

Accession fatigue and backlash:

Mapping EU membership discourses in the Turkish parliament (2004-2017)

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Abstract

Turkey arguably represents the most contested EU candidate in history. While much has been written on intra-EU controversies, less is known about the structure and evolution of Turkish parliamentary discourse on EU membership. This paper presents a first comprehensive analysis of an original dataset on Turkish parliamentary debates between 2004 and 2017 using descriptive tools and discourse network analysis (DNA). We identify three discursive phases in contemporary EU-Turkey relations: bumpy start (2004-2005), enthusiasm (2006-2012), accession fatigue and backlash (2013-2017). While the incumbent party in Turkish politics, the AKP, has been championing EU membership for larger parts of its tenure in office, beginning in 2013, we observe a shift in Turkish political discourse. Ever since the AKP has become increasingly lukewarm to EU membership, joining the MHP in the camp of opponents. A new discourse coalition of “strange bedfellows” has emerged subsequently: the main opposition party, CHP, and the HDP, now represent the main proponents of EU membership. Specifically, we put forward that the shift in discourse post-2012 coincides with the incumbent party’s authoritarianization tendencies. While the AKP has initially instrumentalized the EU to bolster its power, the goal of EU membership has recently, and discursively speaking, more closely aligned the CHP and HDP as a means to counteract democratic backsliding. Given its societal implications, we suggest future research – especially on candidate countries – to systematically scrutinize links between discourse, compliance with EU law as well as democratic backsliding towards understanding the repercussions of changing discursive patterns.

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Introduction¹

For some observers Turkey-European Union (EU) relations are a tale that is perplexing, for others one of endless stumbling blocks. The EU officially opened accession negotiations with Turkey on October 3, 2005.² Fourteen years on, Turkey is still wandering before Europe's gates.³ Expectably, though, this odyssey has taken its toll. Within the EU, the issue of Turkish accession remains highly contested (Müftüler-Bac 2008). It is disputed not only on political and economic but also on cultural grounds (Rumelili 2004; Müftüler-Bac and McLaren 2003; Aydın-Düzgit 2012). Not only its size but also it being a comparatively poor country, predominantly Muslim, as well as the existence of a significant Turkish-origin population in a variety of EU countries complicates Turkey's EU perspective. What is more, in recent years, the Turkish government has gotten into European crossfire due to its increasing authoritarianism which is incompatible with the EU's liberal democratic values.

But how does it look on the other side? While public opinion surveys show steady decrease of societal support for EU membership in Turkey (e.g. 67 % in 2004, as compared to 42% in 2010⁴), we know comparatively little about Turkish political discourses on the country's EU bid and its evolution over time. Focusing on Turkey as a single-case for discourse analysis in the context of EU enlargement is warranted for the following reasons: First, such an analysis has the potential to provide a more fine-grained picture of how the ebbs and flows involved in EU-Turkey relations manifest themselves in political discourse and, by extension, to what extent the latter are related to political outcomes and developments (Schmidt 2008). Second, the country's EU membership is fundamentally contested within the EU and its prospects for joining the Union are thus rather bleak. At the same time, however, the Turkish elite has continued pursuing EU membership for various reasons and more than 50 years. Given the

¹We would like to thank Müge Özlütiras for assistance in data collection.

²To be sure, Turkey's association with the predecessor organizations of the EU (EC/EEC) goes back as far as 1959 when it made its first application to join.

³In comparison: another candidate country, Croatia, which started negotiations at the same time, succeeded to join Union eight years after the start of accession negotiations.

⁴Data from Eurobarometer survey item: "Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY'S) membership of European Union is a good thing . . .".

contested nature of Turkey’s EU credentials, the analysis of this case warrants itself as an outlier, or deviant case in comparison to other candidate countries. The examination of the structure of Turkish political discourse can serve as an instructive base to assess the future trajectory of EU-Turkey relations, on the one hand, and Turkey’s prospective geopolitical positioning, on the other.

As a key arena to peruse political discourses, this paper focuses on Turkish parliamentary debates. Doing so enables capturing popular representation and policy deliberation on the issue of EU membership. Parliamentary transcripts provide a direct access to the arguments used by policy-makers which are often truncated in media reporting, in particular so where media self-censoring has taken hold. We focus on the period between 2004 and 2017 which coincides with the start of Turkey’s membership accession negotiations as well as key political transformations in its aftermath. Our guiding research question reads: *what are the main features of the Turkish parliamentary discourse on EU membership, and how does it develop over time?* In this paper, we focus on EU membership-related discourse because our data suggests it to be the most saliently debated regional organization in Turkish parliament (compared to NATO, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, etc.).

In line with this outlook, this paper undertakes a comprehensive analysis to get a hold of the lay of land. The project coding follows a modified variant of the core-sentence method (Kriesi et al. 2012) and is largely in line with political claims analysis as developed by Koopmans and Statham (1999).⁵ In analyzing the data, we make use of descriptive statistics and discourse network analysis (DNA). The latter allows us to show affiliations between and ascertain patterns of dominance with respect to specific actors and frames. DNA, as opposed to a plain frequency analysis, allows us to analyze relational aspects of discourse as well the extent to which actors overlap in positioning and justification patterns.

While we find the incumbent party in Turkish politics, the AKP, to have been championing EU membership for larger parts of its tenure in office, we observe a shift in Turkish political

⁵see Appendix for more detailed explication.

discourse after 2013. Ever since, the AKP has been becoming increasingly lukewarm to EU membership, joining the MHP in the camp of opponents. A new discourse coalition of “strange bedfellows” has emerged subsequently: the main opposition party, CHP, and the HDP, now represent the main proponents of EU membership. We put forward that the shift in discourse post-2012 coincides with the incumbent party’s authoritarianization tendencies. Specifically, while the AKP has used the EU to gradually bolster its power by *inter alia* abolishing military tutelage and installing a presidential system with quasi non-existent checks and balances (David 2016), democratic backsliding has been responded to by the CHP and HDP by way of increasing discursive support for EU membership. Key observable implications of this trend are increasing references by the two parties to democracy, human rights and rule of law in parliamentary discourse during said period. Another observable upshot is the HDP’s foregoing to put up a candidate for Istanbul – Turkey’s economic heavyweight – during the local elections 2019 which was instrumental for the CHP candidate Ekrem Imamoglu to win the city’s majorship.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: we first give a succinct overview of the literature to identify knowledge gaps. Next, we define key concepts on positioning and framing. Afterwards, we detail our research design discussing issues related to data collection and coding. This is followed by the empirical analysis of Turkish parliamentary discourses. We close with a few concluding remarks.

Literature review

While observers generally agree on the ambivalent relationship between the EU and Turkey, little is known about the evolution of the Turkish political discourse on EU membership and its dynamics over time. So far, only a few scholars have attempted to examine Turkish political discourses (Müftüler-Bac and McLaren 2003; Avcı 2004; Yılmaz 2011a; Balkir and Eylemer 2016; Aydın-Düzgit and Kaliber 2016; Saatcioglu 2016; Aydın-Düzgit 2016), let

alone analyzed them across parties, time or assessed their impact on policy. Surveying this literature suggests one principal pattern: the initial enthusiasm for EU membership seems to have waned and turned into aversion after the start of the accession negotiations with the coming to the fore of EU-internal disputes such as the Cyprus issue and the blocking of negotiation chapters.

What are some of the more specific findings in the literature on Turkey's EU membership discourse? McLaren and Müftüler-Bac (2003) surveyed 61 Turkish MPs in spring 2000. Their findings reveal that Turkish parliamentarians back then were rather overwhelmingly enthusiastic about EU membership in the near future. Avcı (2004) analyzes media reports and speeches by Turkish political parties in the post-Helsinki period between 1999 and 2003. Her account draws an overall supportive picture with the exception of the MHP that conducted a strong anti-EU discourse. Yılmaz (2011a) analyzes polling data to explore the substantive underpinnings of Euroskeptic attitudes among the Turkish public and elite up until 2007. He, too, finds the MHP to have consistently been lukewarm to the idea of EU membership (except for a somewhat more moderate stance during their time in coalition government from 1999 to 2002) and the CHP to have oscillated towards a soft Euroskepticism after the AKP's coming to power in 2002 and its taking over of the "EU flag". Balkir and Eylemer (2016) study election manifestos of the AKP, CHP and MHP for the 2002, 2007 and 2011 elections. They find, for instance, that the AKP's discourse on Turkish membership has moved from presenting the EU as a universal standard to a more pragmatic and calculating approach ever since 2005 when the EU's membership promise came into doubt due to intra-EU controversies and the open-ended nature of negotiations. Aydın-Düzgüt and Kaliber (2016), in an attempt to account for the changing political dynamics since 2007, coin the term "de-Europeanization" to describe a general distancing within Turkish politics from the European system of norms, values and policy expectations (Aydın-Düzgüt and Kaliber 2016, 6). Saatcioglu (2016, 141), based on selected policy statements, argues that EU-skepticism among the ruling Turkish elite (AKP) has been rising since the beginning of the government's second term in office in 2007.

Aydin-Düzgit (2016), analyzing a small corpus of speeches delivered by Recep Tayyip Erdogan between 2011 and 2013, finds persistent and intensifying negative references to the EU for that period. Müftüler-Bac and Süleymanoglu-Kürüm (2015) analyze Turkish parliamentarians' perceptions of the EU's foreign policy. Based on an analysis of 111 parliamentary proceedings between 1998 and 2012, the authors find virtually no references to European foreign policy *per se*, but rather that deliberations mostly seem to revolve around the issue of EU membership.

In sum, while extant studies suggest a distancing from the goal of EU membership over time, we are interested in precisely which parties support or reject EU membership and to what kind of arguments they tie their stances. As it stands, the literature lacks a systematic, longitudinal analysis which captures the evolution of positions and frames. To this end, the next section presents the corresponding theoretical framework.

Theoretical framework

Concepts: discourse and frames

We follow existing research in defining political discourses as an ensemble of positions and frames on a certain subject (Hajer 1993; Leifeld 2016).⁶ We assume that political actors behave strategically by taking position on issues and framing them in a certain way in order to shape and dominate the “political discourse of the day” (Hall 1993, 290).⁷ We generally define a discourse coalition in terms of actors or parties who share similar views, both in

⁶In the field of international relations (IR), discourse studies are widely associated with the constructivist turn (cf. Milliken 1999; Guzzini 2005). Because these studies cross-cut divisions between post-structuralists, postmodernists and social constructivists, they come in different variants, drawing upon distinct methodologies and metatheoretical premises. The variations notwithstanding, as Carta and Wodak (2015, 4-5) have pointed out, different strands of discourse analysis also have similarities among which are, most notably, a focus on language and political speech and a concern for non-material resources in the creation of meaning. While discourses have entered the field through the vessel of post-structuralism and are often thought of almost as a post-structural concept outside the realm of empirical study, we do not see any *a priori* reason why they should not be studied using systematic empirical approaches (Jones and McBeth 2010, 339). Scholarship has not only shown that this is possible but also generated valuable empirical insights doing so (e.g. Roe 1994; Crespy and Schmidt 2014).

⁷To avoid misunderstanding, for reasons of linguistic variety, in this paper we use the terms frames, arguments and justifications synonymously.

terms of positioning on and framing of a given issue at hand.

In the context of candidate country discourses about EU membership, we conceive of positions in terms of positive, conditional, and negative stances. While the first and last are rather self-explanatory, the motivation for uttering a conditional statement can follow different logics. On the one hand, uttering a conditional position can act as a type of negotiation strategy. While it voices opposition at face value, a conditional position, in principle, does not foreclose support and can therewith work to signal ego's willingness to move forward given that certain concessions are made. On the other hand, conditional positioning may also embody a strategy of "calculated ambivalence" (Wodak 2013) whereby an actor opts not to tie himself down to a specific position.

Framing, as distinguished from agenda setting, does not guide us as regards *what* to think about, but *how* to think about a particular issue. In line with this understanding, we conceive of frames in terms of a justification an actor provides when taking a position (Kriesi et al. 2012, 42).⁸ Similarly, Entman (1993, 52) conceives of framing as a process "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient . . . in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation". Goffman has described frames in terms of "schemata of interpretation" (1974, 221). Kinder and Sanders conceive of frames as tools "invented and employed by political elites, often with an eye on advancing their own interests or ideologies, and intended to make favorable interpretations prevail" (Kinder and Sanders 1990, 74).

What are general types of frames parties use in the context of EU membership discourses? In deriving a frame classification scheme, we distinguish utilitarian and normative justifications (cf. Sjørnsen 2006; Herranz-Surrallés 2012). These categories mirror two general types of discourses: those that emphasize interests (utility-based) and those that stress norms and/or identities (value-based) (cf. Sjørnsen 2006).⁹ Each type of discourse, in turn, is underpinned

⁸Some critiques question the relevance of frames; however, we believe that frames matter insofar as they bear the capacity to mobilize the public and to shape public opinion (Hoeglinger 2016, 102; Druckman 2009).

⁹Sjørnsen (2006), in her original account, makes a threefold distinction between utility, value and rights-based arguments. This analytical move allows here to integrate a third logic of social action as put forward by

by a specific logic of social action: the logic of consequences and the logic of appropriateness, respectively (March and Olsen 1989).¹⁰ The two master-frames come with a set of sub-frames in order to capture nuances in argumentative patterns. At the utilitarian end, we distinguish arguments related to the costs/benefits of accession, state modernization policy, geopolitics, security, and a residual category for other utilitarian arguments (e.g. environmental concerns). At the normative side, we distinguish frames which revolve around belonging to Europe, liberal democracy and rule of law, multiculturalism, sovereignty and fairness. These general types of arguments can be assigned regardless of orientation (positive, conditional, negative) and also resemble seminal categories that have been found to matter in citizen discourses on enlargement and membership (Dimitrova et al. 2015).¹¹ Table 1 provides an overview.

Utilitarian frames. Costs/benefits of accession relates to the economic and social gains or losses accruing from becoming an EU member.¹² State modernization policy represents a rather idiosyncratic argument in the Turkish case. It revolves around a deeply entrenched development policy (*cagdaslasma projesi*) in place since the late Ottoman Tanzimat times and later continued under the founder of the Republic Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (Eralp 2009; Camyar and Tagma 2010). Within discourse, this is at times referred to as the “Westernisation narrative” (Schröder 2017), viewing the West in general and Europe in particular as role models to emulate. In our coding scheme, statements qualify under this subframe if the speaker portrays EU membership as a state policy for the benefit of the nation. Under the label geopolitics we code statements that portray EU membership as a means to increase

Habermas: the logic of communicative rationality. At this early stage of penning the paper we have limited our analysis to the two general frame-types (utilitarian and normative justifications) as grounded in the logic of appropriateness and consequentialism. We are going to explore further whether expanding the frame scheme in Sjørusen’s manner or another can help yield additional insights.

¹⁰In the broadest sense, our dual classification also resonates with what has been referred to in the public policy literature in terms of cognitive and normative frames (Surel 2000; Schmidt 2008); cognitive frames refer to schemes through which actors interpret the world, often articulated in terms of cause and effect relations, whereas normative frames revolve around values, norms and identities.

¹¹Discourses on the EU as a rule-based community, as a source of better governance and as a community based on ideals and values are captured by the normative frame category proposed here; and discourses emphasizing the utility of enlargement, as found by Dimitrova and colleagues, are here represented by the utilitarian frame category.

¹²The subframes were developed based on an iterative process moving back and forth between theory and data

regional power but also arguments that revolve around matters that relate EU membership to world politics (such as improving Turkey’s sway in the international arena). The subframe security, by contrast, is a container for justifications that center on regional war/peace, terrorism or individual security and relate these to EU membership.

Normative frames. Belonging to EUrope captures identity-related arguments such as those that stress Turkey’s historically grown place in the European political system and/or the continent. Frames revolving around democratization, human rights, and rule of law are subsumed under the corresponding category. Multiculturalism, for example, relates to statements on Turkey’s “bridging role” between the East and the West. It also captures arguments which conceptualize the EU as a multicultural polity. Sovereignty subsumes statements related to national independence, the unitary-state or external impositions of EU rules in the context of conditionality. Finally, fairness-related arguments center on what is perceived a differential, or “unfair” treatment of Turkey in comparison to other candidate countries, which also includes criticisms of the open-ended nature of the accession process.

Table 1: Frame classification scheme

Utilitarian frames	Normative frames
Costs/benefits of accession	Belonging to EUrope
State modernization policy	Liberal democracy, human rights & rule of law
Geopolitics	Multiculturalism
Security	Sovereignty
Other	Fairness

Hypotheses

What explains Turkish parties’ positioning on and framing of EU membership? We circle out two theoretically plausible explanations: *ideology* and *inter-party strategy* (cf. Hoeglinger

2016, 61; Riker 1962).¹³ The first approach postulates that EU orientation is structured by ideology while the second emphasizes government-opposition dynamics. Let us discuss each in turn.

Ideological model. This approach presumes that parties have specific preferences in line with their general ideological profile as how to present EU integration to their electorate and how to cue citizens regarding what it is about (Hoeglinger 2016, 101). In this view, it is not national characteristics but parties' own profiles that determines how they position themselves towards EU membership and how they frame it. According to the ideological model, opposition to Europe comes from the far-left and the far-right, while center parties generally hold a pro-integrationist stance (Helbling et al. 2010, 504). This association between position on European integration and left/right position is said to take the form of an inverted U-curve.¹⁴ Adopting this model to the Turkish context requires classifying political parties according to the left-right axis. We do so based on data from the Manifesto Project and existing scholarship (Yilmaz 2011a). This yields the following categorization: we demarcate the AKP as an Islamic and center-right party; the CHP as a Kemalist and

¹³Arguably, the list of potentially relevant explanations is not exhausted with these three approaches. For instance, we do not further discuss EU discourse, Turkish public opinion, and national characteristics as potential determinants for the following reasons: First, EU discourse has been rather lukewarm to Turkish membership all along. If this factor was decisive, Turkish political discourse on EU membership, especially as portrayed by the AKP, should have shifted way earlier. It does, however, start to change only years after the start of accession negotiations. Second, Turkish public sentiment can be discarded as in proportional electoral systems, top-down linkages tend to be stronger (cue-giving) as opposed to a bottom-up process – electoral connection as Carrubba (2011) calls it – whereby elites react to public sentiment (cf. Steenbergen et al. 2007). In fact, if public opinion was a key determinant, recent observations of the CHP and HDP voicing increasing support for EU membership should have not materialized, as Turkish public support for EU membership floats at all time lows. Third, the national characteristics approach (also known as geopolitical model) takes as the unit of analysis the nation-state and we do not have a comparative basis here to assess the argument. Specifically, it posits that elite orientations will be structured by national interest, institutions or collective identity. We do, however, discuss the model's implications by extension and implicitly when engaging in the frame analysis. This applies, in particular, to the way EU membership is conceived of by many political and societal actors in Turkey; namely as a national project and state policy of modernization (e.g. *cagdaslasma projesi, milli mesele, devlet politikasi*).

¹⁴To be sure, the argument comes in different variants: in addition to the economic left-right axis, scholars have also pointed at the importance of the cultural GAL-TAN cleavage. Here we focus on the left-right dimension only due to data scarcity. To be more specific, the Chapel Hill dataset, which contains data on the GAL-TAN dimension, includes data for Turkey merely for the year 2014. We could have taken these figures as a proxy. However, there is reason to believe that there have been substantial shifts in the Turkish party landscape in this respect over the last fifteen years, especially with regards to the AKP, which led us to discard this aspect for the time being.

center-left party; the MHP as an extreme right and nationalist party; and the “Kurdish party family” (HDP, BDP, DTP) as extreme-left and ethnic parties.¹⁵ Based on the preceding reasoning, we formulate the following empirical expectations:

H – 1_a: The AKP and CHP will on average be supportive of Turkey’s EU membership.

H – 1_b: While the AKP will predominantly use utilitarian frames, the CHP will predominantly use normative frames.

H – 1_c: The MHP and Kurdish party family (HDP, BDP, DTP) will on average be against Turkey’s EU membership.

H – 1_d: While the MHP will predominantly use normative frames in justifying their position on Turkey’s EU membership, the Kurdish party family will use a mix of normative and utilitarian arguments.

Strategic model. According to this approach, government-opposition dynamics are seen as decisive in shaping party positions on the EU. In order not to “rock the boat”, center parties are expected to take a largely pro-European stance. They prefer continuity and the status quo (which in this case would be a pro-EU stance). By contrast, opposition parties, irrespective of their ideological color, take a distinctly Euroskeptic position to challenge incumbent parties. In this perspective, the main driving force of party positioning are not substantive or ideological concerns but the pursuit of competitive advantages. We thus formulate the following empirical expectations:

H – 2_a: Government parties will on average be supportive of Turkey’s EU membership, opposition parties against.

H – 2_b: Relatedly, opposition parties will use different arguments than government parties.

¹⁵For reasons of simplicity we subsumed Kurdish ethnic parties that emerged over the last 15 years under one category. We believe that this is a defensible move insofar as they follow a common line; for instance, the BDP has been founded after the decision of the Turkish constitutional court in 2009 to shut down the DTP. Many MPs have subsequently switched parties. The founding of the HDP in 2012 was accompanied by a similar process and represents the most recent attempt by Kurdish politicians to unite the movement.

Research Design

The main unit of data collection are statements made in parliamentary debates in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, TBMM) related to the issue of membership and belonging to the EU and other regional organizations.¹⁶ Our dataset spans the period from 2004 to 2017. Given our interest in party positions, we aggregate these individual-level statements to obtain party-level figures.

Using parliamentary debates as the principal arena to analyze political discourses in Turkey is a pragmatic choice for the following reasons.¹⁷ First, it enables capturing political deliberation at length, across different parties and actors (Ilie 2015). Where the press is not entirely free, as can be said for the case of Turkey (e.g. in 2014, Turkey ranked 134/197 in the Freedom House Index), parliamentary debates offer a more direct access to the frames and arguments used by policy-makers as compared to other outlets. Specifically, the self-censoring of the media in less democratic settings represents a potential source of bias.¹⁸ Further, whereas media discourse is often used to study issue salience and politicization, here the focus is on political actors and their struggle over meaning in the parliamentary arena. Second and relatedly, parliamentary debates represent arenas of ordinary politics as compared to, for example, electoral (e.g. election or referenda campaigns) and protest arenas which are forums of extraordinary politics (cf. Kriesi et al 2012, 221). This enables capturing every-day elite discourses (Herranz-Surralles 2012) which are key to understanding the evolution of positions and frames over time. Overall, while parliamentary debates represent only a subset of political discourse (beside media and state), it is reasonable to assume that parties in

¹⁶see Appendix for more detailed project description.

¹⁷Choosing parliamentary discourse as the main arena of analysis also brings with it certain design-related considerations. Most importantly, political discourse represents a subset of what can be called public discourse. The latter entails, in addition, arenas such as the media, government, and state institutions. A study which were interested, for instance, in dissecting the discursive differences between these arenas or their mutual influence would indeed be well advised to incorporate all or at least a broader set. Since our goal, however, is to capture the main tenets of political debate, zooming in on parliamentary discourse appears to be a reasonable choice.

¹⁸We assume this to be less an issue for MPs with immunity - although this is not to say that they may as well be suffering from repression, in one way or the other.

parliament aggregate and express publicly relevant positions and arguments.¹⁹

To ensure measurement validity and replicability, among other things, the project team has developed, piloted and refined a comprehensive codebook with the involvement of five principal researchers and several research assistants. In coding parliamentary statements, we apply a variant of the “core-sentence method” (Kriesi et al. 2012, 41), borne out of political claims analysis (Koopmans and Statham 1999), which is designed to capture relationships between a political actor and a political issue. To this end, each sentence within a plenary debate - sentence here is not limited to a grammatical sentence but can span over several lines - is thus broken down to its subject (the actor), the object (the issue), the direction of the relationship (positioning) the justification (frame) that goes along with the statement. Because other research suggests that actors back their policy position by using multiple frames (Lerch and Schweltnus 2006), we allowed for the assignment of more than one frame. The frames were initially recorded in terms of keywords and keyphrases which were later used to assign the predefined frames from our classification scheme. In addition, per statement, we also collected contextual information such as the origin of the actor and his role (e.g. member of parliament or government, party affiliation, etc.). While the project codebook details coding rules to ensure replicability, we furthermore conducted intercoder reliability tests (ICR) to assess coding consistency. For two ICR tests in the Turkish case (three coders), the adjusted Cohen’s Kappa are respectively .95 and 1.00.

In analyzing the data, we resort to longitudinal descriptive statistics and employ discourse network analysis (DNA). DNA is a combination of content analysis and network analysis relating actors and frames to one another (Leifeld 2016). In terms of visuals, this kind of combination produces what is referred to as bi-partite discourse networks. A discourse network, in turn, is composed of four elements as far as our study is concerned: *actors*, *frames* and *degree of agreement*. *Actors* make claims. These are organizations or individuals who

¹⁹Relatedly, some critics argue that an exclusive view at parliaments comes at the expense of missing out on the voices of actors outside the political system. This is offset by the circumstance, however, that MPs usually react to discourses within and outside of parliamentary debates interacting with their electorate, businesses, and a variety of societal actors (Bayley 2004).

contribute to the construction and reproduction of discourse via public speech acts. *Frames* are justifications actors relay when positioning themselves with respect to a specific issue.²⁰ *Degree of agreement* is a qualifier indicating an actor's net position. To this end, we transform our threefold claim categorization (supportive, negative, conditional) into two categories, positive (statements in support) vs. non-positive positions (statements that are conditional or negative). We do so in order to reduce complexity and ease interpretation of the network graphs.

Our network-based analysis centers on the aggregate structure of the data, whereas we use descriptive tools to study longitudinal dynamics. This is in line with our dual purpose of capturing the overall picture of the Turkish EU membership discourse as well as developments over time.

Mapping the lay of land: Turkish political discourse on EU membership (2004-2017)

Institutional context

The Turkish political system, in comparison with its European counterparts, exhibits certain idiosyncrasies. First, due to the uniquely high electoral threshold (10%) the diversity of parties in parliament is limited. As a means to circumvent this high threshold, in the past, MPs have entered Parliament as independent representatives and later formed a party group within Parliament. The formation of a party group requires at least 20 members.²¹ Second, speaking time is distributed unevenly across MPs. Representatives of the party group are given 20 minutes speaking time whereas individual members of parliament have merely 10

²⁰This applies with one exception: in Figure 2, we study actor affiliations with respect to different forms of cooperation with the EU such as membership, customs union, association/partnership etc. Here frames are substituted by categories in the generation of the discourse network.

²¹The Code of Conduct of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, 1973, Article 18.

minutes.²² Should an MP appear again in the same debate the speaking time is reduced by half of the standard time.²³

As regard the constitution of Parliament, there have been five Parliaments during our period of analysis: the 22nd Parliament (2002 to 2007), the 23rd Parliament (2007 to 2011), the 24th Parliament (2011 to 2015), the 25th Parliament (2015), and the 26th Parliament (2015 to 2018). The AKP obtained a majority in each, except for the short-lived 25th Parliament, which was a hung parliament. It was succeeded by the 26th Parliament after snap elections had been called due to failed attempts at forming a coalition government. Hitherto, the number of MPs was fixed at 550. However, with the forming of the 27th Parliament after elections in June 2018, the number of MPs was increased to 600. At the same time, the country's parliamentary system was transformed into a presidential one. While the CHP and AKP were represented in all five Parliaments that coincide with our period of analysis, the MHP and Kurdish parties entered Parliament only with its 23rd constitution (2007 and onwards).

In what follows, we first examine the big picture, discursive patterns that arise in the aggregate, before we turn to the longitudinal analysis of Turkey's EU membership discourse from 2004 to 2017.

Aggregate discourse analysis: the big picture

Figure 1 shows descriptive statistics on frequency and type of statements in our database. With respect to frequency (left panel), there is quite some fluctuation observable: 2006, 2007 and 2015 exhibit very low numbers of statements and 2008, 2009 and 2013 turn out to be statement-rich years. Overall, the number of membership-statements with reference to regional organizations are comparatively low (N~400) in comparison to other European

²²ibid. Articles 18 and 60

²³While, as a consequence, speakers of party groups are represented more frequently in parliamentary debate than other MPs, this is not so much an issue in the present context, as our research interest lies in capturing general party orientations and framing patterns. This is also why we aggregate individual statements to the party-level since this allows reconstructing the overall structure of the discourse as it unfolds across party lines.

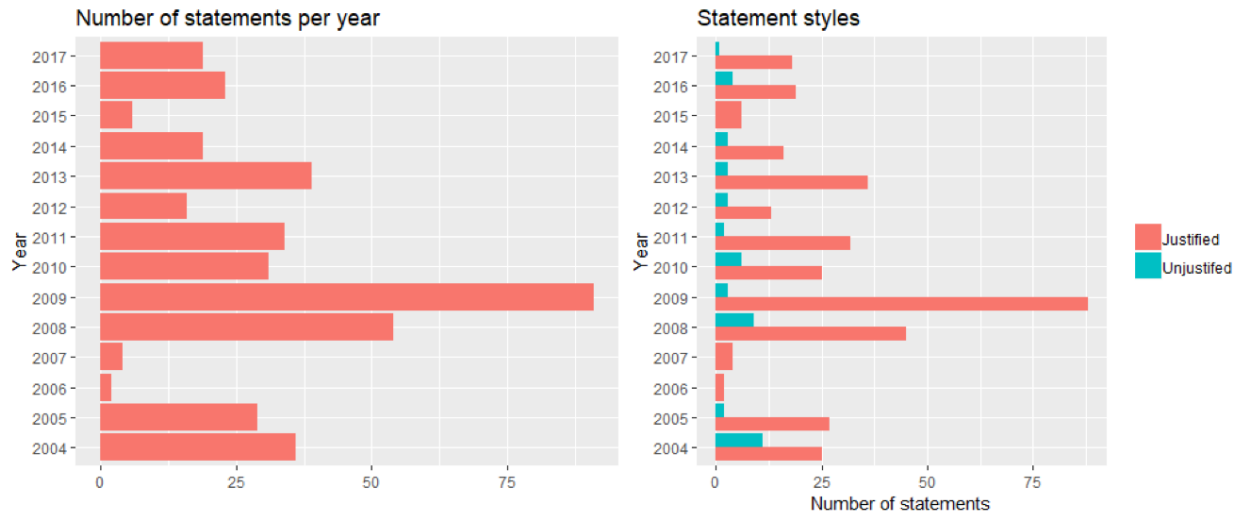


Figure 1: Number and type of membership-related statements

parliaments.²⁴ The right panel in Figure 1 depicts the number of statements that come along with frames (justified statements) as opposed to statements that lack frames (unjustified). The trend here is quite clearly and consistently towards justified statements over the entire time period of study.

We start by plotting the networks based on the Turkish parliamentary discourse. Figure 2 shows the net positions of political parties (circles) with respect to different forms of association with the EU (triangles). The size of the nodes are proportional to statement frequency (large node indicates higher frequency, and vice versa). Further, darker green links indicate stronger agreement while darker red links indicate stronger disagreements. All networks (Figures 2 through 4) were drawn based on the subtraction method of aggregation to obtain net positions. Importantly, Figures 3 and 4 follow the same aggregation and visualization methods but zoom in on the relation between political parties and frames they use when discussing EU membership (instead of types of association with the EU as done in Figure 2).

To start with, a few general observations are in order. First, the most dominant actors in

²⁴For the average European Parliament within the context of our project coders recorded three to five times more statements in total and over the entire time period in comparison to the Turkish Parliament (statistics not printed here).

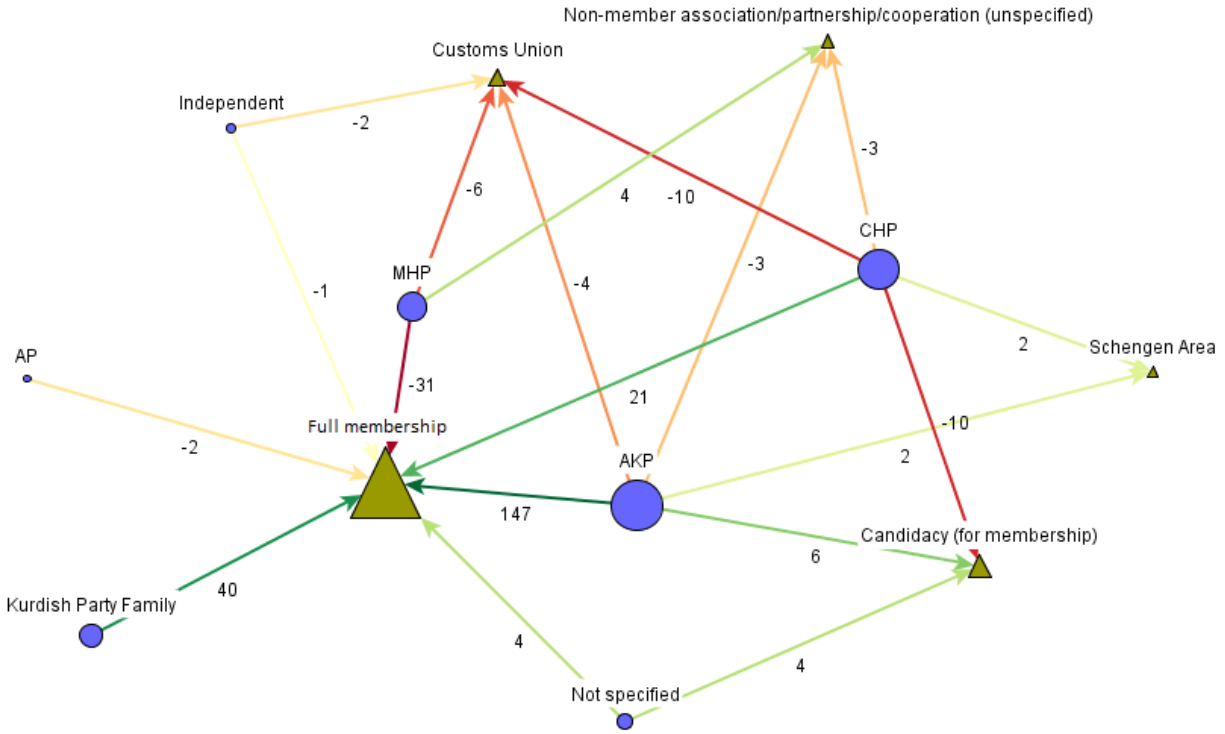


Figure 2: Discourse network on political party and type of EU association

the Turkish political discourse are the AKP and CHP, followed by the MHP and Kurdish party family. This reflects the parties' share of seats in each Parliament. Second, the most salient issue over the period of analysis has been full membership with the EU. Other forms of affiliation such as Customs Union and non-member associations find mention much less frequently (this is reflected in the different sizes of the triangles in Figure 2). Further, membership-related statements about the EU make up the bulk of claims in Turkish political discourse (>90 %) in comparison to other regional organizations such as NATO (3%), or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (3.5%). With respect to EU membership, the aggregate data indicates that on average almost all parties have been in favour of full membership – except for the MHP – over the last fourteen years (link weights in Figure 2). This is in line with hypotheses 1_a and 2_a , the ideological and strategic models, respectively.

The AKP, as an islamist-center-right party, surfaces as the staunchest defender of full EU membership in the post-2004 period, despite uncertain membership prospects down the road.

Concomittantly, AKP MPs voiced rather negative positions with respect to alternative forms of affiliation with the EU across the board. This applies in particular to the Customs Union of which Turkey has been part since 1995. This resonates with the general desire among the Turkish elite to revise the current arrangement if not revoking the Customs Union agreement entirely.²⁵ With respect to the use of frames (Figure 3), the data supports hypothesis 1_b: The AKP has, on average, used utilitarian frames more often than it used normative frames to justify its support for EU membership. At the level of subframes, we observe that the AKP used justifications related to state modernization policy, benefits of accession, and liberal democracy/human rights/rule of law predominantly in support for EU membership. Crucially, the party presenting itself as the vanguard of liberal democratic values for the better part of its political existence does not sit very well on developments on the ground, namely democratic backsliding tendencies setting in in the early 2010s. However, if it were not doing so it would subject itself to criticism. Similarly, if it had argued against Turkey's historically entrenched modernization policy, this may have at come at a high political price as well.

The main opposition party CHP, compared to the incumbent, is more ambivalent in its positioning and framing of EU membership. There appears a clear break if one compares the party's discourse before and after the start of accession negotiations in 2005. While remaining rather lukewarm to EU membership in the pre-negotiations phase,²⁶ afterwards, the CHP gradually adopted a more positive stance. It is conceivable that Turkey obtaining official candidate status played a role in this respect. While this observation gives credence to hypothesis 1_a, it rather contradicts with hypothesis 2_a of the strategic model. With respect to sub-frames (Figure 4), the CHP, on average, used modernization, liberal democracy/human

²⁵This stance on the Customs Union emanates from technical issues. Shifting international trade relations, rendered the old agreement between the EU and Turkey insufficient, if not harmful, for the Turkish economy. This is most visible in the case of free trade agreements: the Customs Union agreement doesn't extend these agreements to Turkey, meaning that Turkey cannot export its good on a tariff-free basis but has to accept imports from third countries tariff-free.

²⁶In the context of data collection, statements on the EU membership of a country before the official candidate status were coded as "candidacy (for membership)".

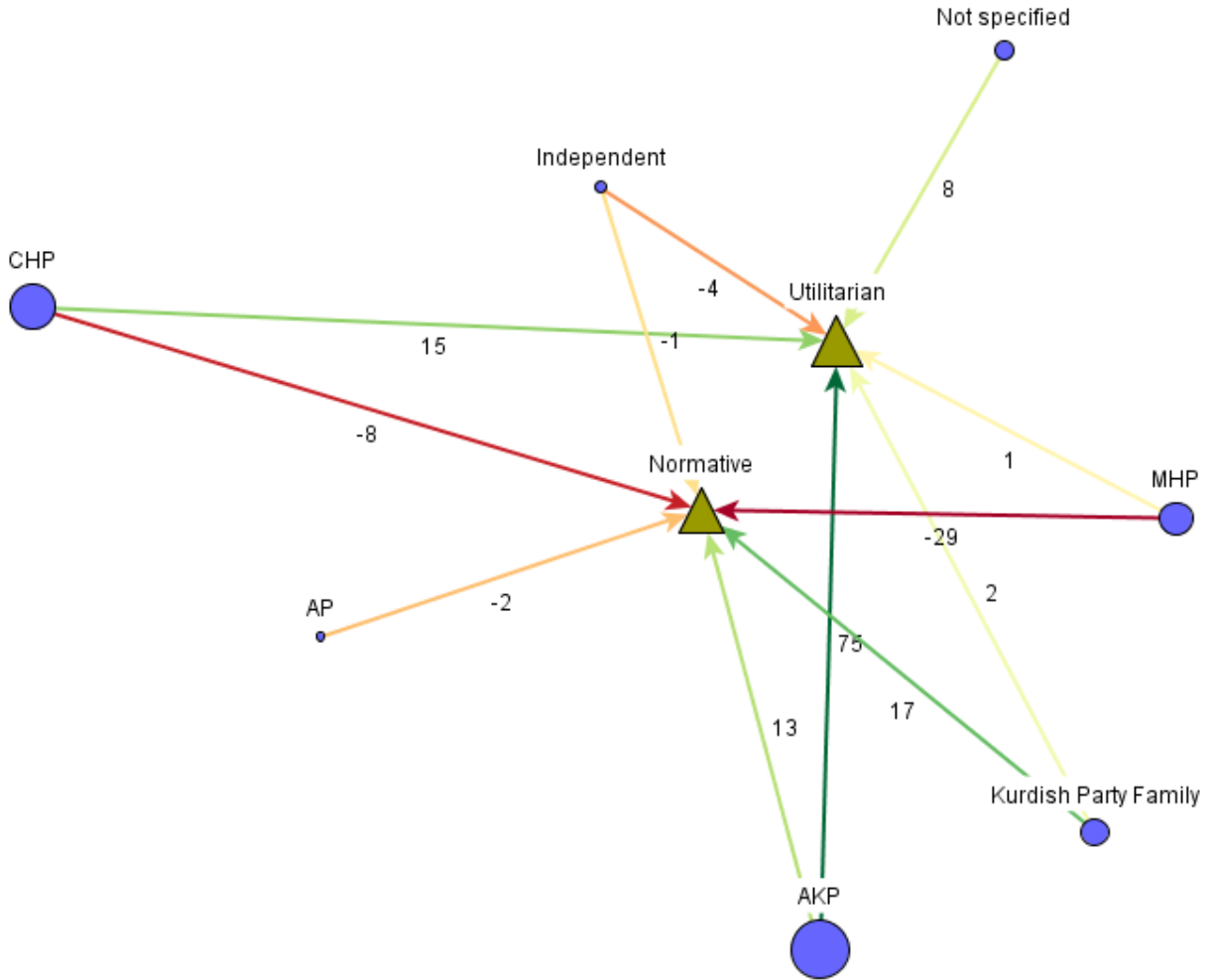


Figure 3: Use of master-frames in Turkish parliamentary discourse on EU membership

rights/rule of law arguments to justify its support for EU membership, while national sovereignty and fairness-related arguments (normative frames) were raised to argue against EU accession.

As to the remaining opposition parties: For one thing, the ultra-nationalist MHP overall rejects any kind of closer integration with the EU – specifically those that involve the transfer of core state powers. It thereby justifies its negative stance mostly based on fairness and sovereignty-related arguments. This is in line with hypotheses 1_c and 1_d . For another, the positioning of the Kurdish party family does not resonate with our theoretical expectations. As the political representatives of the largest minority in Turkey, they were staunch supporters

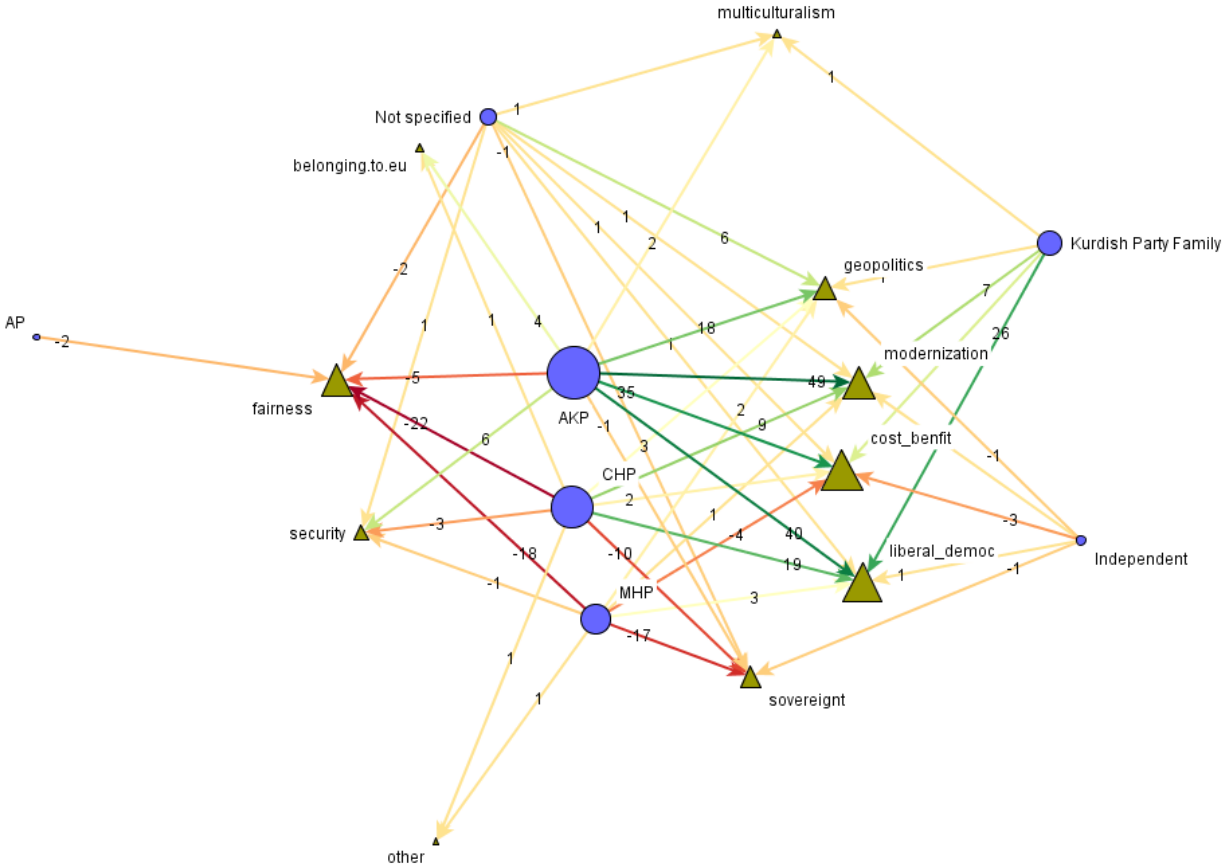


Figure 4: Use of sub-frames in Turkish parliamentary discourse on EU membership

of EU membership from a liberal democracy and minority rights perspective.²⁷ According to the symbolic recognition argument from the literature on ethnic minorities, EU membership creates opportunities for multiple identities to develop, receive expression and be politically recognized (Keating 2004; Nagel 2004). This finds corroboration in the relative use of sub-frames: Kurdish Parties predominantly utilize liberal democracy/human rights/rule of law-related arguments in support for EU membership.

The aggregate discourse analysis so far suggested ideological drivers to be overall pivotal in determining positioning on and framing of EU membership. We now turn to the diachronic analysis in order to capture and make sense of discursive dynamics over time.

²⁷This suggests the party’s ethnic profile to trump its leftist programmatic orientation. Otherwise, one would have expected them to strongly oppose EU membership. Prior studies demonstrate that the opposition of the radical left to the EU is often the result of their discontent with the lack of concern about redistributive policies on the EU side (Marks et.al, 2006).

Longitudinal discourse analysis: a diachronic view

Based on a holistic scrutiny of the data, we distinguish three discursive phases on the issue of Turkish EU membership: *bumpy start* (2004-2005), *enthusiasm* (2006-2012), and *accession fatigue and backlash* (2013-2017).²⁸

Bumpy start (2004-2005): the “bumpy” years 2004 and 2005 can be tied back to crucial EU-related events: the anchoring of an open-ended negotiations clause in the EU-Turkey accession framework²⁹, the “Cyprus issue” and subsequent freezing of accession chapters. While the inscription of an open-ended negotiation clause is the result of an EU-internal compromise, the Cyprus issue warrants some explication: One of the attendant obligations for Turkey to proceed regularly in the accession negotiations was that it opened its harbors and airports to the Republic of Cyprus. This obligation emanated from Turkey’s requirement to extend the Additional Protocol (2005) of the Ankara Agreement (1963) to said country. The issue was subject to hot debate in the TBMM. Discursively, it became visible in the AKP’s conditional positioning with respect to EU membership which amounted to roughly 25% in 2004, and even higher so for the CHP (roughly 75% conditional statements in 2004), which sturdily voiced the stance to not give into the requirement of extending the Additional Protocol to Cyprus. During this period, Turkish MPs used plenty of normative frames, most notably, stressing fairness and sovereignty. Eventually, the Turkish government de facto refused to apply the conditions of the Protocol to Cyprus. This was noted in the European Commission’s 2005 Progress Report. Following a recommendation by the Commission and a decision by the Council of Ministers on 11 December 2006, endorsed by the European Council on 14-15 December 2006, it was then sanction-wise decided that no chapter shall be provisionally closed until Turkey fulfils its commitments related to the Additional Protocol

²⁸We make these distinctions based on the positioning and framing patterns of the incumbent (AKP) and main opposition party (CHP) as the most dominant actors in the context of the political discourse on Turkey’s EU membership. That is to say, we switch sides in this portrayal and instead of looking at developments and discourses from the EU’s vantage point, we focus on the Turkish perspective. We do not look at the period before 2004, but extending the categorization historically may yield a more comprehensive picture.

²⁹(Council of the European Union 12823/1/05)

(Council Conclusions, 2770th Council Meeting, 11 December 2006).

Enthusiasm (2006-2012). During this phase, initial controversy gradually gives way to widespread support for EU membership. Concurrently, there is a decrease in normative frames, most notably those that emphasize fairness in negotiations and national sovereignty; and there is an increase in the use of utilitarian frames, primarily those that focus on the benefits of accession. Looking at the CHP, we observe positional change similar to the AKP, but stronger in magnitude.³⁰

Beginning with the constitution of the 23rd parliament in 2007, we observe three out of four parties being largely supportive of EU membership. In parallel, the share of normative frames that emphasize fairness and sovereignty goes down. Among all four parties, solely the MHP seems to remain overall opposed to EU membership. Specifically, between 2009 and 2012, the MHP habitually expresses conditional and negative voices on Turkey's membership to EU that go along with the use of normative frames, especially national sovereignty – this is most likely related to the peace process (see below).

Enthusiasm during this phase can be attributed economic and political stability taking hold. For one thing, 2009 marks the beginning of the peace and reconciliation process with ethnic secessionist PKK also known as “peace process” (baris süreci). It foresaw the expansion of minority rights, a ceasefire between PKK and Turkish Armed Forces, and a gradual opening towards the political recognition of Kurdish ethnic identity. Especially, the expansion of minority rights had a positive effect. For another thing, the domestic economy steadily improved between 2009 and 2013: a rise in GDP per capita from 8.980 USD to 12.480 USD, and positive growth figures (Ministry of Finance and Treasury, 2019) had stoked a general feeling of optimism, both among the elites and the public. Against such a positive backdrop, accession negotiations progressed further despite frozen accession chapters. Granted the

³⁰One notable difference between the two parties lies in the rate of increase in clear opposition to the EU membership throughout the first phase. While no CHP MPs made claims expressing opposition to EU membership in 2004, roughly 20% of claims by CHP MPs express a clear opposition to EU membership. To be sure: we observe no claim on EU membership by MHP and MPs affiliated with Kurdish party family during this phase as they did not secure seats in the corresponding Parliament.

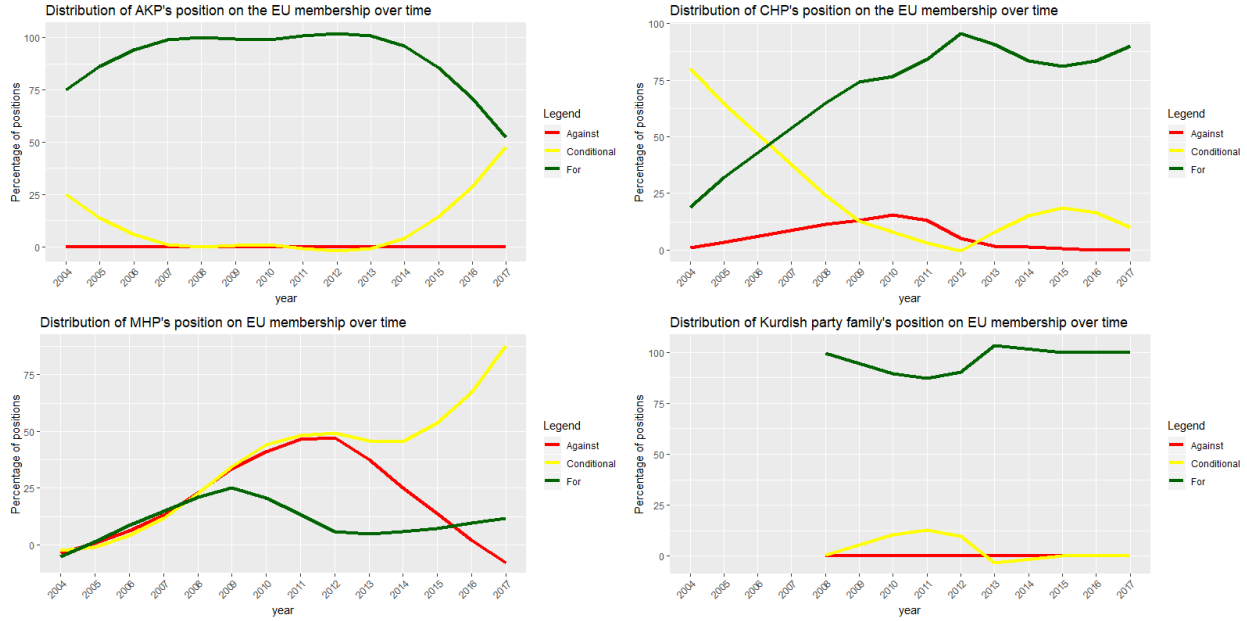


Figure 5: Party Positions on EU membership over time

bumpy start of EU-Turkey accession negotiations, the discourse in the subsequent phase was overall characterized by enthusiasm.

Accession fatigue and backlash (2013-2017). This phase marks the beginning of a major shift in the trajectory of EU-Turkey relations. Discourse-wise, it is characterized by several positional alterations. First, AKP MPs began to voice a distinctively skeptical position on the issue of EU membership. By the time we reach 2017, AKP's support for EU membership reaches a historical low. Simultaneous increase in conditional positions indicates that MPs who were formerly in favor of EU membership began to question its merits. Similarly, there is a sharp increase in conditional positions expressed by ultranationalist MPs during this time period. Although the MHP has always been doubtful of EU membership, their skepticism hits a historical peak in 2017. Second, parties on the left-wing side of the ideology spectrum show opposite trends. CHP's support for membership marginally decreases from its peak in 2012 but reverts back to a supportive stance in this phase using diverse arguments. MPs who are affiliated with Kurdish Parties exhibit consistently positive positions during this phase. Frame-wise, we note a predominant use of normative justifications stressing arguments

related to liberal democracy/human rights/rule of law.

Several watershed events are likely related to patterns of discursive change in the Turkish parliament 2013 and onwards: the Gezi Park protests in 2013 which were followed by fierce responses of EU officials with respect to Turkish authorities' dealings with the event; the visa liberalization dialogue and its open-ended fashion in 2013; as well as the migration crisis in 2015 which shifted negotiation power asymmetries in Turkey's favor due to the EU's dependence on a deal to halt the massive influx of Syrian refugees (signed in March 2016). Interestingly, the EU's launch of the so-called Positive Agenda in 2012, to accelerate alignment with EU policies, seems to have had no significant positive impact on the discourse, most likely due to the agenda lacking attractive incentives. Overall, a recurring critique by Turkish MPs in the post-2012 period, due to frustrating experiences with the accession process in general, and the visa liberalization process and the EU-Turkey refugee deal in particular, are the allegedly "moving target" nature of the EU's conditions which are perceived as arbitrary and capricious. This stance is visible in the overall rise of conditional statements and normative arguments from the AKP and MHP during that time frame. Finally, in 2016, the European Parliament voted to suspend accession negotiations with Turkey over human rights and rule of law concerns. Although a non-binding decision, its symbolic value is arguably of importance. This development also coincides with a major drop in AKP and MHP support rates for EU membership in Turkish parliamentary discourse.

Another possible driver for the CHP's and Kurdish Party Family's support for EU membership during this phase is the increasing authoritarian grip of the AKP. Beginning in the early 2010s, and finally reaching an apex with the presidential system referendum in the aftermath of 2016 coup attempt, the AKP has been steadily expanding its executive powers while dismantling democratic checks and balances in a step by step fashion. This period was marked by harsh measures against opposition figures, the breakdown of the peace process and the revival of armed conflict with the PKK. It is probably no surprise that during this phase, the de facto coalition between the AKP and MHP increasingly rejects EU membership

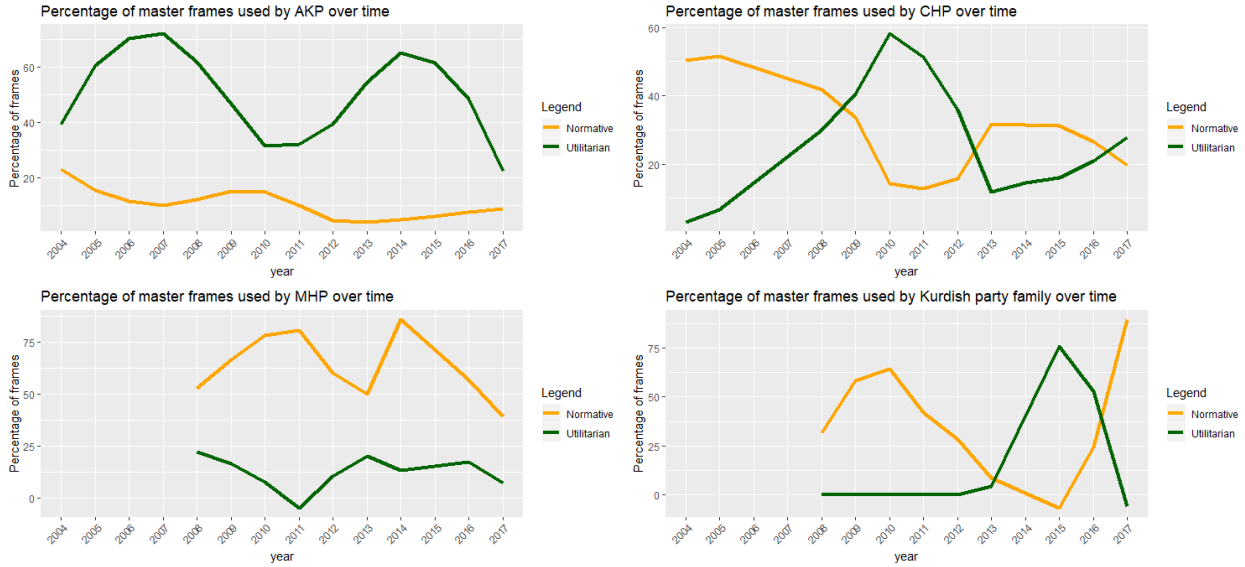


Figure 6: Use of master-frames in Turkish political discourse

while the opposition camp, consisting of the CHP and Kurdish ethnic party, increases support which goes along with stronger emphasis on the material and normative benefits of EU membership. These two “strange bedfellows” come together in their common goal of fending off democratic backsliding by using the EU anchor.

Turning back to our theoretical expectations, observations in Figures 5 and 6 seem to be in line with hypotheses 1_a , 1_b , and 1_d while providing scant to little evidence in favor of hypotheses 2_a and 2_b . Although there were fluctuations, both the CHP and AKP exhibited overwhelming support for EU membership. With regards to hypothesis 1_b , Figure 6 shows that AKP had predominately utilized utilitarian justifications pro EU membership while CHP does not demonstrate a clear-cut justification structure. Hence, the empirical observation only partially support hypothesis 1_b . With respect to hypothesis 1_c , the data is ambivalent. In the case of the ultranationalist MHP, temporal observations indeed show that they were either skeptic of EU membership or completely against. By contrast, the Kurdish Party family on EU membership contradicts with the expectations in hypothesis 1_c . As discussed before, it is more probable that, as representatives of the largest minority group in Turkey, MPs affiliated with these parties view EU membership as a vital instrument for the protection

of minority rights. The evidence at hand gives only limited credence to hypothesis 1_c. As for the framing practices of MHP and Kurdish Party Family, the data supports hypothesis 1_d. The MHP made more use of normative reasoning during the period of enthusiasm (2006-2012). Afterwards, the ultranationalist MPs seem to utilize both normative and utilitarian reasoning in tandem to justify their skeptical and negative positions. Kurdish parties also make heavy use of normative reasoning during the enthusiasm period. In particular, between 2013 and 2015, there is a distinct increase in the use of utilitarian frames by MPs affiliated with Kurdish ethnic parties. By 2015, 75% of all claims made by these MPs supported EU membership on the basis of utilitarian benefits while they switched back to normative reasoning in the post-2015 period.

In sum, our longitudinal analysis lends only limited support to the strategic model as an approach to explain party positioning on and framing of EU membership in the TBMM. Although the governing party AKP had been supportive of EU membership, opposition parties seem to position themselves on this issue based more on ideology and contextual factors rather than simple strategic calculations. Hence, it is warranted that we reiterate our earlier conjecture: in the case of Turkish parliamentary discourse on membership to EU, the ideological model in tandem with contextual factors appears to be a more promising avenue towards understanding the structure of EU membership discourse in Turkey and its evolution over time.

Concluding remarks

Our objective with this paper has been to make a first attempt at mapping the discursive landscape in the Turkish parliament on the issue of EU membership. Even if EU membership prospects seem wide out of reach these days, there certainly remains something to learn by listening to those talking on the sidelines.

Our analysis has yielded a fine-grained picture with respect to the structure and devel-

opment of the overall Turkish political discourse, party positioning and framing between 2004 and 2017. First, the widespread assumption that Turkish political discourse on EU membership turned negative after the start of accession negotiations in 2005 appears to be too sweeping an argument. There has in fact been a drop in the support rate between 2004 and 2006; however, this was a temporary dynamic shortly after giving place to an increasingly supportive stance for EU membership. Second, with respect to the AKP, we were not able to find a rising Euroscepticism since the beginning of its second term in office (2007). At least in the parliamentary discourse, as our data indicates, more lukewarm stances begin taking roots only after 2011/2012.

Theoretically speaking, our results indicate that existing theories on party positioning (the ideological and strategic model) provide only limited insights in the Turkish case. This may be related to three structural features. First, the ideological model with its inverted U-curve finding sprang out of research on EU member states. It is conceivable that this model is restricted by this very scope condition and holds only limited veracity in the context of candidate countries, perhaps even less so in cases where membership down the road is deeply contested by EU member states such as Turkey. Second and more specifically, political cleavages in Turkey deviate from their European counterparts. In Turkey, as a leading scholar puts it, “the ‘right’ refers to a commitment to religious, conservative and nationalist values, while the ‘left’ is defined primarily in terms of secularism. . . .” (Özbudun, 2006, 135). Mardin (1972) finds the main cleavage in Turkey to play out between the so-called center and periphery which describes a perennial conflict between a centralized and heavily secularist state elite against a more traditional, conservative periphery with strong religious orientations. Third, EU membership credibility is questionable in the Turkish case, to say the least. Given the weakness of the EU anchor, and this point now alludes to the strategic model’s applicability in the Turkish case, parties may be hesitant to compete around this issue, and probably less so the more remote the membership perspective becomes. Fourth, contextual factors may also go some way in accounting for variation in the Turkish EU membership discourse

as explicated farther above. In sum, classic theories of party positioning appear to provide some first-cut approach to make sense of the Turkish EU membership discourse, but are best aligned with contextual factors towards explaining variation in temporal dynamics.

Now that the discursive landscape is mapped, it will be possible to assess systematic linkages with other attendant topics such as EU rule adoption or democratization. For instance, are changes in party orientation on EU membership related to the speed and extent of EU law adoption and democratization in Turkey? Does discourse precede political change or vice versa?

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Appendix

Description of overarching SNF Project

The project ‘Constructing Europe’s borders’ is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and seeks to map, trace and explain the European discourse on ‘membership’. It does so based on a dataset of membership-related statements in parliamentary debates since 2004 in the European Parliament and in selected national parliaments of member and nonmember states of the EU. We are interested both in the positions that speakers in parliaments take on the membership issues on the agenda and in the frames they use to motivate and justify their positions. The project includes debates of the European Parliament and a multitude of national parliaments from the beginning of 2004 to the end of 2017. Germany, France, Poland, the UK, Greece, Hungary, Serbia, Turkey, Switzerland, Armenia, Moldova, Ukraine.

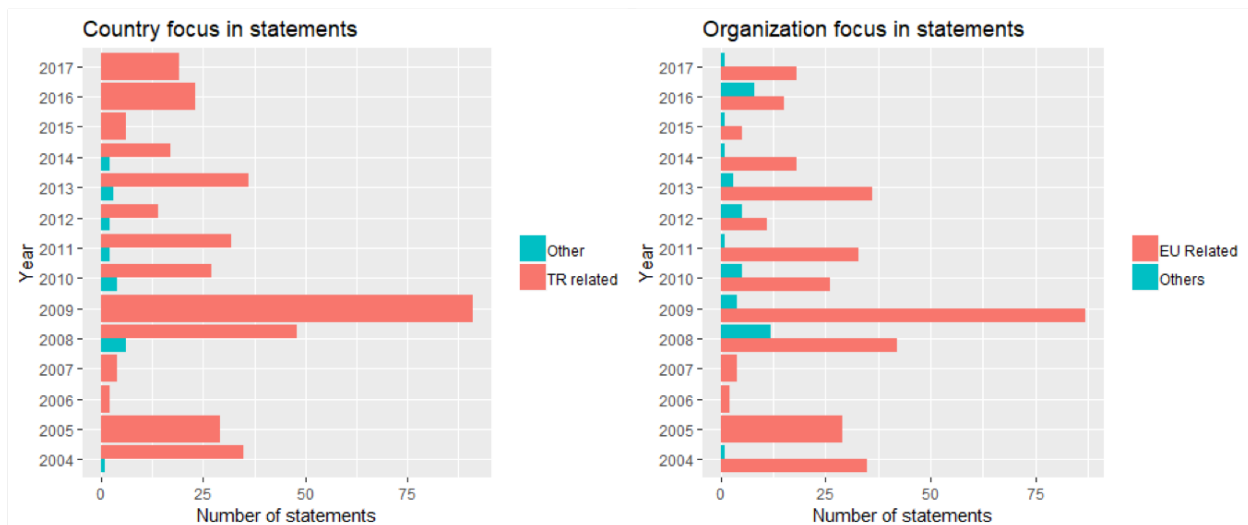


Figure 7: Country and organization focus in membership-related statements

The project coding follows a modified variant of the core-sentence method (Kriesi et al. 2012) and is largely in line with political claims analysis as developed by Koopmans and Statham (1999). Their coding breaks down claims into seven elements: (1) the location of the claim in time and space, (2) the actor making the claim (subject actor), (3) the form of the claim, or how the claim enters the public sphere, (4) the addressee of the claim, (5) the substantive content of the claim, (6) the object actor who would be influenced by the claim, and (7) the frame, or justification for the claim. We adopt most of these elements, but omit the form, addressee and object actors of the claim. Instead, we code actors and issues in more detail.

Coding examples

- «European Union membership is a strategic goal for Turkey ... for the country to attain a healthier structure by implementing internal reforms» (Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, TBMM plenary debate, 18 December 2009).
 - coding: support for EU membership, based on utilitarian frame, argument revolves around cost-benefit calculations.
- «We should not lose the sight of [EU] full membership prospect... [EU membership process] is vital for the improvement and stability of our democracy and rule of law.» (CHP MP, Umut Oran, TBMM plenary debate, 08 May 2013)
 - coding: support for EU membership, based on normative frame, argument revolves around liberal democracy/human rights/rule of law.

Additional descriptive statistics

Figure 7 depicts the distribution of statements by country and organization focus. Interestingly, most membership-related statements relate to Turkey itself, very few statements were uttered

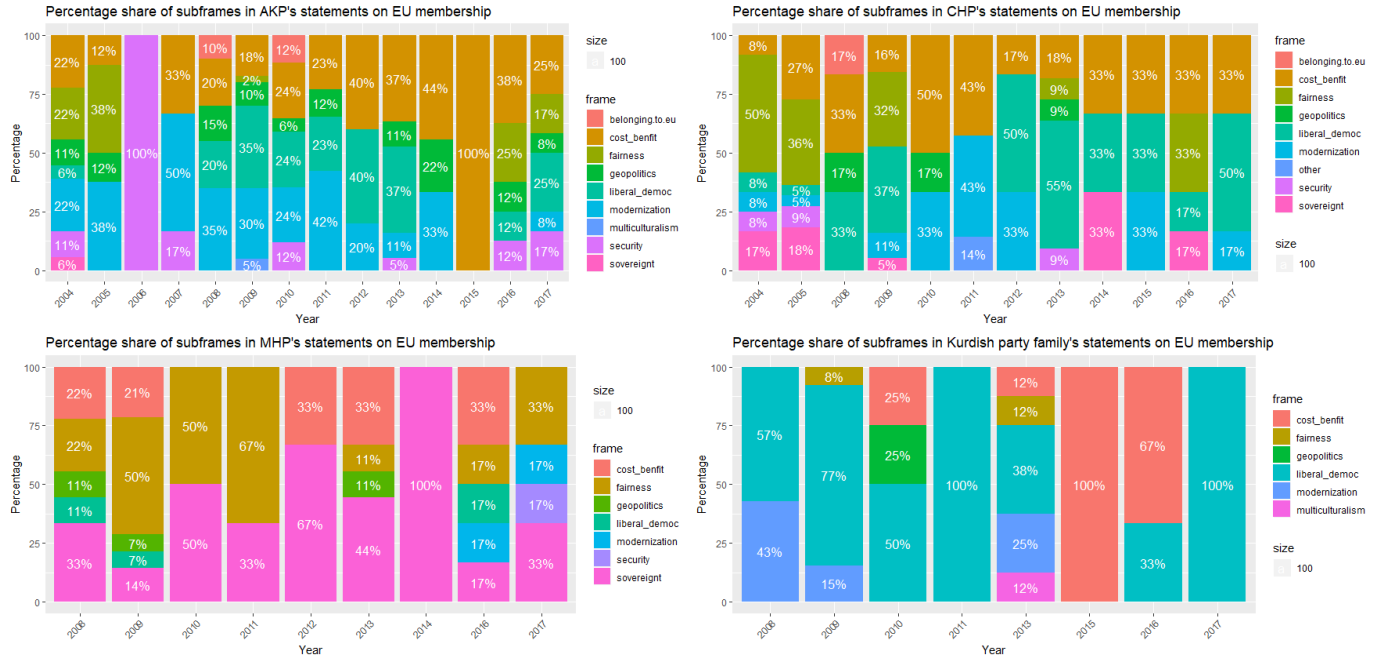


Figure 8: Use of sub-frames by party and per year

with respect to other countries' memberships in regional organizations (left-panel in Figure 7). What is more, among those membership-related statements made in the Turkish assembly, most are in fact EU related (right-panel in Figure 7). Discursively, this would attest to (a) the EU being a central force of attraction in Turkish political discourse and (b) content centering on Turkey itself rather than other countries.

Figure 8 breaks down the use of sub-frames by political party and per year. Two clear-cut patterns stand out: First, the ultranationalist MHP uses plenty of sovereignty and fairness related arguments and does so rather consistently over time. Second, the ethnic Kurdish party family habitually resorts to liberal democracy related frames. By contrast, the AKP and CHP exhibit a more diverse use of arguments.