



Narratives in Flux: Turkish Elite Perspectives on Germany's Role in EU–Turkey Relations

Ebru Ece Özbey & Atila Eralp

To cite this article: Ebru Ece Özbey & Atila Eralp (2025) Narratives in Flux: Turkish Elite Perspectives on Germany's Role in EU–Turkey Relations, *German Politics*, 34:4, 845-868, DOI: [10.1080/09644008.2025.2530964](https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2025.2530964)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2025.2530964>



© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



[View supplementary material](#)



Published online: 31 Jul 2025.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 267



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)

Narratives in Flux: Turkish Elite Perspectives on Germany's Role in EU–Turkey Relations

EBRU ECE ÖZBEY ^{a,b} and ATILA ERALP ^c

^aMax Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, Cologne, Germany; ^bCologne Center for Comparative Politics (CCCP), University of Cologne, Cologne, Germany; ^cIstanbul Policy Center, Sabancı University, Karaköy, Turkey

ABSTRACT

This article examines the evolving narratives within the Turkish elite regarding EU–Turkey relations, focusing on Germany's pivotal role. Drawing on in-depth interviews with high-level stakeholders in Turkey, it explores how these narratives have shifted over time, particularly in response to significant milestones. The findings reveal increasing complexity and negativity in discussions surrounding EU–Turkey–Germany relations, driven by new geopolitical challenges that compound unresolved historical grievances. Whereas Germany was once perceived as a central actor promoting Turkey's EU integration, it is now viewed as prioritising pragmatic, interest-driven engagements, resulting in a less cohesive vision for the relationship's future. This shift is attributed to the rise of transactionalism under former German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the current leadership vacuum in both German and broader European politics. Despite this, the Turkish elite remains rhetorically committed to EU membership. While alternative forms of partnership are unequivocally rejected, there is openness to reinterpreting what membership could entail within a reformed and more flexible EU framework, with Germany acknowledged as the key member state. The interviews further reflect a widespread belief that sustained dialogue is essential to prevent a complete rupture in relations and safeguard opportunities for future cooperation amid evolving regional and global dynamics.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 19 November 2024; Accepted 2 May 2025

Introduction

More than sixty years since the signing of the Ankara Agreement, which historically cemented the association between Turkey and the European Union (EU), the relationship between the two parties remains one of the most consequential yet persistently fraught pillars of the EU's external affairs. Over the

CONTACT Ebru Ece  oezbey@wiso.uni-koeln.de  Cologne Center for Comparative Politics (CCCP), University of Cologne, Herbert-Lewin-Str. 2, Cologne, 50931, Germany

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

decades, Turkey's progress towards accession has been slow and sporadic, eliciting mixed reactions of enthusiasm and scepticism among Turkish and European citizens alike (Lindgaard 2018; Şenyuva 2018). In recent years, this already tenuous partnership has been further strained by a series of external geopolitical shocks – most notably Russia's invasion of Ukraine and escalating conflicts in the Middle East, South Caucasus, and Africa – which have compounded long-standing bilateral challenges such as the Eastern Mediterranean disputes and the Cyprus issue. These overlapping crises have not only aggravated political rhetoric on both sides but also heralded a new and uncertain phase in the relationship. Yet, despite its strategic weight, the perspectives of political elites who play a central role in shaping both domestic discourse and foreign policy orientations have remained surprisingly underexplored.

Officially launched in 2005, the accession negotiations between Turkey and the EU have consistently faced significant impediments. In 2006, the Council of the EU restricted the opening of eight negotiation chapters in response to Turkey's refusal to extend its customs union with the EU to include new member states, notably the Republic of Cyprus (Council of the EU 2006). Subsequently, vetoes by the Republic of Cyprus and France on various chapters have further obstructed progress. As a result, only a minority of the required negotiation chapters, 16 out of 35, have been opened, with just one reaching provisional closure after nearly two decades.

The stagnation of this process has had far-reaching political consequences. In Turkey, the profound resentment and strong nationalist sentiments arising from the 'virtual breakdown of the negotiation process and the absence of any credible commitment to Turkey's membership' (Öniş and Kutlay 2019, 244) have been effectively leveraged by the ruling elite to promote a new discourse imbued with heightened Euroscepticism. This was accompanied by a shift from a 'logic of interdependence' to 'an assertive quest for "autonomy"' (Kutlay and Öniş 2021, 1085) in foreign policy, leading to deepened engagements with countries like Russia and China, thereby weakening Turkey's image as a staunch member of the Western alliance. Meanwhile, the EU's criticism of Turkey has intensified, propelled by accusations of severe democratic backsliding, breaches of the separation of powers, human rights violations, and aggressive foreign policy moves (European Parliament 2017). Consequently, relations deteriorated to a 'historic low' when the Council of the EU, following the European Parliament's repeated calls to freeze the accession process, declared that the negotiations had 'effectively [come] to a standstill and no further chapters [could] be considered for opening or closing' (Council of the EU 2018, 13).

While Turkey's EU membership remains the ultimate goal in principle, with the accession process still formally in place, there is an evident lack of consensus on how to achieve it. Amid this stalemate, certain actors

arguably wield a disproportionate degree of influence over the trajectory of the EU–Turkey relationship. Germany stands out as a pivotal player in this context, holding notable weight in shaping the future of relations through diplomatic efforts, economic cooperation, and shared policy objectives. The country’s stature as the largest economy in the EU grants it considerable leverage in formulating Union-wide policies (Iso-Markku and Müller-Brandek-Bocquet 2019). This economic power translates into political clout, highlighting Germany’s diplomatic prowess in steering the direction of interactions between the EU and Turkey (see also Turhan et al. 2025). Since the United Kingdom (UK), once a major player in the EU, exited the bloc, Germany’s strategic importance, together with that of France, has further surged, amplifying its sway over decisions – particularly in areas such as energy, defence, and security (Daehnhardt 2018; Iso-Markku and Müller-Brandek-Bocquet 2019; see also Smith and Tekin 2025).

Germany’s historical, cultural, and economic ties with Turkey further underscore its distinctive position in EU–Turkey affairs (Reiners and Tekin 2019). The countries’ political and diplomatic connections date back to their alliances in World War I, laying the groundwork for subsequent decades of cooperation. Culturally, the substantial Turkish diaspora in Germany fosters a unique bond, shaping societal interactions and enhancing interest in domestic affairs on both sides. Economically, Germany ranks among Turkey’s principal partners, with extensive mutual investments and trade agreements that reinforce their interdependence. This multifaceted sense of connection elevates Germany’s position relative to other member states, making it the primary focus of this paper. Conversely, for all its centrality, Germany’s role remains curiously overlooked in analyses that foreground Turkish political perspectives.

This article addresses this gap by examining how Turkish elites currently narrate the relationship between Turkey, the EU, and Germany. It seeks to explicate the complexities of the stalled accession process, assess Germany’s role in its potential revival, and contribute to the emerging scholarship on narratives surrounding the trilateral relations in two foundational aspects. First, the article relies on semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in Turkey, offering invaluable empirical insights unobtainable from other data sources. Second, while considering the evolution of relations and narratives over time, the article situates these insights within the context of the most recent regional and global disruptions, shedding light on how key moments and related actors are framed, contested, and reimagined in contemporary elite discourses. Although not exhaustive of all viewpoints, the selection of interviewees, as detailed below and in the [Online Appendix](#), captures a significant cross-section of views, illuminating the interplay between ideological standpoints and broader perspectives concerning the parties involved. Overall, the article argues that Turkish elites perceive Germany

as both an indispensable actor and a source of frustration in the stalled accession process and that this ambivalence reflects a broader narrative shift from transformative engagement to institutionalised transactionalism in EU–Turkey relations.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows: first, a concise overview of the narrative analysis approach is presented, highlighting its merits in studying EU–Turkey relations, along with details on the data collection methods and analytical framework. This is followed by a summary of the key commonalities among elite stories concerning EU–Turkey relations, particularly character portrayals and historical milestones. The subsequent two sections respectively explore Germany’s perceived role and influence within these stories, both historically and contemporarily, and examine the purported shift towards transactionalism and increased political pragmatism. The article concludes by reflecting on Turkish elite perspectives on the relationship’s *finalité* and proposing potential avenues for future research.

Narratives and EU–Turkey Relations

Narratives are considered ‘one of the most basic means of sense-making’ (Oppermann and Spencer 2022, 117). Broadly defined, they are stories that unfold in a sequence with a beginning, middle, and end, structured within a coherent plot (Somers 1992; 1994). These stories feature characters situated ‘in time and space, where events interact with the actions of the characters and the world around them’ (Jones, McBeth, and Shanahan 2014, 1). While they may highlight certain aspects of reality while downplaying others or explore hypothetical situations in the future, the primary meaning-making function of narratives lies in the coverage of events in specific temporal order, distinguishing them from other rhetorical tools such as frames (Entman 1993; Snow and Benford 1988) or schemas (Graber 1984).

Narratives are also interpretive devices about reality, albeit from the particular standpoint of the storyteller, used to communicate information in social interactions at both micro and macro levels. In politics, they are central to discursive construction, contextualising decisions, legitimising policies, shaping public opinion, and guiding diplomatic relations (Somers 1994). Particularly in foreign affairs, actors craft and disseminate narratives about their country as a global player and its past, present, and future relations, aiming to shape the political landscape and influence the behaviour of both domestic and international audiences (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle 2013; Oppermann and Spencer 2016).

Research on political narratives can adopt various approaches. On the one hand, it can focus on the implications of narratives, for instance, by examining their strategic use by the political elite (Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle 2013) as well as their impact on public opinion (de Graaf, Dimitriu,

and Ringsmose 2015; Schmitt 2018) and policy adoption (van Noort and Colley 2021). On the other hand, the storification process or the storyteller(s) can be the focus of inquiry, addressing questions about structures of narratives (Oppermann and Spencer 2016; 2022), temporality (Büthe 2002), identity (Bamberg 2009), or the role of emotions (Clément, Lindemann, and Sangar 2017). Studying narratives from an empirical content analytic perspective and relying on elite interviews, this paper aligns more closely with the latter strand of research. While acknowledging the role of narratives in shaping attitudes and behaviour on both the supply and demand sides of politics, its primary objective is to examine the underlying perceptions, assumptions, and expectations they convey. Specifically, the analysis centres on elites' recounting of past experiences linked to their projections about the future and on the commonalities that converge into one dominant, collective story. It is through these contested yet overlapping storylines that broader structural shifts in the EU–Turkey–Germany relationship are refracted and rearticulated, revealing how political actors frame continuity, rupture, and strategic recalibration.

Cooperation of any sort necessitates a certain understanding of the perceived realities of all parties involved, if not a complete consensus. Elucidating the constructed set of facts based on different experiences, therefore, is the essential first step towards communication and agreement. Translating these experiences into meaningful stories involves decisions about actors, themes, and moral backdrops for the storyline. It entails descriptions of the key characters and the problematisation of issues at hand, revealing the normative rationales and drivers for conflict and resolution between the parties involved. In the context of the EU–Turkey–Germany triangle, this mandates dissecting the stories from all sides, each deeply embedded within distinct historical, cultural, and geopolitical contexts, to better understand the dynamics of their relationship, uncover shifts in political meaning-making, address complex challenges, and seek common ground in the pursuit of enhancing the partnership.

Thus, it is unsurprising that a growing body of literature has emerged to explore the complex and evolving narratives surrounding EU–Turkey relations. Comparative studies, such as those by Hauge et al. (2019) Özbey et al. (2021), and Özbey, Hauge, and Eralp (2022), have provided valuable insights into the evolution of Turkish and European narratives and their increasingly adversarial dynamics since the inception of official relations, emphasising the significance of critical milestones and identity representations within these stories. Focusing specifically on Turkish narratives, Yılmaz (2019) identified a 'discursive shift from EU-phoria to EU-phobia' in President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's speeches, driven by shifting sentiments and strategic priorities from 1999 to 2017. On the European side, Wessels (2020) documented increasingly conflict-oriented narratives in European

Council conclusions from the 1970s to 2019, which Wessels and Suratlı (2021) further developed for the period from 2016 to 2021. Similarly, Turhan and Wessels (2021, 208) highlighted a recent turn towards a narrative on the European side that questions Turkey's reliability as a partner, complicating the prospects of deepening EU–Turkey relations, 'even on a primarily transactional and sector-specific basis'. Expanding the discussion beyond bilateral relations, the edited volume by Tekin and Schönlaue (2022) examined the EU–German–Turkish triangle, offering analyses of diverse narratives across different contexts and periods. Their work underscored the increasing 'differences of storylines in the EU, Germany, and Turkey respectively' (Schönlaue and Tekin 2022, 188), pointing to a 'stagnating and increasingly conflictual relationship' (198).

These studies have commendably mapped the historical narratives that have emerged in EU–Turkey–Germany relations from different perspectives and noted their complex and dynamic nature, often influenced by critical junctures affecting the state of relations. Together, they have consistently indicated an increasing negativity in, and discrepancies between, them over time. However, our understanding of contemporary narratives in this context remained underexplored, as the data collection for existing studies concluded before the most recent regional and global developments could be considered. The past couple of years have seen incredible shifts in geopolitical dynamics, encompassing not only the UK's departure from the EU but also substantial disruptions to the global economy following the COVID-19 pandemic, new security and migration imperatives following Russia's incursion into Ukraine, and the re-escalation of the Israel–Hamas conflict, followed by a war in Gaza. Recognising the intricate connection of political narratives to critical junctures, it is thus essential to extend the research to fully grasp potential shifts in storylines against the backdrop of these unfolding events.

Furthermore, aligned with the objective to analyse past narratives retrospectively, existing research has largely relied on thematic content analysis of textual data from speeches, statements, and official documents. To our knowledge, no study to date has harnessed the potential of interviews with key informants to gather personal insights and enhance the understanding of the contextual influences on these narratives. Narratives are inherently tied to their narrators and need to be told 'in and for a specific context, reproduced and rearticulated by embedded political actors' (Boswell 2022, 334). In this regard, interviews stand out as a particularly potent method and remain one of the most useful and preferred forms of qualitative data collection for narrative analysis (Boswell 2022; Czarniawska 2004). They excel at providing 'an observation of how stories are made, an opportunity for story collection, and a possibility to provoke storytelling' for researchers (Czarniawska 2004, 14). Their flexibility enables the exploration of unexpected themes and clarification

of complex issues in real time. Moreover, interviews build rapport and trust, leading to candid responses and making them particularly valuable for accessing the plurivocal realm of elite perspectives. As such, they offer a unique entry point for empirical inquiries like this one, which trace the contours of elite narratives within evolving constellations of power and partnership.

Data and Method

This article endeavours to investigate the contemporary narratives promulgated by the Turkish elite concerning the EU–Turkey relationship. Central to this investigation, however, is understanding how Germany, as a pivotal actor, is perceived and articulated within these narratives. To achieve this, the article employs a dual-methodological approach, combining in-depth elite interviews with thematic content analysis. Data collection occurred from December 2023 to July 2024 and involved a research trip to Ankara, Turkey, supplemented by several virtual meetings, culminating in 16 interviews with bureaucrats, technocrats, politicians, and experts. Participants were selected purposively to ensure variation in institutional experience and political orientation and included both former and current officials from the Turkish national parliament, ministerial offices, diplomatic envoys, and representatives from prominent non-governmental organisations. All interviews were conducted in Turkish; the translations presented in the following sections are the authors' own. Some original-language excerpts for direct quotations appear in the Online Appendix, particularly where interpretive nuance may be significant. All quoted material is attributed to interviewees using randomly assigned numbers (e.g. Interview #9) to preserve anonymity.

The interviews followed a semi-structured format, addressing critical topics such as historical milestones in EU–Turkey relations, perceptions concerning the trilateral interactions, key issues, and potential trajectories for the relationship. Moreover, to augment the data and expand the political and ideological spectrum of the sources, a variety of publicly accessible materials were also incorporated as needed. The data derived from these interviews underwent rigorous qualitative analysis, enabling a meticulous dissection and synthesis of the respondents' insights. The employment of the MaxQDA software facilitated the systematic coding of recurring motifs, emotional tones, and nuances in the storylines. The combined use of inductive and deductive methods in the development of the codebook enabled the integration of the empirical richness of the data with the theoretical rigour derived from existing literature, thereby enhancing both the depth and coherence of the analysis. (The resulting codebook and analytical structure are outlined in the Online Appendix.) The following sections of this paper present the insights gleaned from this detailed examination, illuminating

the complex tapestry of elite perspectives and offering a deeper understanding of the dynamics shaping these stories.

Turkish Narratives on EU–Turkey Relations: Commitment to Membership and Historical Milestones

Analysis of the interviews with the Turkish elite reveals a rich spectrum of stories about EU–Turkey relations, each contributing distinct perspectives on key figures, timelines, and future trajectories. Due to space constraints, this section does not reconstruct each interview as a full narrative arc; rather, it identifies recurring elements, such as central character descriptions, critical junctures, emotional tones, and expectations, which together form the building blocks of collective elite meaning-making. It thereby brings to light cross-cutting patterns while preserving analytical clarity and thematic coherence, providing a foundation for the subsequent discussion on Germany’s role and influence.

The findings reflect a blend of aspiration and realism within the Turkish elite regarding EU accession. Though full membership is deemed unlikely in the near future, it remains the ultimate objective, consistent with prior observations (Özbey et al. 2021). EU accession was framed as ‘a matter of national interest’, encompassing ‘being a decision-maker in a body with global influence’ (Interview #12), thereby increasing the country’s affluence in the broader region (Interview #4) and contributing to its economic recovery, reassurance, and international credibility (Interview #14). Turkey was commonly portrayed as ‘a country striving to be Western for a century’ (Interview #6) and a bridge connecting Europe to Asia, Africa, and the Middle East (Interview #4). Its deep cultural and historical ties with Europe were frequently emphasised, with one respondent affirming that Turkey’s ‘European-ness is unquestionable’ (Interview #8), while another clarified that doubts regarding this identity arise only from certain European counterparts – not all – and not from Turkey (Interview #6). This portrayal was bolstered by the belief in Turkey’s critical role in securing and stabilising Europe (Interview #8) as ‘the most powerful actor in the region’ (Interview #10), underscoring its significance not merely as a neighbour but as an integral participant in European affairs.

Nevertheless, descriptions of Turkey were not without self-criticism. All respondents noted that EU membership has waned as a priority on Turkey’s political agenda and acknowledged, to varying degrees, the political missteps that have hindered Turkey’s alignment with EU accession criteria. Many respondents mentioned increasing authoritarian tendencies in the country (e.g. Interviews #4, 11, 13, 14, 16), with one arguing that autocracy has become entrenched across ideological divisions (Interview #4). Some pointed to factions within the bureaucracy and government that have not

internalised the European identity (Interview #6) and exploited the EU's criticism as a pretext to 'shift the blame' without advancing accession efforts (Interviews #5, 6). One interviewee described these factions as 'highly corruptible' (Interview #4) and self-serving, suggesting a lack of genuine commitment.

Importantly, these criticisms often framed Turkey's drift from European values as a reaction to the EU's 'stalling' (Interview #15), 'imposing unjust conditions' (Interview #11), and 'being hypocritical since the outset, and working for its own interests' (Interview #6). One respondent questioned whether 'Turkey's story would be different today, had its accession process not been blocked only one year after it started in 2005' (Interview #11). Others noted that 'discussions d[id] not seem to be taking place on a fair basis [...] among equals' (Interview #13), highlighting the difficulties of 'not being able to trust your partner in the negotiations' (Interview #4). Respondents also pointed to undemocratic and illiberal trends within the EU (Interviews #8, 10, 14, 15), citing examples involving both current and potential member states. Some argued that the EU had compromised its core values in response to recent events, such as 'remaining silent about the coup in Egypt' or 'failing to sanction the use of chemical weapons in Syria' (Interview #13). Reflecting on Gaza, one respondent asserted that 'the prestige of the entire Western value system, international law, and international institutions [wa]s in ruins', further asserting that 'Germany le[d] in shame and disgrace' (Interview #7).

Despite intensified negativity and sharp criticism towards both sides regarding the stalled accession process, Turkey's EU membership was widely seen as mutually beneficial in addressing current domestic, regional, and global challenges. The EU was perceived as being in retreat, facing a troubled future against economic and military powers such as the United States, China, and Russia (Interview #7). Respondents described the Union's unanimity-based decision-making mechanism as archaic and cumbersome (Interviews #1, 7, 10, 13), highlighting that members' veto power obstructed swift decision-making and hindered cohesive collective action (Interviews #6, 8, 12, 15). Turkey's dynamic economy, strong infrastructure, flexible labour force, and access to key markets (Interview #8) were seen as pivotal in discussions about the EU's inevitable structural transformation and its efforts to reclaim influence in international affairs.

While membership was recognised as beneficial, even necessary, for both sides, respondents highlighted how the unusually protracted negotiation process had not only bred resentment in Turkey but also strained the relationship into more entrenched and intractable challenges. Regarding the first point, one respondent expressed 'great appreciation of Turkey looking back (...) for putting in a genuine effort and doing everything possible to comply with the *Acquis*' (Interview #8) despite numerous obstacles,

while another noted ‘the serious patience Turkey has shown’, arguing that ‘the EU, above all, should greatly appreciate this patience’ (Interview #7).

On the second point, respondents emphasised that the prolonged process has further complicated relations due to the growing number of EU members with diverse interests and emerging issues, such as digital governance and green transformation, adding to existing complications. Similarly, in light of the parties’ failure to achieve stronger institutional integration, the modernisation of the Customs Union, trade irritants and, most critically, the growing discord between Turkish and EU foreign policies were cited as examples of novel points of contention (Interviews #2, 3, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16). The lack of a coherent foreign policy framework between parties was seen as driving Turkey’s assertive actions and pursuit of strategic autonomy, particularly in conflict zones such as Syria, Libya, and the Caucasus, further diverging from the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and creating regional rivalries.

In discussing critical junctures in EU–Turkey relations, respondents largely exhibited similar perspectives (see Online Appendix). Notably, they devoted considerably more attention to discussing negative milestones than positive ones, suggesting a prevailing sentiment of dissatisfaction and despair. They characterised these milestones as having a dual impact: On the one hand, these events were claimed to elicit – at times conflicting – reactions on the European side: for some, they heightened existing concerns about Turkey’s democratic backsliding, erosion of the rule of law, and restrictions on freedoms; for others, they offered a glimmer of hope, highlighting the resilience of civic and political opposition.

For instance, one respondent remarked that the 2016 coup attempt ‘came as a shock’ to Europeans, underscoring Turkey’s perceived immaturity and susceptibility to ‘old stories’ (Interview #11). The government’s subsequent security-focused measures were interpreted by the EU as a retreat from democratic principles. Conversely, albeit for a minority of Europeans, events like the Gezi Protests were interpreted as a powerful affirmation of ‘the resilience of [Turkish] civil society’ (Interview #11). One interviewee noted, for instance, that some activists and Green Party MPs from Germany were ‘directly involved in the [protests]’ (Interview #1), showing keen solidarity but ultimately becoming disillusioned with the government’s response.

On the other hand, respondents drew attention to the shifting perceptions and sentiments within Turkey in light of European positions taken at these key milestones. For example, the fact that the EU criticised the Turkish government’s handling of the Gezi Protests, rather than condemning the protestors, was said to have sparked an uproar within Turkey’s ruling circles and deeply fractured Erdoğan’s trust in European partners. As ‘paranoia that the West want[ed] his government to fall’ set in, ‘historical injustice

towards the country' was believed to have 'transformed into personal injustice' for Erdoğan and his courtiers (Interview #11), deepening their resentment and criticism of the EU.

These feelings were particularly reinforced by European partners' delayed reaction to the 2016 coup attempt. Respondents reported that the lack of 'a swift and correct response from the EU' created 'a breaking point [...] not only rhetorically, but also emotionally' (Interview #12). The momentary silence, viewed by multiple respondents as a deliberate 'wait and see tactic', blatantly contradicted the EU's own democratic values, plunging the relationship into a 'vicious cycle', where both sides 'became increasingly distant in body and soul' (Interview #2). Germany's slow response in denouncing this unlawful attempt was particularly noted, evoking stronger reactions than with other countries. Notably, unlike the Gezi protests, this emotional rupture is reported to have transcended the circles of the ruling party and resonated more widely across all bureaucrats and politicians regardless of their ideological alignments.

The 2019 EU Council Decision (Council of the EU 2019), which suspended the High-Level Dialogues, reduced pre-accession assistance, and asked the European Investment Bank to review its lending activities in Turkey, was recounted in this context. This decision was deemed a milestone for its significant implications for the accession process, by endorsing the position that 'there would be no progress (...) under the current conditions' (Interview #15) and leaving no door open for negotiation or dialogue. A particularly poignant aspect of this decision, however, was its announcement on July 15, the anniversary of the coup attempt. One respondent stated that there were requests from the Turkish side to the EU to announce it 'any other day but July 15', drawing attention to the date's symbolic meaning. The EU's decision to proceed as planned was said to have harmed 'not only the relations but [people in Turkey] psychologically' (Interview #15). Realising the European partners were unable to understand or empathise with the trauma that resulted from this event was described as causing 'a sadness like never before' (Interview #15).

Overall, Turkish narratives depict both Turkey and the EU with a degree of criticism and negativity. Although the deep connections between the parties and the necessity for further integration are widely acknowledged – and the overarching goal of EU membership remains intact – aspirations for accession are hindered by a range of internal and external challenges, both longstanding and emerging. While the Turkish elite recognises some improvement in relations since the previous low point in 2018, optimism remains subdued, as the relationship is mired in broader geopolitical complexities and sustained by persistent hostility and tension. These collective narratives thus not only capture the affective and normative contours of elite disillusionment but also provide the discursive setting within which

Germany's recalibrated role as both constraint and conduit is increasingly interpreted.

Germany's Role in EU–Turkey Relations and the Transactional Turn

Germany's influence as a decisive actor in EU policy-making was a recurring theme in the interviews, with one respondent capturing this perception by stating: 'Maybe not everything [Germans] want happens, but what they do not want definitely does not happen' (Interview #12). This influence was perceived to extend to Turkey's quest for membership, as the EU–Turkey relationship was 'unlikely to find a stable footing without Germany' (Interview #4). Germany was considered pivotal in various milestones since Turkey's official application to the Union, including the launch of the Customs Union in 1995 (Interviews #6, 11), the 1997 Luxembourg Summit, which excluded Turkey from the next round of enlargement (Interviews #1, 2, 6, 8, 15, 16), and 1999 Helsinki Summit, where Turkey's status was elevated from applicant to candidate (Interviews #1, 2, 6, 8, 15, 16). The ruling Social Democratic and Green Party coalition of the day was viewed as supportive of Turkey's EU aspirations by the Turkish elite. The then-Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and Vice-Chancellor Joschka Fischer were particularly praised for taking a proactive stance not only publicly but also behind the scenes (Interview #2). One respondent cited the example of the secret correspondence between then Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit and Schröder in 1999, which was later made public, revealing Turkey's pledge of full commitment to EU membership and Germany's promise to support Turkey's candidacy, and stated that the Helsinki decision was 'entirely thanks to Germany' (Interview #15).

Beyond its role in key diplomatic junctures, Germany emerged in these accounts as a symbol of the EU's shifting ethos, from principled alignment to conditional engagement, highlighting a broader transformation in how the partnership is imagined. In this context, the Turkish elite viewed Chancellor Angela Merkel's tenure more negatively, describing Germany's approach to Turkish accession during her leadership as 'wishy-washy' (Interview #6) and burdened by added conditionalities as a prerequisite for advancing the relationship. The 'invention of the "privileged partnership" as a substitute for full membership' was attributed to the Franco-German axis (Interview #16), while the initiatives such as Positive Agenda(s) – perceived as a side-track to accession – and imposition of 'scrutiny' requirements for Turkey beyond the usual 'screening' of candidates were viewed as 'creative attempts led by Germany' (Interview #15). Merkel's key role, however, was most vividly remembered in the context of the 2016 EU–Turkey Statement on irregular migration (Council of the EU 2016), commonly referred to as 'the Migration Deal'. Many respondents identified this statement as the

most significant milestone in recent history (Interviews #1, 2, 4, 6, 11, 13, 14, 16). While some recalled it as a collaborative effort motivated by sincere convictions to achieve mutual gains (Interview #4), others perceived it as a pragmatic, utilitarian strategy by the EU, compelled to mend relations with Turkey amid mounting domestic pressures to control migration. One respondent starkly characterised this agreement as ‘an indecent proposal [...] in terms of international moral standards’ (Interview #16).

Germany’s role in the process was dissected critically by several respondents. One described Merkel’s 2015 ‘*Wir schaffen das*’ stance as naïve, noting that Germany took in around one million Syrian refugees before realising the situation was unsustainable and turning to Turkey to manage the fallout (Interview #2). Another echoed this, arguing that Merkel had effectively caused the migration crisis by inviting refugees, only to later seek Turkey’s assistance once the influx overwhelmed Europe (Interview #6). Attention was drawn to Merkel’s numerous visits to Turkey during this period and to one unprecedented incident described as ‘completely outside of protocol’ (Interview #6) in which Merkel and Mark Rutte, representing the Dutch EU Council Presidency, visited the Turkish Permanent Delegation in Brussels (see also Turhan 2016). As one respondent stated:

That is where we really saw Germany’s role, its power. Because they didn’t care about the Commission at all. We (referring to Turkey) actually negotiated this deal with Germany. (...) The presidency was held by the Netherlands. [Germans] used them too. For example, we were cooperating with the Germans, and they were presenting the results to the other member states, which really bothered them. They had no idea about anything. Suddenly, they were faced with a *fait accompli*. So, it was a negotiation between Germany, the Netherlands, and Turkey. (Interview #6)

Some respondents acknowledged the potential opportunities this deal could present for Turkey in due course, recognising the new conjuncture in which the EU, led by Germany, expressed enthusiastic and insistent support on critical issues concerning Turkey’s further integration into the EU, such as visa liberalisation, modernisation of the Customs Union, and advancement in accession negotiations. The deal was described as ‘fundamentally a Turkish-German project [...] to convince the EU’ (Interview #4) to pursue deeper cooperation. However, certain swift and positive developments preceding the deal, such as the opening of new negotiation chapters in 2015 and 2016, also reinforced perceptions of unfairness, inconsistency, and double standards applied to Turkey’s membership bid. Reflecting on this, one respondent stated:

The state of human rights in Turkey in 2015 was the same as it was in 2014 and continued to be the same in 2018, 2019, and 2020. However, in 2015, when the EU perceived the refugee threat, it set all these issues aside and opened new chapters with Turkey. The modernisation of the Customs Union began. The

Cyprus issue had not changed at that time, either. This means that there is a course of action based on interests here. (Interview #3)

Any notion that Turkey 'profited' from the refugee crisis, however, was widely contested, with some respondents viewing it as a misconception fuelled by misinformation and inaccurate reporting. Although the EU was described as being 'in a desperate situation' and 'ready to give whatever [Turkey] wanted' (Interview #6), even urging the swift completion of visa liberalisation criteria itself, respondents argued that Turkey did not need to leverage 'the trump card at hand' (Interview #5) and ultimately gained little from the deal. One respondent emphasised the stringent EU controls on financial support provided to Turkey and highlighted the disparity between this assistance and the significantly larger funds Germany had allocated to refugees within its borders, asserting that the EU was the true beneficiary (Interview #1). Another respondent went further, suggesting that Turkey should unilaterally terminate the agreement and promptly seek renegotiation with the EU under new, fairer terms (Interview #13).

Still, some respondents pointed to potential gains for the Turkish government, referring to the potential Turkish influence over the content and timing of the 2015 European Commission Report (European Commission 2015). Although the report continued to criticise Turkey on issues such as human rights, the rule of law, and freedom of expression, its language was reportedly softened, and its release was delayed until after Turkey's elections at the government's request (Interview #6), reflecting the prevailing 'transactional mood'.

The potential of transactionalism, particularly for visa liberalisation and the modernisation of the Customs Union, had initially been welcomed by the Turkish elite. Consequently, this phase of relations, abruptly halted after the 2016 coup attempt, was later viewed by many as a 'missed opportunity'. Reflecting on the coup attempt, one respondent remarked that it 'brought relief' to the Europeans, offering them 'an excuse and cut off all their commitments and promises, except for the money' (Interview #6). It was felt that the EU, 'previously ready to give everything', ended up 'not having to give anything to Turkey' (Interview #6), once again deviating from the goal of integration and reverting to keeping Turkey at 'arm's length' in a transactional manner. Under Merkel's leadership, this approach solidified, as previously overlooked concerns about Turkey's democratic backsliding resurfaced, and the EU returned to maintaining 'a deliberate distance from Turkey, positioning the country as a partner in practical areas such as security and economics but stopping short of offering full membership' (Interview #14).

Overall, Turkish elite narratives underscore a discernible pivot toward a transactional approach in EU–Turkey relations, widely regarded to have

emerged around 2016, which aligns with earlier studies linking the rise of functionalism in the relations to the refugee crisis (e.g. Saatçioğlu 2019). This transactional dynamic, reportedly initiated and driven by Germany under Merkel, was seen as defining the later years of the EU–Turkey relationship, where considerations of short-term gains have taken precedence over long-term commitments. With all parties acutely aware of the changing geopolitical landscape and undergoing strategic recalibration, stakeholders describe the relations to be driven by an interplay of realism and opportunism, focusing on tangible benefits rather than shared norms and values.

Post-Merkel Leadership Void and Institutionalised Transactionalism in Europe

With Olaf Scholz succeeding Merkel as chancellor in 2021, the Turkish elite noted deepening transactionalism in EU–Turkey–Germany relations. Building on Merkel’s legacy of framing Turkey as a strategic partner rather than a prospective member, this new phase was marked by interactions driven by strategic calculations and mutual interests, whereby the EU promoted constructive engagement with Turkey without necessarily advancing accession prospects. Recent rapprochements in key areas such as economics, security, and energy are viewed as emblematic of this perspective, fostering contentment over sustained dialogue while simultaneously diminishing Turkish hopes for EU membership.

Respondents generally, albeit reluctantly, accepted the ‘inevitability of this transactionalism’. One respondent described it as ‘the new way of doing things’ and part of a broader global trend, remarking that ‘the world is heading towards a completely different point’ (Interview #8). Another respondent, however, cautioned against its limitations, arguing that while transactionalism may yield short-term benefits, it lacks long-term sustainability, ‘as evidenced by the fact that no party takes ownership of these so-called transactions later’ (Interview #7). Reflecting on the risks inherent in this approach, one interviewee stated:

The difference with a rules-based [relationship] is that you can’t proceed in a controlled manner in a transactional relationship. Both sides might lose control, sometimes even when you do not want to lose it, because there is no mutual leverage. (Interview #8)

In this regard, the 2023 European Commission Report on EU–Turkey relations (European Commission 2023) marked another critical juncture for the Turkish elite. Several respondents recounted their initial excitement and anticipation for ‘a strategic and forward-looking document’ (Interview #8), which they hoped would reinvigorate Turkey’s accession prospects. However, the report, presented by Vice President Josep Borrell, was

largely perceived as disappointing and unconstructive, foregrounding contentious issues such as the Eastern Mediterranean and Cyprus while disproportionately blaming Turkey. Limited proposals such as partial visa facilitation, resuming suspended High-Level dialogues, and inviting Turkey to Gymnich meetings ‘as necessary’ were described as examples of the EU’s calculated ‘creativity’ (Interviews #2, 6, 8) and ‘compensatory measures’ aimed at addressing the deterioration in relations with Turkey (Interview #15). These efforts to ‘assess the damage’ and ‘revert relations [to the state they were in as of] 14 July 2019’ (Interview #15) were taken as a sign of regression rather than true advancement. Furthermore, despite recognising the pressing agenda driven by the invasion of Ukraine, the Turkish elite viewed the decision to defer the discussion of the report to the next Council summit as an indication of Turkey not being a priority for the EU. The decision to discuss relations with Turkey separately from the enlargement framework was cited as further evidence that transactionalism had evolved from a temporary policy direction into an institutionalised strategy in the EU’s dealings with Turkey (Interview #8).

Reflecting on these recent developments and Merkel’s enduring influence, the Turkish elite emphasised the decline in visionary leadership within the EU, contrasting it with past figures renowned for their far-reaching vision and strategic foresight. One respondent nostalgically recalled leaders like Jacques Delors, François Mitterrand, Günter Verheugen, and Gerhard Schröder, lamenting the absence of comparable figures today and criticising current European leadership for focusing too much on technicalities and lacking the innovative drive that once propelled European integration (Interview #15). Another interviewee described the post-Merkel era within Europe as marked by a ‘poverty of leadership’, where leaders attempted to emulate Merkel but could only achieve superficial imitations, falling short of her impact and influence (Interview #7).

The perceived decline in leadership quality was particularly pronounced in Germany, where interviewees consistently drew unfavourable comparisons between Olaf Scholz and his predecessors, notably Angela Merkel (Interviews #4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 15, 16), as well as between the current and former Foreign Ministers Annalena Baerbock and Joschka Fischer (Interview #16). Although Merkel occasionally undermined Turkey’s membership aspirations, her policies were regarded as highly influential and broadly accepted within both Germany and the EU. One respondent emphasised Merkel’s dominance and substantial control over her government, contrasting this with Scholz, who was described as lacking the same ‘leadership fabric’ and being more of a technocratic, bureaucratic figure than a visionary statesman (Interview #10). Another interviewee reinforced this view, stating ‘Scholz [wa]s no Merkel’ and calling him the ‘lightest-weight chancellor’ they have ever encountered (Interview #16). Similarly, one respondent bluntly

remarked, 'You cannot even put Scholz in the same category as Merkel' (Interview #4). Comparisons with earlier 'great figures' like Helmut Kohl and Konrad Adenauer further accentuated the perceived leadership gap in Germany today, reflecting broader concerns about the country's waning influence both within Europe and in the EU's relations with key partners like Turkey. Taken together, these reflections indicate that Merkel's departure has not only weakened perceptions of Germany's strategic clarity but has also crystallised a growing sense of ineffectual leadership at the EU level, thereby further entrenching ad hoc, interest-based coordination.

Future Frontiers for EU–Turkey–Germany Relations

Despite the current 'indecisive' leadership (Interview #8) facing political turbulence in the post-Merkel era (Interviews #10, 11) and struggling to sustain the country's former influence (Interview #16), the Turkish elite still described Germany as the most significant actor in the EU. Across all interviews, Germany was viewed as wielding unparalleled power in EU decision-making, positioning it as integral to shaping the future trajectory of EU–Turkey relations. At the same time, respondents harshly criticised Germany for straying from European norms and values, particularly its stance and reactions regarding the Cyprus issue (Interviews #3, 6, 8, 10), the 'Migration Deal' (Interviews #1, 6, 13), the 2016 coup attempt (Interviews #1, 3, 8), and the war in Gaza (Interviews #4, 7, 10, 14, 16). Nevertheless, Germany was commended for maintaining a respectful tone in its engagements with Turkey compared to other member states and its mediating role in managing tensions in EU–Turkey relations (Interviews #3, 10, 12, 14) (see also Müftüler-Baç and Taştan [forthcoming](#), this Issue).

As previously noted, while the commitment to the EU membership goal remains steadfast, the Turkish elite does not anticipate accession in the near future (Interviews #1, 2, 6, 8, 10, 11, 14), particularly because 'the perception of Turkey in Europe is heavily influenced by President Erdoğan's image' (Interview #8). At the same time, the interviewees do not foresee a complete breakdown in relations either, given the strategic interdependence between the EU and Turkey, which has only intensified amid current geopolitical shifts. One interviewee poignantly captured this dynamic, stating, 'Turkey and the EU seem uncertain about how to proceed, and yet they see each other as indispensable and find themselves unable to drift apart' (Interview #10).

For Turkey, abandoning the membership goal entirely after years of commitment was viewed by many as tantamount to conceding defeat (Interviews #6, 8, 16), though some noted that this prospect had prevented Turkey from reimagining its relationship with the EU on new terms (Interview #6). On the EU side, respondents emphasised the 'high costs' (Interview #11) of severing

ties, with one respondent cautioning that the EU might 'lose Turkey altogether and set an entirely different course', but that this would be 'their loss at the end of the day' (Interview #13). Retaining Turkey's candidacy was thus viewed as 'a wise move, [...] as it is easier to reactivate a frozen process than to revive something that has been entirely cancelled' (Interview #10).

In its current state, the EU appeared to have 'lost the moral high ground' (Interview #16) in the eyes of the Turkish elite, now perceived through a lens shaped by years of 'disillusionment and erosion of trust' (Interview #12), and no longer serving as 'a reference point or benchmark' (Interview #14). Nonetheless, the respondents expressed strong interest in a radical redefinition of the relationship, provided it would not involve a partnership model specially tailored to Turkey as a substitute for full membership. While some respondents acknowledged that current EU–Turkey relations already 'reflected an alternative relationship' (Interview #8), indicating a departure from traditional accession formalities, there was unanimous rejection of proposals such as privileged or strategic partnerships, which were deemed insubstantial. Discussions around the EU's reinvigorated enlargement processes reinforced frustrations over the EU's unequal treatment of Turkey compared to other candidates. Respondents questioned why Turkey alone had been subjected to alternative frameworks, drawing comparisons with other long-standing Western Balkan candidates as well as newer ones like Moldova and Georgia. They argued that this 'double standard' was not only unjust but also demeaning (Interview #15), undermining Turkey's power and diminishing its status and significance in the region (Interview #10).

The Turkish elite also warned that any integration model excluding Turkey's meaningful voice in EU decision-making would be unacceptable (Interviews #7, 10, 16) and exploitative towards the country and its interests (Interview #15), calling instead for a reimagining of EU membership within the context of a transformed Union. Some respondents expressed scepticism about the EU's capacity to pursue further enlargement in its current state (Interview #8), suggesting that institutional restructuring was inevitable (Interviews #3, 6, 7, 8, 12). In this context, they supported concepts like 'variable geometry', 'multi-speed Europe', and 'differentiated integration', so long as these frameworks were applied equally to all current and future members, including Turkey (Interviews #3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15). One respondent further argued that Turkey should take the initiative to propose an alternative relationship model to the EU (Interview #6). Asserting that full membership would likely remain out of reach, even if Turkey perfectly met all the accession criteria, they advocated shifting away from the current strained dynamics (Interview #6), suggesting that such a shift could not only relaunch a new partnership for Turkey,

free from the burdens and tensions of the past, but also catalyse the broader transformation needed within the EU.

In this regard, Germany's past efforts to conceptualise new integration frameworks, such as strategic and privileged partnerships, along with its influence over other member states, were emphasised. More substantially, the recent initiation of the Franco-German working group, composed of independent experts tasked with proposing EU institutional reforms, was cited as a reflection of Germany's vision for meaningful internal transformations within the Union (Interview #3). While these efforts, in their current form, were not considered viable solutions for the fundamental breakthrough needed in the EU–Turkey relationship, they were nonetheless viewed as underscoring Germany's perceived role as a key architect in shaping the EU's future and its ties with Turkey.

Conclusion

This article examined the evolving narratives among the Turkish elite on EU–Turkey relations, with a particular focus on Germany's perceived role and influence as a central actor. The article's distinctive contribution lies in its timely and comprehensive qualitative analysis, drawing on first-hand insights gathered from in-depth semi-structured elite interviews with key stakeholders in Turkey. These accounts illuminate diverse perspectives regarding the current state and future trajectory of EU–Turkey–Germany relations. The resulting constellation of viewpoints, shaped by both memory and unfolding developments, points to a deep reorientation in how Turkey's elites conceptualise the nature, limits, and direction of engagement with Germany and the EU.

The findings underscore several key themes. First, they reveal the complexities surrounding Turkey's EU membership aspirations, characterised by shifting perceptions and mutual scepticism, as well as deepening disillusionment and frustration over the unusually protracted accession negotiation process. The Turkish elite remains rhetorically committed to EU membership, yet this commitment faces increasing challenges both from longstanding grievances and emerging areas of contention against the backdrop of regional and global developments.

Second, there is a strong perception among the Turkish elite of a recent shift toward transactionalism in EU–Turkey relations, largely attributed to Germany under Angela Merkel and continued under Olaf Scholz. This shift is argued to have reframed the relationship in more pragmatic, interest-driven terms, gradually recasting Turkey as a strategic partner rather than a potential member state. Consequently, Turkey's membership prospects are now seen as remote, with the Turkish elite expressing mixed sentiments: upholding a rhetorical commitment to EU accession while remaining open

to reinterpreting membership within a restructured, more flexible EU that accommodates diverse integration models and offers Turkey equitable opportunities.

Third, Germany is depicted as uniquely influential within the EU, holding considerable power to shape the Union's decisions and policies in general and toward Turkey in particular. Historically seen as both a mediator and a gatekeeper under different governments, Germany draws both praise and criticism from the Turkish elite. More recently, as the principal architect of the transactional turn in EU–Turkey relations, Germany is perceived as prioritising pragmatic, interest-driven interactions over deeper engagement and is thus accused of shifting relations into a phase of strategic calculations and containment, often at the expense of shared values and ideals. Furthermore, the current leadership in Germany is widely viewed as lacking the strategic vision of its predecessors, contributing to what many perceive as a leadership vacuum across the continent.

Finally, with Turkey's membership prospects seemingly waning and immediate breakthroughs unlikely, the Turkish elite emphasises the importance of sustaining and enhancing current engagement to preserve potential opportunities for future collaboration and further integration. Their scepticism toward alternative partnership models reflects concerns about unequal treatment relative to other candidate countries. This reinforces calls for a reimagined EU membership framework – one that accommodates differentiated integration while aligning Turkey's unique role with the EU's strategic interests. Despite its diminishing power and recent leadership challenges, Germany is still seen as the primary actor capable of steering this recalibration within the Union's evolving institutional landscape (see also Smith and Tekin 2025).

Taken together, these findings show how narrative production among Turkish elites serves as a prism through which deeper structural changes are interpreted – whether in the EU's external identity, the recalibration of German influence, or the waning appeal of membership as a normative horizon. Looking forward, they open several avenues for future research. Comparative studies could explore the perspectives of European policymakers and elites on Turkey's candidate and potential membership, using a combination of narrative analysis and comprehensive interviews to provide a fuller understanding and a more balanced view of trilateral dynamics. Additionally, investigating public opinion both in Turkey and across the EU would help assess how societal attitudes converge or diverge from contemporary elite perspectives. Finally, examining how EU enlargement and integration frameworks, beyond the question of Turkish membership, are narrated by the European elites, particularly in terms of their conceptualisations, viability, implications, and normative assumptions, could yield critical insights into reimagining the role of any current and aspiring member within a transformed Union.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Ethics Approval Statement

University of Cologne Ethical Review Board ref 230053EÖ.

Supplemental Data and Research Materials

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2025.2530964>.

About the Author(s)

Ebru Ece Özbey is a doctoral researcher at the International Max Planck Research School on the Social and Political Constitution of the Economy (IMPRS-SPCE) and a lecturer at the Cologne Centre for Comparative Politics (CCCP), University of Cologne. She is also a Global Forum for Democracy and Development Fellow at the Democracy Institute, Central European University.

Atila Eralp is a member of the Mercator-Istanbul Policy Center (IPC) International Advisory Council. He was a Mercator-IPC Senior Fellow from 2019 to 2023. He is also Emeritus Professor in the Department of International Relations at the Middle East Technical University, Ankara. He has been awarded the Jean Monnet Chair on Politics of European Integration since 2002 and served as Director of the METU Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence from 2007 until 2017. In 2008, he was recognised by the European Commission as one of the twenty ‘European Success Stories’.

ORCID

Ebru Ece Özbey  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6564-1824>

Atila Eralp  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7142-5645>

References

- Bamberg, M. 2009. “Identity and Narration.” In *Handbook of Narratology*, edited by P. Hühn, J. Pier, W. Schmid, and J. Schönert, 132–143. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Boswell, J. 2022. “Introducing the Narrative Policy Framework.” In *Research Methods in Deliberative Democracy*, edited by S. Ercan, H. Asenbaum, N. Curato, and R. F. Mendonça, 333–344. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Büthe, T. 2002. “Taking Temporality Seriously: Modeling History and the Use of Narratives as Evidence.” *American Political Science Review* 96 (3): 481–493. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055402000278>.
- Clément, M., T. Lindemann, and E. Sangar. 2017. “The ‘Hero-Protector Narrative’: Manufacturing Emotional Consent for the Use of Force.” *Political Psychology* 38 (6): 991–1008. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12385>.

- Council of the European Union. 2006. "2770th Council Meeting, General Affairs and External Relations." *Press Release*. 16289/06, December 11. Brussels.
- Council of the European Union. 2016. "EU–Turkey Statement." *Press Release*. 144/16, March 18. Brussels.
- Council of the European Union. 2018. "Outcome of Proceedings." 10555/18, June 26. Brussels.
- Council of the European Union. 2019. "Outcome of the Council Meeting, 3709th Council Meeting." 11260/19. July 15. Brussels.
- Czarniawska, B. 2004. *Narratives in Social Science Research. Introducing Qualitative Methods*. London: Sage Publications.
- Daehnhardt, P. 2018. "German Foreign Policy, the Ukraine Crisis and the Euro-Atlantic Order: Assessing the Dynamics of Change." *German Politics* 27 (4): 516–538. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2018.1448386>.
- de Graaf, B., G. Dimitriu, and J. Ringsmose (eds) 2015. *Strategic Narratives, Public Opinion, and War: Winning Domestic Support for the Afghan War*. London: Routledge.
- Entman, R. M. 1993. "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm." *Journal of Communication* 43 (4): 51–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>.
- European Commission. 2015. "Turkey 2015 Report." SWD(2015). November 10, Brussels.
- European Commission. 2023. "Joint Communication to the European Council State of Play of EU–Türkiye Political, Economic and Trade Relations." JOIN(2023). November 29. Brussels.
- European Parliament. 2017. "European Parliament Resolution of 6 July 2017 on the 2016 Commission Report on Turkey (2016/2308(INI))." P8_TA(2017)0306. July 6. Strasbourg.
- Graber, D. A. 1984. *Processing the News: How People Tame the Information Tide*. New York, NY: Longman.
- Hauge, H. L., E. E. Özbey, A. Eralp, and W. Wessels. 2019. "Narratives of a Contested Relationship: Unravelling the Debates in the EU and Turkey." FEUTURE Online Paper No. 28.
- Iso-Markku, T., and G. Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet. 2019. "Towards German Leadership? Germany's Evolving Role and the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy." *German Politics* 29 (1): 59–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2019.1611782>.
- Jones, M. D., M. K. McBeth, and E. A. Shanahan. 2014. "Introducing the Narrative Policy Framework." In *The Science of Stories: Applications of the Narrative Policy Framework in Public Policy Analysis*, edited by M. D. Jones, E. A. Shanahan, and M. K. McBeth, 1–25. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kutlay, M., and Z. Öniş. 2021. "Turkish Foreign Policy in a Post-Western Order: Strategic Autonomy or New Forms of Dependence?" *International Affairs* 97 (4): 1085–1104. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiab094>.
- Lindgaard, J. 2018. "EU Public Opinion on Turkish EU Membership: Trends and Drivers." FEUTURE Online Paper 25.
- Miskimmon, A., B. O'Loughlin, and L. Roselle. 2013. *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Müftüler-Baç, M., and S. Taştan. forthcoming. "Between a Curse and a Blessing: Germany's Role in Shaping the EU-Turkish Relations with the Eastern Mediterranean as a Litmus Test." *German Politics*.

- Öniş, Z., and M. Kutlay. 2019. "Global Shifts and the Limits of the EU's Transformative Power in the European Periphery: Comparative Perspectives from Hungary and Turkey." *Government and Opposition* 54 (2): 226–253. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2017.16>.
- Oppermann, K., and A. Spencer. 2016. "Telling Stories of Failure: Narrative Constructions of Foreign Policy Fiascos." *Journal of European Public Policy* 23 (5): 685–701. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2015.1127272>.
- Oppermann, K., and A. Spencer. 2022. "Narrative Analysis." In *Routledge Handbook of Foreign Policy Analysis Methods*, edited by P. A. Mello and F. Ostermann, 117–132. London: Routledge.
- Özbeý, E. E., H. L. Hauge, and A. Eralp. 2022. "Identity Representations in Narratives on EU–Turkey Relations." In *The EU–German–Turkish Triangle: Narratives, Perceptions, and Discourse of a Unique Relationship*, edited by F. Tekin and A. Schönlau, 29–56. Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Özbeý, E. E., H. L. Hauge, A. Eralp, and W. Wessels. 2021. "Narratives of a Contested Relationship: Unravelling the Debates in the EU and Turkey." In *Turkey and the European Union: Key Dynamics and Future Scenarios*, edited by B. Saatçiođlu and F. Tekin, 29–56. Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Reiners, W., and F. Tekin. 2019. "Taking Refuge in Leadership? Facilitators and Constraints of Germany's Influence in EU Migration Policy and EU–Turkey Affairs during the Refugee Crisis (2015–2016)." *German Politics* 29 (1): 115–130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2019.1566457>.
- Saatçiođlu, B. 2019. "The European Union's Refugee Crisis and Rising Functionalism in EU–Turkey Relations." *Turkish Studies* 21 (2): 169–187. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2019.1586542>.
- Schmitt, O. 2018. "When Are Strategic Narratives Effective? The Shaping of Political Discourse through the Interaction between Political Myths and Strategic Narratives." *Contemporary Security Policy* 39 (4): 487–511. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2018.1448925>.
- Schönlau, A., and F. Tekin. 2022. "Agreeing to Disagree and the Way Forward: Conclusions Drawn from the Triangular Perspective on EU–Turkey Relations." In *The EU–German–Turkish Triangle: Narratives, Perceptions, and Discourse of a Unique Relationship*, edited by F. Tekin and A. Schönlau, 181–201. Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Şenyuva, Ö. 2018. "Turkish Public Opinion and the EU Membership: Between Support and Mistrust." FEUTURE Online Paper 26.
- Smith, J., and F. Tekin. 2025. "Differentiated Structures of Europe: German Perspectives on Turkey and the United Kingdom." *German Politics*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2025.2499203>.
- Snow, D. A., and R. D. Benford. 1988. "Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization." *International Social Movement Research* 1:197–217.
- Somers, M. R. 1992. "Narrativity, Narrative Identity, and Social Action: Rethinking English Working-class Formation." *Social Science History* 16 (4): 591–630. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1171314>.
- Somers, M. R. 1994. "The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach." *Theory and Society* 23 (5): 605–649. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00992905>.
- Tekin, F., and A. Schönlau, eds. 2022. *The EU–German–Turkish Triangle: Narratives, Perceptions and Discourse of a Unique Relationship*. Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Turhan, E. 2016. "Europe's Crises, Germany's Leadership and Turkey's EU Accession Process." *CESifo Forum* 17 (2): 25–29.

- Turhan, E., J. Smith, F. Tekin, and S. Aydın-Düzgit. 2025. "Germany's Central Role in EU-Turkey Relations and Its Implications for EU Foreign Policy: An Introduction." *German Politics*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2025.2502836>.
- Turhan, E., and W. Wessels. 2021. "The European Council as a Key Driver of EU-Turkey Relations: Central Functions, Internal Dynamics, and Evolving Preferences." In *EU-Turkey Relations: Theories, Institutions, and Policies*, edited by W. Reiners and E. Turhan, 185–218. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- van Noort, C., and T. Colley. 2021. "How Do Strategic Narratives Shape Policy Adoption? Responses to China's Belt and Road Initiative." *Review of International Studies* 47 (1): 39–63. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210520000388>.
- Wessels, W. 2020. "Narratives Matter: In Search for a Partnership Strategy." *IPC-Mercator Policy Brief* (1). Accessed December 16, 2023. <https://ipc.sabanciuniv.edu/Content/Images/Document/narratives-matter-in-search-of-a-partnership-strategy-25fe78/narratives-matter-in-search-of-a-partnership-strategy-25fe78.pdf>.
- Wessels, W., and H. Suratlı. 2021. "How to Understand the EU's Policy towards Turkey? A Dual-Track Strategy without Effective Results? An Analysis of the Leaders' Narratives." *Track Policy Brief*. Accessed December 16, 2023. https://track.uni-koeln.de/sites/jean_monnet/user_upload/TRACK_Policy_Paper_EUCO_Turkey_WW_HS_fertig.pdf.
- Yılmaz, G. 2019. "From Eu-phoria to Eu-phobia? Changing Turkish Narratives in EU-Turkey Relations." *TalTech Journal of European Studies* 9 (1): 20–32. <https://doi.org/10.1515/bjes-2019-0002>.