizlere bağlanmasını kabul etmez. Aynı şekilde Lozan Antlaşmasıyla bağdaşmayan keyfi koşulların Türkiye'ye kabul ettirilmek istenmesine de karşı çıkar. Türkiye'nin üyeliğine engel olmak isteyen ülkelere karşı gerekli tepkilerin gösterilmesini ve önlemlerin alınmasını savunur. Buna karşılık, Türkiye'nin de çıkarlarına hizmet edecek, AB mevzuatına ve diğer ülkelerin uygulamalarına uygun bir reform sürecinin hızlandırılarak sonuçlandırılmasını destekler. AB'nin Türkiye'nin tam üyeliği için bir hedef tarih vermesi gereğini savunur.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with senior advisor to the party chair.

negotiations for an integration model under separate policy categories that deviates from the path of membership. It is noteworthy that the CHP views a permanent external differentiated integration as an ‘inadequate form of membership’. However, the CHP acknowledges the possibility of pursuing further integration while membership negotiations are in progress, emphasizing that such efforts should not be seen as a substitute for attaining full membership status.

### **4.3. Good Party (İYİ Parti, İYİP)**

The Good Party emerged in 2017, under the leadership of Meral Akşener, positioning itself as a nationalist and Kemalist political party. The founding of the İYİP stemmed from the political landscape marked by significant strategic shifts within the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) which formed a power bloc with the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), endorsing an empowered presidential system. The decision to establish a new party arose following the MHP’s support for a ‘Yes’ vote in the controversial 2017 constitutional referendum, along with a failed attempt to remove the party’s incumbent leader Devlet Bahçeli.

Despite its initial nationalist narrative, the party has gradually shifted toward the center of politics over time. This shift can be attributed to a recalibration of the party’s policy positions, aiming for a more inclusive and moderate approach. Furthermore, compared to other right-wing parties in the political arena, the İYİP exhibits a secular character. This characteristic distinguishes the party from some of its conservative counterparts and further contributes to its positioning as a centrist-liberal force within the right-wing spectrum.

It is worth noting that the İYİP is a member of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. This association with ALDE indicates a degree of ideological affinity with liberal values. However, in assessing the İYİP in relation to its European counterparts, the task of categorizing it as a straightforward liberal party encounters certain complexities. The party’s ideological positioning does not neatly align with the conventional liberal party

framework. Despite this not neatly aligned with the conventional liberal party framework, comprehending the party's overall political orientation requires considering the distinctive dynamics and specific policy stances that shape the İYİP's trajectory within the intricate landscape of Turkish politics.

While the party supports the continuation of European integration for Turkey and advocates for positive relations with the EU, it also highlights the need for constructive criticism. The İYİP acknowledges certain attitudes implemented by the EU in the past process, noting that the de facto freeze of the full membership process and negotiations are not solely due to Turkey's inability to meet all the membership requirements. It attributes this freeze to EU policy towards Turkey, which it suggests has been influenced by rising racist sentiment across the EU in recent years. İYİP's party program, developed during its establishment in 2017, presents an interesting contrast to the statements later made by party leaders regarding Turkey's relationship with the EU. While the program suggests the need to explore discussions on Turkey-EU relations beyond full membership, it does not propose a specific alternative approach. As mentioned in the party program:

We believe that Turkey-EU relations are as important for the European Union as they are for Turkey. The current full membership process does not serve mutual interests. Turkey-EU relations based on a healthy relationship are important not only for both parties but also for the Middle East, Caucasus, Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean. In this framework, Good Party will ensure the establishment of the right relationship ground that will represent the mutual interests of the parties in relations with the EU.<sup>10</sup>

Distinguishing itself from other parties in the Nation Alliance, the İYİP released an election manifesto, in addition to the 'Memorandum of Understanding on Common

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<sup>10</sup> Author's translation: "Türkiye-Avrupa Birliği ilişkilerinin Türkiye için olduğu kadar Avrupa Birliği için de önemli olduğunu düşünmekteyiz. Mevcut tam üyelik süreci karşılıklı çıkarlara hizmet etmemektedir. Sağlıklı bir ilişki zeminine oturmuş Türkiye-AB ilişkileri sadece iki taraf açısından değil, Ortadoğu, Kafkasya, Balkanlar ve Doğu Akdeniz için de önem taşımaktadır. Bu çerçevede, İYİ Parti, AB ile ilişkilerde tarafların karşılıklı çıkarlarını temsil edecek doğru ilişki zemininin oluşturulmasını sağlayacaktır." For the party's program, see <https://iyiparti.org.tr/storage/img/doc/iyi-parti-guncel-parti-program.pdf>

Policies' they jointly published prior to the 2023 elections. In contrast to the contentions presented in the party's program, the manifesto of the İYİP<sup>11</sup> aligns with the rhetoric of its leadership by emphasizing the pursuit of full membership in the European Union. Moreover, the party acknowledges its intention to diligently pursue the completion of the full membership process in a manner that upholds principles of dialogue, justice, and equality maintaining its critique of the European Union's unjust treatment of Turkey. İYİP's manifesto explicitly references the attainment of EU norms across distinct policy areas on multiple occasions. Furthermore, consistent with the principles outlined in the 'Memorandum of Understanding on Common Policies', the party pledges to actively advance the process of updating the customs union and facilitating visa liberalization.

As noted earlier, Turkey's accession to the Customs Union represents a policy area that prominently showcases external differentiated integration. The İYİP's stance on the modernization of the Customs Union, along with its commitment to implementing various EU norms within Turkey, reflects a positive inclination towards deeper integration. Furthermore, the party recognizes that achieving visa liberalization for Turkish citizens traveling to Schengen countries necessitates additional alignment with EU laws and regulations.

The İYİP demonstrates a nuanced stance towards differentiated integration, expressing support for further integration solely within the framework of the EU accession process. While acknowledging the formidable obstacles associated with achieving full membership in the European Union, the İYİP maintains a firm opposition to engaging in discussions centered around an alternative model of integration that could serve as a substitute for the comprehensive membership negotiations. In essence, similar to the CHP, the İYİP maintains a fundamental opposition to the concept of external differentiated integration as a permanent model. It emphasizes the significance of preserving the integrity and coherence of the EU accession process, asserting that genuine membership should be the ultimate goal rather than settling for an alternative form of integration. An interviewee justified their position as such:

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<sup>11</sup> Author's translation: "Avrupa Birliđi'ne tam üyelik hedefimizdir. Tam üyelik sürecinin diyalog, adalet ve eşitlik çerçevesinde tamamlanması için çalışacağız."

For the party's program, see <https://turkiyetarih yazacak.com/home>

We acknowledge the difficulties and complexity inherent in the process of attaining full membership in the European Union. However, we do not consider full membership as entirely unattainable. I would like to highlight that the recognition of the Greek Cypriot Administration<sup>12</sup>, which posed a hurdle in the accession negotiations, was not an insurmountable obstacle, as it was able to join as a member while maintaining EU-Turkey Customs Union. The İYİP views the European Union as a project of social modernization and emphasizes the importance of implementing EU norms in Turkey. Thus, the pursuit of an alternative model of integration to membership would present significant challenges to our country's modernization endeavors.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the party program, which was formulated in 2017 and initially indicated skepticism towards negotiations for full membership, it is evident from both the party's election manifesto and the interview conducted that the party is wholeheartedly dedicated to the objective of achieving full membership. Unsurprisingly, the party's deputy leader Naci Cinisli responsible for foreign policy expressed their strong opposition via a tweet<sup>14</sup>, firmly rejecting the notion proposed in the draft report of the European Parliament that suggests exploring alternative models of engagement with Turkey instead of pursuing membership.

#### **4.4. Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi, SP)**

The Felicity Party (SP), the successor party of former prime minister Necmettin Erbakan's National Outlook movement which aims to promote Islam and national economy, occupies a significant position as an Islamist political party within the Turkish political landscape. Established in 2001, it primarily garners support from conservative Muslims within the country. The party's inception occurred on July 20th, 2001, following the ban of the Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi, FP) by the Constitutional Court. While the

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<sup>12</sup> The interviewee refers to the Republic of Cyprus which is not recognized as a sovereign state by Turkey.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with a member of İYİP's Central Executive Committee.

<sup>14</sup> See <https://twitter.com/NaciCinisli/status/1681318090804695042>

reformist faction of the Virtue Party went on to establish the Justice and Development Party (AKP), the more hardline members formed the Felicity Party. Over the years, the Felicity Party has experienced a decline in its voter base, attributed in part to the rise of the AKP.

The SP can be described as anti-European, anti-American, anti-Western, and anti-modernity, also it has consistently criticized the Turkish government's aspirations to join the European Union, as well as its relationships with Israel and the United States. It argues that Turkey must adapt its military and foreign policy approaches to counter what it perceives as growing threats emanating from the West toward Muslim nations as a whole. Under the leadership of Temel Karamollaoğlu, the Felicity Party underwent a notable transformation, characterized by a shift away from its previous islamist orientation.

Despite the emergence of a new party leadership with a more moderate tone, the SP's party program steadfastly adheres to an anti-Western stance. The program articulates a perception of the European Union as an imperialistic endeavor, incompatible with the embracement of pluralism. Furthermore, the SP contends that Turkey's accession to the EU would inevitably lead to the fragmentation of the nation-state. As mentioned in the program<sup>15</sup>:

Especially the unacceptable attitudes and behaviours of the EU towards our country, our nation and our values, together with the full membership process, have revealed that the mentality of the EU is not sufficiently developed in terms

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<sup>15</sup> Author's translation: "Özellikle AB'nin, tam üyelik süreciyle birlikte, son yıllarda, ülkemize, milletimize ve milletimizin sahip olduğu değerlere karşı sergilemekte olduğu kabul edilemez tutum ve davranışlar, AB'yi oluşturan zihniyetin insan hakları, inanç özgürlüğü, inanca saygı, çoğulculuk ve farklı medeniyet mensupları ile birlikte yaşama konularında yeterince gelişmiş bir düzeyde olmadığını ortaya koymuştur. Batılı ülkelerin hâlâ eski emperyalist ve sömürgeci alışkanlıklarından kurtulamadıkları ortadadır. [...] Çünkü bu doğrultuda AB üyeliği [...], Türkiye'nin bağımsızlığından vazgeçmesi ve ırkçı emperyalizmin plân ve hedeflerinin gerçekleşmesi için adım adım parçalanıp yok olmaya götürülmesi manasını taşımaktadır. Bu gerçekler dolayısıyla ki, AB'ye tam üyelik yerine, eşit koşullarda karşılıklı ikili ilişkiler içinde olmayı daha doğru buluyoruz. Türkiye'nin AB ile ilişkilerinin, tüm uluslararası ilişkilerde olduğu gibi, barış, diyalog, adalet ve eşitlik çerçevesinde yürütülmesinden yanayız. Zira Türkiye'nin âdil bir düzene sahip, yeni bir barış dünyasının kurulmasında öncülük yapmasının engellenmesi, sadece Türkiye için değil, aynı zamanda AB ve bütün insanlık için, telafisi mümkün olmayan bir kayıp demektir." For the party's program, see <https://saadet.org.tr/tr/program-detay/5ed7a06d44b02/avrupa-birligi>

of human rights, freedom of belief, respect for belief, pluralism and living together with members of different civilisations. It is obvious that Western countries still cannot get rid of their old imperialist and colonialist habits. [...] Because becoming a member of the EU [...] means that Turkey will give up its independence and will be taken to destruction step by step in order to realise the plans and goals of racist imperialism. We find it more correct to have bilateral relations with the EU on equal terms instead of full membership because of these facts. We are in favour of conducting Turkey's relations with the EU within the framework of peace, dialogue, justice, and equality.

Notwithstanding the stridently anti-Western rhetoric within its party program, SP does not fundamentally reject the concept of European integration. Rather, it proposes an alternative model of integration for Turkey in lieu of pursuing EU membership. The party asserts its pioneering advocacy for the 'privileged partnership' model, previously endorsed by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and emphasizes the need for EU-Turkey relations to be developed within this framework.<sup>16</sup> The interviewee emphasized that the primary concern lies in the EU's current structure, which is perceived as intrusive and imposing on Turkey, leading to significant unease. Furthermore, the interviewee acknowledged that the SP may not categorically reject membership if the structure of the European Union were different from its current state. To illustrate this point, the interviewee mentioned the possibility of the SP supporting EU membership if a differentiation model similar to the one in place when the UK joined the EU was available.

#### **4.5. Democracy and Progress Party (Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi, DEVA)**

DEVA was founded in 2020, by Ali Babacan, a former prominent member of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). Party members, consistently assert their position as representing the central ground of the linear political spectrum, highlighting their status as a mainstream political movement. Moreover, the party puts forward policy proposals

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with an MP who is also member of SP's Central Executive Committee.

with a liberal inclination to address political, legal, and economic challenges. (Saf 2020) Although the term ‘liberal’ does not explicitly appear in the party’s program or in Ali Babacan’s discourse, the party’s economic understanding closely aligns with classical liberalism. However, there exist divergent perspectives regarding the identity of the DEVA. Some contend that the party, operating under the guise of liberalism, maintains an Islamist nature, pointing to party chairman Babacan’s tenure as a minister in various AKP governments between 2002 and 2015, as well as the involvement of former AKP politicians within the party. (Kalkan 2021)

While Babacan’s departure from the AKP was motivated by a variety of factors, his dissatisfaction with the AKP’s handling of EU relations and their failure to make substantial progress towards membership was also one of the contributing factors to his decision to form DEVA. He had been an advocate for Turkey’s EU membership during his tenure as Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and also Chief Negotiator for the EU actively working on economic reforms and alignment with EU standards to support the accession process. During his term, Turkey successfully initiated accession negotiations with the European Union in 2005. According to Babacan, ‘the accession negotiations were an opportunity for Turkey to transform’. (Babacan 2004)

Similar to Babacan’s stance during his tenure as a minister, DEVA’s party program<sup>17</sup> prominently emphasizes the importance of European integration. According to the program, Turkey’s membership in the European Union is regarded as a historically significant goal that holds substantial significance for both the nation and the broader region. DEVA also recognizes Turkey’s EU membership as an indispensable long-term objective, with an expressed desire to avoid any impediments in the integration process during accession negotiations. It also strongly against a permanent external differentiated integration.<sup>18</sup> In the short term, the party pledges to enhance the Customs Union by

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<sup>17</sup> Author’s translation: “Avrupa Birliđi’ne üyeliđimizin tarihi öneme sahip bir hedef olduđunu, bu hedefin gerçekleştirilmesinin gerek ölkemiz gerek içinde bulunduđumuz cođrafya açısından büyük önem taşıdıđını düşünüyöruz. Bu nedenle Türkiye’nin AB üyeliđi bizim için vazgeçilmez orta ve uzun vadeli bir hedef olmaya devam edecektir. Daha kısa vadede ise Türkiye ile AB arasında tam üyelik sürecinin tamamlayıcısı niteliđinde, Gümrük Birliđi’nin kapsamının genişletilerek modernleştirilmesini, göç politikaları, yenilikçilik, terör ile mücadele ve savunma ve güvenlik alanında işbirliđini sağlayacađız.” See <https://devapartisi.org/temel-metinler/parti-programi>

<sup>18</sup> Interview with a senior advisor to the party chair.

broadening its scope, fostering cooperation on migration policies, innovation, counter-terrorism, defense, and security. Within the Turkish political landscape, DEVA can be identified as the party that exhibits the highest degree of alignment with European integration, particularly in terms of its rhetorical positioning.

#### **4.6. Future Party (Gelecek Partisi, GP)**

The Future Party (GP) was officially founded in 2019 by Ahmet Davutoğlu, who had previously served as a foreign minister and prime minister within the AKP, in response to disagreements with Erdoğan's policies and the direction of the AKP government. GP's ideology is characterized by a conservative approach, building upon the principles and values associated with the AKP's earlier years. GP aims to uphold democratic standards aligned with those of the European Union (EU). However, given the significant criticism faced by Davutoğlu's previous government regarding human rights violations, there arises a need for a critical examination of the party's discourse on democracy.

Prior to his involvement in GP, Davutoğlu had an extensive political career that shaped his reputation and influence in Turkish politics. He served as the 26th Prime Minister of Turkey. Ahmet Davutoğlu's tenure as Prime Minister was preceded by his notable role as the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2009 to 2014, during which he wielded considerable influence in Turkey's external engagements and diplomacy. Prior to assuming this high-profile position, Davutoğlu served as the chief advisor to then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan from 2003 to 2009. Throughout his time as Foreign Minister, Davutoğlu pursued a multidimensional foreign policy agenda, characterized by what some critics labeled as 'neo-Ottomanism' or pan-Islamist foreign policy ideals. These critics pointed to Turkey's increased engagement with countries in the Middle East, as well as its efforts to strengthen ties with other predominantly Muslim nations. Some argued that such policies could potentially divert Turkey from its traditionally Western-oriented foreign policy stance. Despite the Pan-Islamist accusations, Davutoğlu also expressed his continued support for Turkey's ambition to become a full member of the European Union (EU). This stance reflects Turkey's longstanding aspiration to deepen its ties with Europe and gain full integration into the EU's economic, political, and social frameworks.

However, Turkey's EU accession process has encountered numerous challenges and obstacles, leading to protracted negotiations and limited progress in recent years.

Davutođlu consistently maintained a position supporting Turkey's full membership in the EU throughout his political career. On numerous occasions, he articulated his stance that the ultimate goal for Turkey was to become a full member of the EU. Also, during his tenure as Prime Minister, the EU-Turkey migration deal was successfully implemented in 2016. This agreement marked a significant development in the relationship between Turkey and the European Union (EU) in terms of addressing the migration crisis.

Despite being a conservative party, the GP maintains a steadfast commitment to achieving full membership in the European Union (EU). The party's program<sup>19</sup> acknowledges the political challenges currently faced by the EU, but firmly asserts that full membership to the EU serves as a guiding roadmap that outlines the fundamental objectives of Turkey's foreign policy. According to the GP, the success of Turkey's multidimensional foreign policy hinges upon the accomplishment of these core objectives. The party also contends that adherence to EU democratic standards serves as an anchor for Turkey's own democratic practices. Additionally, the GP emphasizes the inevitable need for Turkey-EU

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<sup>19</sup> Author's translation: "Avrupa Birliđi (AB)'nin siyasal bir trblans ierisinden getiđi dnemde Trkiye'nin AB yeliđini stratejik bir hedef olarak koruması gerektiđini dşnyoruz. Avrupa Birliđi'ne tam yelik hedefi, Trkiye iin dıř politikada temel hedefleri tayin eden bir yol haritası grevi stlenmiřtir. Trkiye'nin dıř politikasında gerekleřtirmesi gereken ok boyutluluđun bařarısı da, bu temel hedeflerin bařarısına bađlı olacaktır. Bu bađlamda; Avrupa Birliđi ile iliřkileri tam yelik hedefinden uzaklařmadan, ancak Trkiye'nin temel dıř politika parametrelerini de nceleyen anlayıřla yrteceđiz. Gerek Avrupa lkeleri ile ikili iliřkiler gerekse de AB ile kurumsal iliřkiler birbirini tamamlayan bir btnlk iinde yeniden yapılandırılmalıdır. AB demokratik standartlarının lkemiz demokrasisi iin bir ıpa olduđuna inanan partimiz bu standartların AB den bađımsız olarak korunması gerektiđine inanmaktadır. Ykselen poplizm, ařırılıklar ve terrizmle mcadelede AB ile ortaklıkların glendirilmesinin blgesel istikrar iin gerekli olduđunu ngryoruz. zellikle Irak'ın iřgalinden bu yana blgemizde yeni bir ivme kazanan kuralsız g sorununu ynetmek iin tarafların iř birliđi kaınılmazdır. Avrupa Birliđi aynı zamanda Trkiye'nin en nemli dıř ticari ortađı olmaya devam etmektedir. AB, lkemizin en nemli ihracat pazarıdır ve Trkiye'nin enerji dıř ithalatında birinci sırada yer almaktadır. Trkiye'nin, zellikle AB'nin nc lkelerle yaptıđı serbest ticaret anlařmalarından zararının azaltılması aısından, Gmrk Birliđi'nin kapsamının gncellenmesi ve AB'nin Trkiye ekonomisindeki nemini daha da artırması iin yeni bir aılım sađlayacađız. AB katılım mzakerelerimiz, bugne deđin iniřli ıkıřlı bir sre yařamıřtır. Partimiz; bu srecin safahatında yařanan sorunlar ve kaynaklarının farkındadır. Partimiz; AB gndeminin i siyaset malzemesi olmaması iin elinden gelen gayreti sergileyecektir. Mzakerelerin 'aılan fasıllar' tartıřmasından ıkarılarak, Trkiye ile AB arasında yeni bir dnemi bařlatacak gl bir giriřime dnřtrlmesi gerektiđini ngryoruz."

See <https://gelecekkpartisi.org.tr/partimiz/program>

cooperation in effectively managing the issue of unregulated migration, while recognizing the EU as Turkey's foremost foreign trade partner. To mitigate potential losses arising from the EU's free trade agreements with third countries, the GP pledges to revise the scope of the Customs Union and create new avenues to enhance the EU's significance in the Turkish economy. Moreover, the GP emphasizes its commitment to ensuring that the EU agenda is not exploited for domestic political purposes, while advocating for transforming the negotiations into a robust initiative that heralds a new era of relations between Turkey and the EU.

The GP, as a matter of principle, does not oppose the notion of external differentiated integration; however, it vehemently rejects it as a long-term substitute for membership.<sup>20</sup> Consistent with the party program, the GP contends that the modernization of the customs union, in particular, can serve as a notable exemplar in this regard. Despite Turkey's prolonged candidacy for EU membership and the limited progress achieved thus far, there is a prevailing belief that Turkey's failure to attain full membership would result in permanent exclusion, particularly in light of the strained relations with Greece and the Republic of Cyprus.

#### **4.7. Conclusions**

The preceding section of this chapter has provided an extensive examination of the distinct viewpoints held by the five parties of the Nation Alliance regarding the concept of differentiated integration. Each party's individual positions discerned through meticulous analysis, have offered valuable insights into the nuances and variations that exist within the Alliance, reflecting the diverse political landscape of Turkish opposition politics. Finally, through this subchapter, I will delve into both their common election declaration and compare it with their individual party positions.

The Nation Alliance comprised six political parties (CHP, İYİP, SP, DEVA, GP and DP) that have joined forces to pursue a common agenda. Accordingly, they manifested a

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with a member of GP's Central Executive Committee.

comprehensive 244-page joint document named ‘Memorandum of Understanding on Common Policies’ (MUCP) in which the opposition bloc’s goals and policies were explained in early 2023. In fact, this was not the first document published by the six parties. Prior to MUCP, they released document<sup>21</sup> outlining their commitment to a form of governance referred to as a strengthened parliamentary system approximately a year ago. They provided a thorough roadmap in that document. Within this framework, the partnership they declared was described as a collaboration aimed at reinstating democracy. Ultimately, the agreement reached on the crucial and foundational matter opened doors for their consensus on numerous other subjects one year later.

The Nation Alliance’s primary and overarching goal, as clearly articulated in their memorandum, is to secure full membership in the European Union.<sup>22</sup> Notably, their emphasis on dialogue, justice, and equality reflects a conscious acknowledgment of the EU’s expectations regarding democratic principles, human rights, and the rule of law. Also, it addresses several other EU-related issues, offering insights into the Alliance’s broader policy positions.

One of the key areas highlighted in the memorandum is visa liberalization for EU countries. The Alliance expresses a commitment to prioritize and finalize this process, emphasizing its importance in promoting people-to-people contacts between Turkey and EU member states. The memorandum also underscores the Alliance’s dedication to environmental sustainability by pledging to adapt to the Green Deal target. This aligns with the EU’s ambitious climate goals and signifies the Alliance’s intention to adopt green policies to address environmental challenges. However, the document lacks specific policy proposals or implementation strategies in this regard. In terms of economic relations, the memorandum acknowledges existing disagreements between Turkey and the EU regarding the modernization of the Customs Union. The Alliance commits to resolving these disagreements, suggesting a desire to strengthen economic ties with the EU. However, the document does not offer specifics on how these issues will be addressed

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<sup>21</sup> See <https://milletitfaki.biz/guclendirilmis-parlamenter-sistem>

<sup>22</sup> See <https://milletitfaki.biz/temel-politikalar-ortak-calisma-grubu/calismalar-raporlar>

or what concessions might be made. Lastly, the memorandum addresses the refugee crisis, emphasizing shared responsibility and burden-sharing with the EU. It mentions a review of the 2014 Readmission Agreement and the 18 March 2016 Agreement, suggesting a willingness to collaborate with the EU on managing the refugee issue. In conclusion, the Nation Alliance's Memorandum of Understanding on Common Policies presents a comprehensive vision for its EU-related policy positions. While it prominently focuses on EU membership aspirations, it also touches upon visa liberalization, environmental commitments, economic relations, and the refugee crisis. However, the document lacks detailed plans and strategies for implementation, leaving room for further scrutiny and assessment of the feasibility and impact of these policy goals.

Examining the text through the lens of differentiated integration, one can discern a noteworthy point in the form of the Turkey-EU Customs Union agreement, which has garnered consensus among all stakeholders involved. Even though the Customs Union agreement was originally conceived with the anticipation that Turkey's eventual EU membership would become a reality in the foreseeable future, it is interesting that these parties have expressed a preference for handling and deliberating upon this particular issue as a separate and standalone component instead of embedding it within the broader spectrum of EU membership negotiations. Considering their strong objections to discussing any form of integration that might be seen as an alternative to full membership, apart from Islamic Felicity Party which is in favour of non-membership of the country, the Nation Alliance parties have chosen to take a distinctive approach.

Consequently, the MUCP generally aligns with the positions of the parties. As mentioned earlier, the Felicity Party leans toward integration models other than full membership, which is not explicitly addressed in the text. While the other parties maintain a firm stance on differentiated integration and are hesitant to discuss alternatives to full membership, the absence of a specific emphasis on this matter in the text allows for some flexibility in interpretation. Şar questions 'whether the six opposition parties can pursue a joint foreign policy'. (2023) However, interviewees confirmed that 'negotiations on foreign policy chapter only took 3 hours as there was not really a disagreement'. This swift resolution of the foreign policy chapter negotiations highlights the relative consensus among the

opposition parties on European integration, suggesting that it may not be a topic that elicits significant disagreements among them.

## **Chapter 4. Concluding remarks**

In this research, the primary objective was to explicate the Nation Alliance's stance on differentiated integration within the context of EU-Turkey relations. To achieve this aim, I employed two analytical frameworks proposed by Holzinger and Schimmelfennig (2012) and Leuffen, Rittberger, and Schimmelfennig (2013).

Holzinger and Schimmelfennig's (2012) classification, which differentiates integration based on its permanence or temporariness, served as a valuable lens to understand the nuanced approaches of the Nation Alliance (MI) towards EU integration. By distinguishing between permanent and temporary forms of differentiation, this framework allowed me to gain insights into the alliance's vision for its relationship with the EU and the level of commitment it seeks to establish. Moreover, this classification facilitated the identification of specific policies advocated by the alliance, aligning with either a permanent or temporary model of differentiation.

Furthermore, Leuffen, Rittberger, and Schimmelfennig's (2013) categorization, which positions external differentiated integration as a subset of horizontal differentiation, added an additional layer of analysis. Through this lens, I could discern how the MI positions itself in the framework of being a non-member state. This classification provided crucial insights into the dynamics of external differentiated integration and the MI's interactions within the EU framework.

This analysis proceeded in two phases. Initially, I examined each party's individual positions on differentiated integration, followed by an exploration of their collective stance as an alliance. By adopting the aforementioned analytical frameworks, this research successfully illuminated the alliance's position concerning permanent or temporary models of differentiation and its approach to external differentiation within the EU landscape.

The CHP, for instance, firmly champions Turkey's EU membership as a crucial social transformation project aligned with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's modernization vision. (Erdem 2008; Akçay 2018) They steadfastly reject alternative options or special statuses for Turkey within the EU, emphasizing the pursuit of full membership on equal terms. In contrast, the İYİP supports European integration but calls for constructive criticism of EU policies, particularly in light of perceived freezes in the full membership process influenced by rising racism within the EU. Their election manifesto aligns with a pursuit of full EU membership.

DEVA takes a proactive stance in favor of Turkey's EU membership, viewing it as historically significant and indispensable. They pledge to enhance the Customs Union and foster cooperation in various policy areas while firmly opposing permanent external differentiated integration. The GP, despite its conservative stance, emphasizes the importance of full EU membership as a guiding roadmap for Turkey's foreign policy and democratic practices. Surprisingly, even the Felicity Party, known for its anti-Western rhetoric, does not fundamentally reject European integration. They propose an alternative model of integration, a 'privileged partnership,' and express concerns about the EU's current structure.

I found that CHP, İYİP, DEVA, and GP are receptive to differentiated integration, but only under non-permanent circumstances that do not hinder their ongoing membership process. They expressed openness to further integration during the accession negotiations, as exemplified by their acceptance of the Customs Union update. However, these parties are steadfast in their opposition to exploring alternative integration models that could lead to the termination of full membership negotiations. On the other hand, the SP's position deviates from the other parties, advocating for permanent external differentiation. The SP's proposal of the privileged partnership echoes this preference. Additionally, the SP is open to negotiating a membership model where Turkey refrains from developing certain policies within the EU, particularly in the context of foreign policy, exemplifying internal differentiation. This unique position of the SP within the alliance stems from its distinct policies compared to the other parties.

Through this comprehensive analysis of each party's individual positions and the alliance's collective stance, I have provided valuable insights into the complex dynamics of differentiated integration within the Nation Alliance's pursuit of EU objectives.

Turkey's unique candidacy process also has implications for the EU's approach to enlargement in general. (Baldwin and Widgrén 2005) The EU has been grappling with questions related to its enlargement process and the extent to which it can accommodate countries with varying degrees of alignment and integration. (Bourguignon, Demertzis, and Sprenger 2022; Emerson and Blockmans 2022; Lippert 2022; Sapir 2022; Anghel and Džankić 2023) Turkey's experience can serve as a case study for other candidate countries, demonstrating that there are different paths to cooperation with the EU beyond traditional membership. This includes recognizing the need for flexibility and adaptability in designing integration models that can accommodate the specific circumstances and preferences of candidate countries.

In reflecting on the research undertaken, it is essential to acknowledge several noteworthy limitations. Despite conducting interviews, it was not possible to interview all key politicians responsible for shaping foreign policy positions. This limitation means that some perspectives may not be fully represented in the analysis. Additionally, the research predominantly focuses on the parties' official stances on European integration, often through the lens of their party programs and interviews. However, it is essential to note that political parties' practical actions and behaviors in the realm of foreign policy can vary from their stated positions. Furthermore, even though parties may find consensus on certain aspects of European integration, one may question the extent to which foreign policy issues occupy a significant portion of their overall political agendas. The allocation of party resources, time, and attention to foreign policy matters could be a subject for further examination, as parties often have multifaceted agendas encompassing various domestic and international issues.

Another noteworthy limitation worth acknowledging is the significant influence that party leaders hold over the formulation of foreign policy positions. In the parties consisting MĪ,

the leaders' personal stance on foreign policy matters can significantly shape the party's official position. This reliance on leaders may have implications for the stability and consistency of a party's foreign policy position, as leadership changes or shifts in leadership priorities can lead to changes in the party's stance. Consequently, the analysis may not fully capture the complexity of party dynamics, where the leader's personal views and interests may sometimes diverge from the party's historical positions or stated ideologies. Moreover, the degree of party leader influence on foreign policy can vary widely between parties, making it a challenge to generalize findings across the political spectrum. In sum, the parties' dependence on their leaders and the potential for personalization of foreign policy positions add another layer of complexity to the analysis and may be considered a limitation in fully understanding the parties' perspectives on European integration.

In conclusion, this research has contributed to a deeper understanding of the Nation Alliance's stance on differentiated integration and the justifications behind their respective positions. By employing Holzinger and Schimmelfennig's and Leuffen, Rittberger, and Schimmelfennig's analytical frameworks, I have shed light on the alliance's approach to permanent or temporary models of differentiation. This study's findings have significant implications for the ongoing discussions surrounding differentiated integration within the EU and Turkey's EU-related policy trajectory.

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