

# So Close Yet So Far: Turkey's Relations with Germany in Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Narratives (2003–2018)

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## 1. Introduction

Turkey and Germany have had ongoing relations dating from well before the Republic of Turkey was founded in 1923. Today, Ankara and Berlin have close ties, especially through good trade relations and many people of Turkish origin, first, second and third generations, living in Germany. Bilateral relations, shaped by social, political and economic factors, have over recent years swung between periods of either convergence and harmony or divergence and discord. Turkish-German relations generally develop in tune with EU-Turkey relations, so that tensions or enhancements in one relationship translate into the other.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the state of bilateral affairs shapes the perception and framing of Turkish-German relations in Turkey.

In broad terms, EU-Turkey relations have gone through three phases in the post-2000 era: the golden years (1999–2006), stagnation (2007–2013) and backsliding (2013–present).<sup>2</sup> Turkey was officially granted candidacy for EU membership at the European Council in Helsinki in 1999. The Justice and Development Party (AKP), which won the 2002 elections in Turkey, eagerly pursued an agenda aimed towards EU membership, implementing several reforms to meet the Copenhagen Criteria throughout this first period. Hence, in 2004 the European Council declared that Turkey fulfilled the political criteria for the accession process and negotiations started in October 2005. Thereafter, problems emerged from the long-term

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1 Cf. Turhan, Ebru. With or Without Turkey? The Many Determinants of the Official German Position on Turkey's EU Accession Process. In: Ebru Turhan (Ed.). *German-Turkish Relations Revisited: The European Dimension, Domestic and Foreign Politics and Transnational Dynamics. Turkey and European Union Studies*. Vol. 2. Baden-Baden, 2019.

2 Cf. Soler I Lecha, Eduard. *EU-Turkey Relations: Mapping landmines and exploring alternative pathways*, 2019, pp. 4–6.

Cyprus issue<sup>3</sup> and the reluctance of new European conservative leaders – Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy– towards Turkey’s EU membership. Thus, from 2006 the Council of the EU as well as Cyprus and France unilaterally blocked several accession negotiation chapters.<sup>4</sup> Following the 2013 Gezi Park protests, relations deteriorated even further starting with the harsh repression of protests and reaching a low point with the purges and detentions resulting from the 15 July 2016 failed coup attempt. The referendum for and entry into force of the new presidential system in 2017 and 2018 respectively<sup>5</sup> further increased Western suspicions and criticisms on Turkey’s state of democracy.<sup>6</sup>

These developments were directly reflected in the narratives of Western/EU and AKP elites. The AKP government’s initial pro-EU stance and reforms were praised by Western audiences, being reflected positively in Western narratives. Indeed, the then prime minister Erdoğan was portrayed as a “bridge builder”<sup>7</sup> and discussions emerged about whether the AKP represented a “model Muslim-democratic party”<sup>8</sup> for the broader Muslim world. Throughout these golden years, the AKP elite “placed a strong emphasis on democracy and human rights, advocated EU membership, supported globalisation and eschewed ‘anti-Western’ discourse”.<sup>9</sup> Emerging problems in the second period were similarly reflected in narratives on both sides. Chancellor Merkel, who in 2004 had introduced the concept of “privileged partnership” as an alternative cooperation model,

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- 3 Cf. Eralp, Doğu Ulaş/ Beriker, Nimet. Assessing the Conflict Resolution Potential of the EU: The Cyprus Conflict and Accession Negotiations. In: *Security Dialogue*, 2005, 36(2).
  - 4 Cf. Weise, Helena/ Tekin, Funda. German Narratives, Strategies and Scenarios of EU-Turkey Relations 2002–2018: Towards a Unique Partnership – Yet to be defined. In this volume, p. 79-109 p. 102.
  - 5 Aslan Akman, Canan/ Akçalı, Pınar. Changing the system through instrumentalising weak political institutions: the quest for a presidential system in Turkey in historical and comparative perspective. In: *Turkish Studies*, 2017, 18(4).
  - 6 Cf. Tansel, Cemal Burak. Authoritarian Neoliberalism and Democratic Backsliding in Turkey: Beyond the Narratives of Progress. In: *South European Society and Politics*, 2018, 23(2), pp. 205–206.
  - 7 Purvis, Andrew. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: Turkey’s Builder of Bridges. In: *Time*, 26.04.2004.
  - 8 Tepe, Sultan. Turkey’s AKP: A Model “Muslim-Democratic” Party?. In: *Journal of Democracy*, 2005, 16(3).
  - 9 Aydın, Senem/ Çakır, Ruşen. Political Islam in Turkey, 2007, p. 1.

was stating by 2011 that the EU “does not want Turkey as a full member”<sup>10</sup> after a meeting with the then president Abdullah Gül. Parallel to developments after 2013, the EU increasingly voiced concerns about a variety of themes including human rights, freedom of speech and assembly, as well as the rule of law.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Turkey increasingly began to be perceived as an “authoritarian and oppressive” country in the West, politicising a wide area of issues including Syrian refugees and smashing Western hopes for a “moderate and modernizing”<sup>12</sup> country. In response, the AKP elite narratives took on a Eurosceptic tone, presenting Turkey “as a victim of an international-scale conspiracy” while Erdoğan expressed several times “his distrust of European and Western partners”.<sup>13</sup>

The AKP exemplifies a unique case in Turkish political history: On the one hand, it articulated “formal democracy, free market capitalism and conservative Islam”,<sup>14</sup> which drove EU-Turkey relations essentially forward during the golden years. On the other hand, President Erdoğan and the AKP-government led EU-Turkey relations almost to a breaking point in the post-2013 period. During these years, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been indisputably the most important actor when it comes to politically framing EU-Turkey as well as Turkish-German relations. He served as prime minister from 2002 to 2014 and as the Turkish president ever since. In line with the developments referred to above, his stance on EU-Turkey relations has shifted dramatically over time. While he actively endorsed the EU accession process during the initial years, growing mistrust stemming from “perceived discrimination and EU double standards”<sup>15</sup> provoked his more sceptical stance towards the EU afterward. Thus, more recently, there has been increasing academic interest in Erdoğan’s influence as well as links between discourse and foreign policy making within the Turkish

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10 Merkel lehnt EU-Mitgliedschaft der Türkei ab. In: Welt-Online. 20.09.2011, <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article13614695/Merkel-lehnt-EU-Mitgliedschaft-der-Tuerkei-ab.html>, [12.07.2021].

11 Cf. Pitel, Laura. Turkey’s judiciary must protect rule of law, says Europe diplomat. In: Financial Times, 16.02.2018.

12 Goodman, Peter S. The West Hoped for Democracy in Turkey. Erdoğan Had Other Ideas. In: Ney York Times, 18.08.2018.

13 Soler I Lecha, EU-Turkey Relations, p. 6.

14 Tuğal, Cihan. The Fall of the Turkish Model: How the Arab Uprisings Brought Down Islamic Liberalism. London, 2016, p. 4.

15 Aydın, Senem/ Çakır, Ruşen, Political Islam in Turkey, p. 1.

context.<sup>16</sup> Whereas “systemic factors”<sup>17</sup> of the global order are crucial in assessing Turkish foreign policy, it has rightly been stated that domestic politics and the character of leadership both play determinant roles in foreign policy making.<sup>18</sup>

This research shares the view put forward by Görener and Ucal, who argue that any attempt to analyse recent Turkish foreign policy without considering Erdoğan’s leadership will be found lacking due to his “preponderance in political life”.<sup>19</sup> Aiming to put Turkish-German relations and the triangular relation between Turkey, Germany and the EU into a recent historical, contextual and conjunctural framework, this study examines narratives of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan regarding Germany and Turkish-German relations apropos EU-Turkish relations from 2003 to 2018. In social sciences, approaches to narrative analysis view narratives either as the object of research or as a strategy for conducting research.<sup>20</sup> This study combines these two approaches and accepts narratives as “the conversational units of communication”.<sup>21</sup> Our analysis assesses how Erdoğan narrates Turkish-German relations and how in general terms he positions the EU and the West within this relationship. Thus, we seek to identify whether there is a change/turning point in President Erdoğan’s narrative over time or any thematic prioritisation within the context of Turkish-German relations. A number of questions will be raised and answered: Why are some thematic dimensions referred to more often than others at a certain point in time? Are changes within and between thematic dimensions related

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- 16 Cf. Benhaim, Yohanan/ Öktem, Kerem. *The rise and fall of Turkey’s soft power discourse: Discourse in foreign policy under Davutoğlu and Erdoğan*, 2015; Erdoğan, Birsen. *Turkish Foreign Policy: A Literature and Discourse Analysis*, 2016; Kesgin, Barış. *Turkey’s Erdoğan: Leadership Style and Foreign Policy Audiences*, 2019.; Saraçoğlu, Cen/ Demirkol, Özhan. *Nationalism and Foreign Policy Discourse in Turkey Under the AKP Rule: Geography, History and National Identity*, 2014.
  - 17 Özdamar, Özgür/ Devlen, Balkan. *Man vs. the System: Turkish Foreign Policy After the Arab Uprisings*, 2019, p. 178.
  - 18 Cf. Cornell, Svante. *What Drives Turkish Foreign Policy? Changes in Turkey*, 2012.; Grove, Andrea. *Foreign Policy Leadership in the Global South*, 2017.
  - 19 Görener, Aylin/ Ucal, Meltem. *The Personality and Leadership Style of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy*, 2011.
  - 20 Cf. Hauge, Hanna-Lisa et al. *Mapping periods and milestones of past EU-Turkey relations*. FEUTURE Working Paper. Cologne, September 2016, p. 6.
  - 21 Hauge, Hanna-Lisa et al. *Narratives of a Contested Relationship: Unravelling the Debates in the EU and Turkey*. FEUTURE Online Paper No. 28. Cologne, February 2019, p. 2.

and dependent on each other? What is the President's agenda, inferred from sub-dimensions he refers to mostly in each dimension and what is their distribution over time? Do dimensions in Erdoğan's narrative evolve between 2003 and 2018? If so, is this influenced by Erdoğan's position as Prime Minister, President or President of "New Turkey?"<sup>22</sup> What conclusions can be drawn for possible scenarios of conflictual and cooperative relations such as revitalised accession or Unique Partnership?<sup>23</sup> Which is dominant in Erdoğan's narrative: consistency or deviation?

This chapter proceeds as follows: In sections two and three we present our analysis's methodological and conceptual framework by elaborating the methodology and revisiting literature on the role of leaders and leadership in foreign policy analysis.<sup>24</sup> Our quantitative analysis findings are presented and contextualised in section four. This includes a discussion of which dimensions have dominated Erdoğan's speeches throughout different periods and how this can be assessed within national and international political contexts. We also examine which subjects in each dimension have dominated Erdoğan's narrative before presenting our conclusions in section five.

## 2. Methodology

This chapter's dataset comprises 154 documents, referring to Erdoğan's publicly delivered speeches which include references to *Germany* or *German* (see Figure 9).

Collected through an extensive and systematic web-based search, documents include media news between 2003 and 2018 as well as public statements between 2014 and 2018, which are available on the presidency's webpage.<sup>25</sup> Sources include formal and informal speeches as well as national and international statements.<sup>26</sup> Only direct quotes appear in the

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22 Waldman, Simon/ Çalışkan, Emre. The "New Turkey" and Its Discontents, 2017.

23 Cf. Tekin, Funda/ Schönlaue, Anke. The EU-German-Turkish Triangle. A Conceptual Framework for Narratives, Perceptions and Discourse of a Unique Relationship. In this volume, p. 9-30, p. 26.

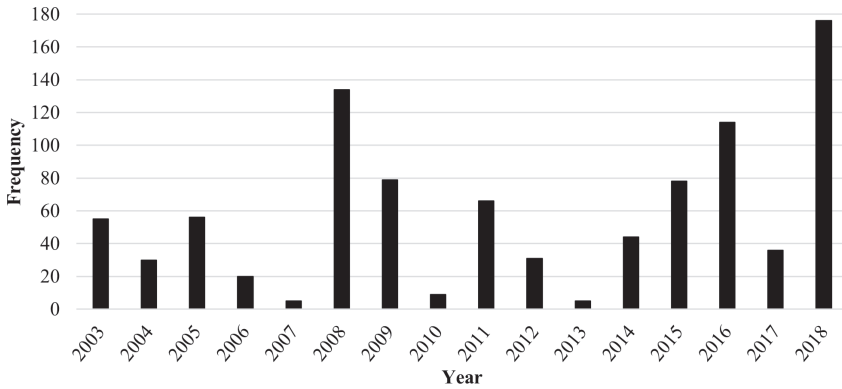
24 Cf. Breuning, Marijke. Foreign policy analysis: A comparative introduction. New York, 2007.

25 Cf. T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı. Konuşmalar, <https://tccb.gov.tr/receptayyiperdogan/konusmalar/>, [12.07.2021].

26 Cf. The discourse and narrative of populist leaders can be simple or more complex based on linguistic measures. Attempting to appeal to the average citizen, Erdoğan uses a very intermingled and vague discourse which has caused a trans-

database; hence, there are no indirect references to Erdoğan’s speeches and statements by journalists and columnists. Between 2003 and August 2014, when Erdoğan served as the Prime Minister, we found 58 documents in total and for the years of his presidency (August 2014-December 2018) 96 documents. Figure 10 illustrates the dataset distribution throughout our analysis period.

Figure 9: Appearance of ‘Germany’ and ‘German’ in Erdoğan’s Speeches Per Year



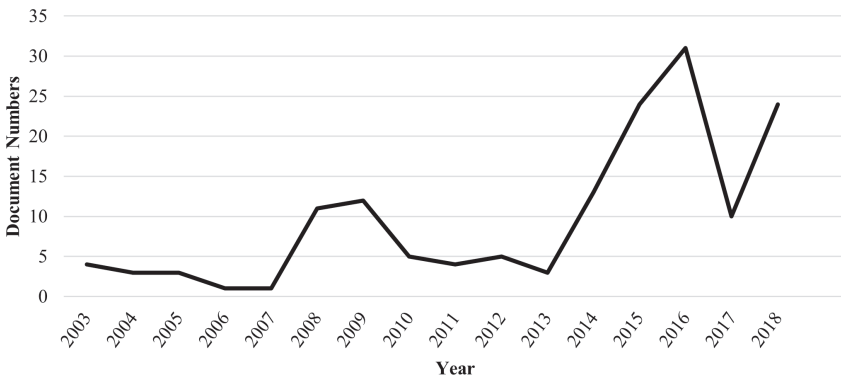
Source: own compilation.

If we combine data on the annual number of references to *Germany* or *German* (see Figure 9 above) with the increased number of relevant speeches as displayed in Figure 10, we can generally assume a gradual increase in Erdoğan’s narratives on Germany. However, a detailed analysis is needed to provide comprehensive explanations for our research questions above. The relatively sharp decrease in references to Germany in 2017 stems from a lack of data as Erdoğan preferred to address the Western world and EU in general rather than specifically referring to Turkish-German relations throughout this period.

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lation difficulty of his speeches into English. Indeed, right-wing populists often try to speak “the common man’s language”. For more detailed analyses see McDonnell, D./ Ondelli, S. The Language of Right-Wing Populist Leaders: Not So Simple. In: *Perspectives on Politics*, 2020.; Bos, L., van der Brug, W./ de Vreese, C. An experimental test of the impact of style and rhetoric on the perception of right-wing populist and mainstream party leaders. In: *Acta Polit* 48, 2013.

Figure 10: Distribution of Data Sources



Source: own compilation.

The triangular relation of the EU, Germany and Turkey is multifaceted, combining many dimensions established through diverse interactions over several decades.<sup>27</sup> This study examines Erdoğan's narratives on the basis of four thematic dimensions, which are also introduced in this volume's overall framework: *political*, *economic*, *geopolitical* and *societal*.<sup>28</sup> Each thematic dimension comprises various sub-dimensions which refer to distinct themes. In addition, this study takes into consideration a fifth 'cross-cutting' dimension where Erdoğan takes Germany as a reference point. This dimension is characterised by competition – Germany as a rival rather than a model or an example for Turkey. Thus, this *cross-cutting dimension* constitutes a unique feature of Erdoğan's narratives that does not exist in those of other actors.

Sources have been manually coded and categorised according to these five dimensions (and their sub-dimensions)<sup>29</sup> through a MAXQDA analysis, a tool widely used within the context of quantitative methodology. Words and phrases written in *italics* throughout this chapter refer to thematic dimensions and sub-dimensions. Accordingly, each document has been associated with one or several thematic dimensions which have, in turn, provided data for our analysis and interpretation. Thus, sub-dimensions constitute the 'actual wording' identified in the original quotes

27 Cf. Aydın-Düzgit, Senem/ Tocci, Nathalie. Turkey and the European Union. Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

28 Cf. Tekin/ Schönlau, The EU-German-Turkish Triangle, 2022, p. 24.

29 Cf. Annex.

and aim at categorising Erdoğan's speeches under the five dimensions explained above. For instance, *tourism*, *refugee aid*, *investment* and *economic co-operation* have been considered as *economic sub-dimensions*, and the speeches which featured these sub-dimensions have been categorised under the *economic dimension*. Based on this general concept, each analytical section of the thematic dimensions presents and discusses the relevant sub-dimensions below.

### 3. *Leaders and Foreign Policy: Why It Matters What They Say?*

Within our analysis of foreign policy, the role played by political leaders is subject to different approaches. Various factors within the structure of foreign policy (such as the institutional and constitutional design), the balance of power between institutions and class fractions, domestic constraints including accountability, level of democratic traditions and rule of law as well as international constraints, alliance set ups and diplomatic agreements can all be relevant in analysing a leader's influence on foreign policy in any given state.<sup>30</sup> Commonly, the leader's personality will be studied to understand and draw conclusions from foreign policy making. Leadership trait analysis, operational code and presidential character utilising extensive political psychology methodology as well as content and speech analysis constitute different strategies in this field.<sup>31</sup>

Leaders also play a crucial role in shaping and framing foreign policy issues in terms of public opinion.<sup>32</sup> As widely accepted, foreign policy is too complex and too detached from the everyday lives of citizens who would look for cues from leaders they trust in forming their own perceptions and positions on foreign policy issues.<sup>33</sup> Other authors argue that, rather than leading the public, leaders would take on positions (or create policy) in response to public preferences or in anticipation of future changes in public opinion.<sup>34</sup> Thus, charismatic, popular leaders and their communication on foreign policy issues are considered as vital inputs in analysing links between public opinion and foreign policy.

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30 Cf. Breuning, Foreign policy analysis, 2007.

31 Cf. Ibid.

32 Şenyuva, Özgehan/ Çengel, Esra. Turkish Public Perceptions of Germany: Most Popular among the Unpopular. In this volume, p. 161-180, p. 172.

33 Cf. Lippmann, Walter. Public Opinion. New York, 1997.

34 Cf. Page, Benjamin/ Shapiro, Robert. Effects of Public Opinion on Policy, 1983.



The concept of elite dominance in public opinion purports that people respond to information and cues supplied by elites and leaders, as different studies have demonstrated.<sup>35</sup> This chapter draws on an approach by Zaller who defines elite domination “as a situation in which elites induce citizens to hold opinions that they would not hold if aware of the best available information and analysis”.<sup>36</sup> Page and Barabas discuss the significant gap that exists between leaders and citizens, approaching this from a democratic theory perspective, stating that asymmetrical knowledge created an advantage for leaders to shape and frame foreign policy issues in a certain way.<sup>37</sup> This is also valid for Turkey since the vast majority of media has been “captured”<sup>38</sup> by the AKP today. This creates an essential advantage for the AKP elites who can control information supply to the public, thus to an important extent shape popular opinion.

Beyond the scope of this chapter, but relevant to the overall context, is the extensive body of research on different forms of relationships between and among the mass media, elites, the public, and the policy-making process.<sup>39</sup> Media is found to have considerable impact on people's agendas and priorities, particularly as widely reported issues become more significant in the eyes of the public. Research also reveals that media messages can affect or ‘prime’ the standards or criteria that individuals use in making evaluations.<sup>40</sup> While media's spreading of elite discourse is a subject that also deserves attention within the context of Turkey during the AKP era, this study focusses on a specific subject (Germany) as transmitted by an influential political leader (Recep Tayyip Erdoğan) over an extensive time period of 15 years.

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35 Cf. Zaller. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*; Iyengar, Shanto/ Kinder, Donald R. *News that matters: television and American opinion*. Chicago, 1987; Page, Benjamin., Shapiro, Robert Y./ Dempsey, Glenn R. *What Moves Public Opinion?*, 1987.

36 Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, 313.

37 Cf. Page, Benjamin/ Barabas, Jason. *Foreign Policy Gaps between Citizens and Leaders*, 2000.

38 Balamir Coşkun, Gülçin. *Media capture strategies in new authoritarian states: the case of Turkey*. In: *Publizistik*, 2020, 65.

39 Cf. Brody. Richard. *Assessing Presidential Character: The Media, Elite Opinion, and Public Support*. Stanford, 1991; Page, Benjamin I./ Shapiro, Robert Y. *The Rational Public*. Chicago, 1992; Zaller, John R. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. New York, 1992.

40 Cf. MacCombs, Maxwell. *Setting the agenda: The mass media and public opinion*. Cambridge, 2006.

#### 4. Main Findings: Closer or Further Away?

This chapter analyses Erdoğan's narratives with a view to *economic, geopolitical, political, societal and cross-cutting (Germany as a reference point) dimensions* from 2003 up until 2018. As stated in the methodology section, Erdoğan became Prime Minister in 2003 and then President in August 2014. Turkey's governmental system then shifted from parliamentarianism to presidential under his tenure in 2018. From the perspective of these different roles, the following sections examine each dimension with a comparative approach, relating them to each other. We also compare different sub-dimensions with each other within the thematic dimension in question and focus on how they evolved over time.

##### 4.1. The Geopolitical Dimension

Because of the Bosphorus, the straits which are perceived as a bridge between East and West, Turkey's geopolitical position is perceived as relying on its geographical position, national unity and border security (classical geopolitics)<sup>41</sup> more than social, economic, cultural and technological values (critical geopolitics).<sup>42</sup> Hence, matters including *security, terror/terrorism (FETÖ<sup>43</sup>, PYD/YPG/YPJ/PKK<sup>44</sup>, ISIS<sup>45</sup>)*, the *Syrian issue* (e.g. *Afrin and İdlib interventions* – which is a cross-border military operation, known as Operation Olive Branch, conducted by Turkey with the Syrian National Army in the Kurdish Afrin District and entails a deal on a demilitarised buffer zone in Idlib [resulted in Sochi Agreement]<sup>46</sup> in 2018), *energy, nuclear weapon, military cooperation* are designated as sub-dimensions under the geopolitical dimension. Reference to *terror/terrorism* appears as the most

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41 Cf. Owens, Mackubin Thomas. In defense of classical geopolitics. *Naval War College Review* 52.4, 1999, p. 59–76.

42 Cf. Kuus, Merje. Critical geopolitics. In: *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*, 2010.

43 Fethullah Gülen Terör Örgütü – Fethullah Gülen Terrorist Organisation.

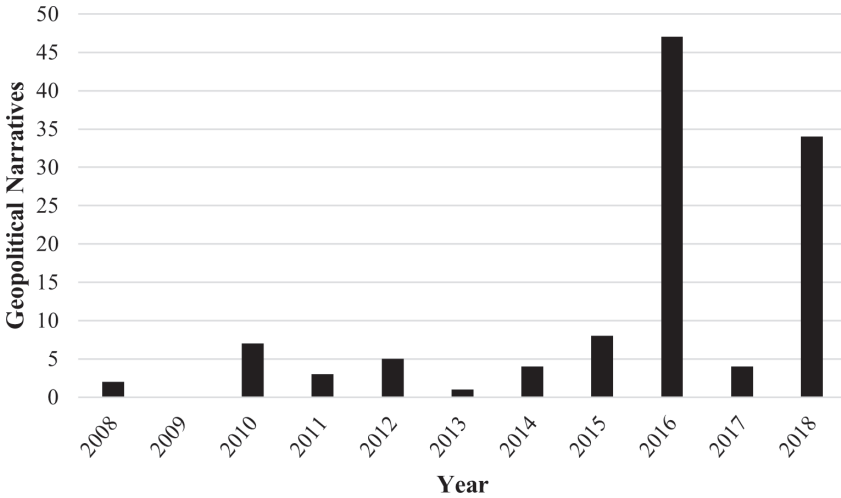
44 Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat – Democratic Union Party/Yekîneyên Parastina Gel – People's Protection Units/Yekîneyên Parastina Jin – Women's Protection Units/Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê – Kurdistan Workers' Party.

45 Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.

46 Cf. Petkova, Mariya. After the Sochi agreement, HTS is facing internal divisions. In: *Aljazeera*, 27.09.2018; Full text of Turkey. Russia agreement on northeast Syria, In: *Aljazeera*, 22.10.2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/22/full-text-of-turkey-russia-agreement-on-northeast-syria/> [12.07.2021].

relevant sub-dimension within the *geopolitical dimension*. Especially after the failed coup attempt in July 2016, it is clear that Erdoğan's comparisons with and accusations towards Germany intensified (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: Narrative Distribution of Geopolitical Dimension



Source: own compilation.

It is important to note that Erdoğan mostly situates Germany within Europe and addresses several European countries when referring to Germany in his speeches. For instance, in the following 2017 speech he compares Turkey's counterterrorism policies with those of its European counterparts and directs harsh criticisms at major Member States, including Germany:

“While Turkey deports 5,000 terror suspects from Turkey – these are terror suspects, we deport them and report it – and prohibits 53,000 entry into Turkey, it did not receive serious intelligence support from European countries that are shaken with several incidents recently. On the contrary, these countries protected and granted asylum to names that have been reported as terror suspects from the Turkish side. Frankly, Germany is one of these countries”.<sup>47</sup>

47 “Türkiye, 5 bin terör şüphelisini sınır dışı ederken, -bunlar terör şüphelisi, bunları sınır dışı ediyoruz ve haber de veriyoruz- 53 binine ülkeye giriş yasağı koyarken, maalesef bugün eylemlerle sarsılan Avrupa ülkelerinden ciddi bir istihbarat desteği alamamıştır. Tam tersine bu ülkeler Türkiye'nin terör örgütü üyesi olarak

It is known that some EU Member States such as Greece and Germany did not extradite people that Turkey accused of being related to the failed coup attempt or perceived as terrorists. For instance, Greece rejected Turkey's demand on extradition of eight Turkish soldiers who fled the country amidst the failed coup attempt.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Germany insisted on more material evidence to meet Turkey's demand on extradition of the fugitive journalist Can Dündar and the members of the so-called terrorist organisations of FETÖ and PKK.<sup>49</sup> Hence, it is understood from Erdoğan's narrative here that Germany acts against Turkish interests, particularly when it comes to security-related issues after the failed coup attempt in July 2016.

Parallel to this, the *Syrian issue* finds a major place in Erdoğan's narratives, particularly on the issue of *foreign fighters*. He refers several times to people from various European countries who joined the armed struggle of ISIS in Syria as foreign fighters, as demonstrated in the following examples:

“Look, one of the greatest challenges of Turkey these days is the young people coming from the West to join these organisations.... The President of France says “One thousand people from my country joined this organisation”, England says “600 people joined from my country”, Germany is the same”.<sup>50</sup> “We do not claim that currently there is no ISIS militants in Turkey. There are foreign fighters coming to Syria from France, England, Germany. Here, the National Intelligence Service, as our security intelligence, worked faster than others. If we had not worked fast, we would not have been able to make

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bildirdiği isimleri korumuş, kollamış, hatta iltica başvurularını kabul etme yoluna gitmiştir. Almanya bunlardan bir tanesidir, bakın bu kadar açık konuşuyorum”. T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı. 38. Muhtarlar Toplantısında Yaptıkları Konuşma, 2017.

48 Cf. Turkish anger as Greece rejects extradition of eight soldiers. In: BBC News, 26.01.2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38754821> [12.07.2021]; Bell, Bethany. Turkey coup attempt: Greek dilemma over soldiers who fled. In: BBC News, 19.07.2016.

49 Cf. Turkey-Germany: Erdoğan urges Merkel to extradite Gulen ‘terrorists’. In: BBC News, 28.09.2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45684390.amp> [12.07.2021].

50 “Bakın Türkiye'nin bu günlerde önündeki en önemli meselelerinden biri de Batıdan gelecek bu örgütlere katılan gençlerdir.[...] Fransa Devlet Başkanı “Benim ülkemden bin kişi bu örgüte katıldı” diyor, İngiltere “600 kişi benim ülkemden katıldı” diyor, Almanya bir o kadar”. T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı. Uluslararası Uyuşturucu Politikaları ve Halk Sağlığı Sempozyumu'nda Yaptıkları Konuşma, 2014.

these detections. ... But if EU Member States transfer especially enough information to Turkey, Turkey all the time does what is necessary”.<sup>51</sup>

However, the *Syrian issue* seems to be referred to in connection with the *political dimension* especially with regards to the *refugee issue* and its relevance for domestic politics. In 2018, Erdoğan argued that Germany was satisfied with and grateful to Turkey for keeping and taking care of Syrian refugees: “I think that we have the same sensitivities with Germany especially with regard to the Syrian crisis and irregular migration. The German authorities have always appreciated the Turkish nation’s protection of the Syrian neighbours fleeing from persecution and that the Turkish nation shared their bread”.<sup>52</sup> The *Syrian issue* is used by the Turkish president to deliver a message on EU/German dependency on Turkey in the region. At the same time, Germany is accused of acting against Turkish interests (see Dündar-case above), which fosters a narrative of unfair treatment in the *geopolitical dimension*, thus indicating a conflictual relationship.

Erdoğan’s conflictual narrative of relations in the *geopolitical dimension* coincides with changing Western perceptions and narratives about Turkey’s state of democracy, particularly after the failed coup attempt in 2016. In the aftermath, Western politicians and media increasingly criticised Turkey’s shift to the presidential system as the beginning of a “more Islamist, nationalist and authoritarian”<sup>53</sup> era and Erdoğan as the “sultan of 21<sup>st</sup>-century Turkey” equipped with “an unprecedented amount

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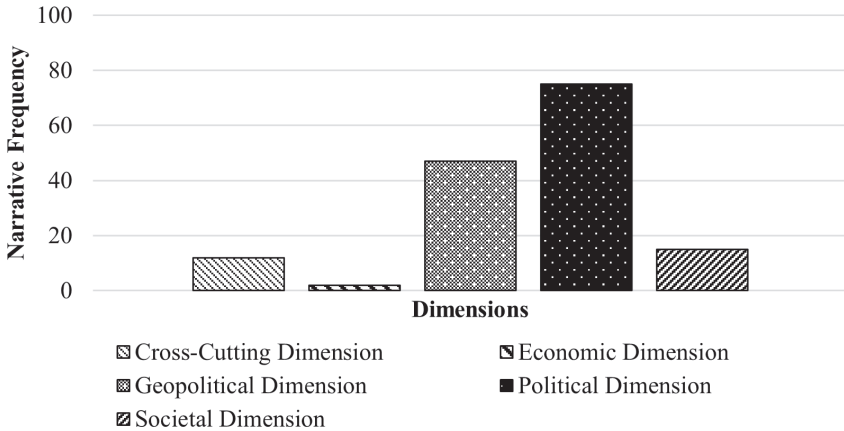
51 “Türkiye’de şu anda DAİŞ militanı yok, diye bir iddianın içerisinde değil. Fransa’dan, İngiltere’den, Almanya’dan Suriye’ye gelen yabancı savaşçılar var. Biz burada MİT, emniyet istihbaratı olarak diğerlerine göre hızlı çalıştık. Hızlı çalışmamış olsaydık bu tespitleri, yakalamaları yapamazdık. [...] Ama AB üyesi ülkeler özellikle yeterince bilgiyi Türkiye’ye aktarırlarsa Türkiye bunun gereğini her zaman yapar”. Erdoğan’dan başkanlık sistemi açıklaması. In: Haber7., 30.03.2015, <https://www.haber7.com/partiler/haber/1332804-erdogandan-baskanlik-sistemi-aciklamasi> [12.07.2021].

52 “Suriye krizi ve düzensiz göç meselesi basta olmak üzere Almanya ile aynı hassasiyetlere sahip olduğumuzu düşünüyorum. Alman makamları Türk milletinin zulümden kaçan Suriyeli komşularına sahip çıkmasını, ekmeğini bölüşmesini daima takdir ettiler”. Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan’dan Almanya’da flaş açıklamalar. In: Hürriyet, 29.09.2018, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/cumhurbaskani-erdogandan-almanyada-flas-aciklamalar-40971180> [12.07.2021].

53 Erdoğan inaugurates a new political era in Turkey. In: The Economist, 28.06.2018, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2018/06/28/erdogan-inaugurates-a-new-political-era-in-turkey> [12.07.2021].

of power”.<sup>54</sup> Hence, it is especially after the failed coup attempt that the *geopolitical dimension* takes a broad place in his narratives (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Narrative Distribution Immediately after the Failed Coup Attempt in 2016



Source: own compilation.

This stems particularly from geopolitical issues such as the *Syrian issue* and the sub-dimension of *terror/terrorism* taking an extensive place in Turkey’s political agenda throughout this era. Hence, Erdoğan’s narrative in the *geopolitical dimension* becomes increasingly intermingled with Turkey’s domestic affairs and takes a reactive approach in response to Western narratives on Turkey.

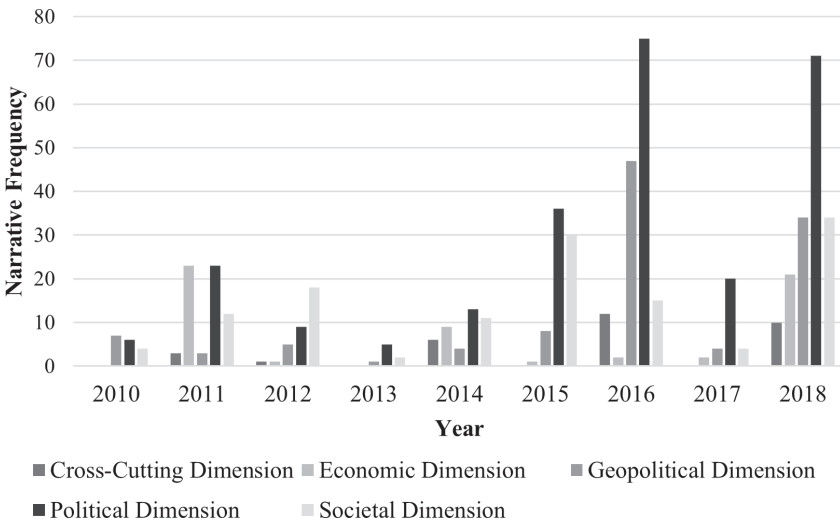
#### 4.2. The Political Dimension

Generally, the *political dimension* is mostly referred to under thematic sub-dimensions such as *democracy/rule of law*, *triangular relation*, *friendship/cooperation/solidarity*, *EU membership/EU process*, *judiciary*, *coup attempt*, *asylum*, *fascism* and *Armenian genocide*. Throughout the early 2000s, Erdoğan emphasised the importance of *friendship/cooperation/solidarity* with the EU

54 Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: The sultan of 21<sup>st</sup>-century Turkey. In: Deutsche Welle (DW), 08.07.2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/recep-tayyip-erdogan-the-sultan-of-21st-century-turkey/a-44569548> [12.07.2021].

and Germany, expressing his desire for *EU membership*. However, with the emergence of problems in the EU accession process, his narratives indicate a growing mistrust and exhaustion towards the EU and European states. Hence, conflictual statements and criticisms become more frequent particularly in the post-2013 era over several issues such as democracy and rule of law, freedom of speech and the independence of Turkish judiciary. As visualised in Figure 13, this dimension takes a pre-dominant place in Erdoğan's speeches particularly after 2013 in comparison to other thematic dimensions. This is the year when Turkey starts to encounter criticisms concerning its state of *democracy and rule of law* with the eruption of Gezi Park Protests.

Figure 13: *Distribution of Dimensions over Years*<sup>55</sup>



Source: own compilation.

Within this dimension, we interpret notions such as *friendship, cooperation and solidarity* as indicating Erdoğan's desire for cooperation. During the full timespan under investigation, 27 percent of sub-dimensions found in the political dimension indicate cooperative messages sent. These friendly notions are mostly present before 2010 although they continue to occupy

55 Since the figure aims to illustrate the domination of political dimension after 2013, the distribution between 2003–2009 was not included.

an important place in Erdoğan's speeches even after 2013. His narrative about German criticisms on Turkey's state of *democracy/rule of law and human rights* – particularly *freedom of press and expression* in Turkey – is built upon statements about Germany that indicate conflict and confrontation. After 2015, Erdoğan's narrative leans towards a conflictual bilateral relationship: The duality of cooperative and conflictual statements here creates a question of consistency in his overall narrative on Germany.

Especially after assuming presidential office in 2014, *democracy and the rule of law* are the sub-dimensions Erdoğan mostly refers to when he speaks on political matters (see Figure 14). When responding to Western criticisms and concerns regarding Turkey's divergence from liberal democratic norms, he aims to put the ball back into Germany's court. The quarrel on Germany's refusal to extradite former Cumhuriyet editor-in-chief Can Dündar to Turkey serves as an example. Referring to the convicted journalist, Erdoğan expressed the following words in 2018: "One of them is the so-called journalist who was sentenced to 5 years and 10 months. The so-called journalist took advantage of a gap, fled, and took refuge in Germany. He is currently in Germany. And he has been rewarded and held in high regard".<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the Turkish President extensively refers to, or rather attacks *German/Western' media* in the same period. Erdoğan criticises Western media with depictions of an anti-democratic actor stating: "I have seen that the countries which we thought are extremely powerful, are not being ruled by their politicians, but by the media. In my interviews, they say that "the media says this, the media says that". And I told them "leave the media aside, don't you care about what your people think?"<sup>57</sup> He does not deny or defend actions but turns these charges back to Germany, thus adding fuel to the conflict.

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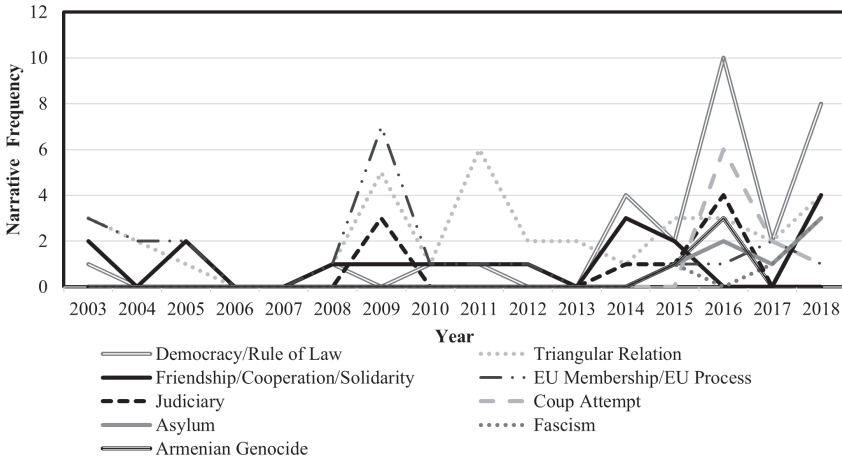
56 "İşte bunlardan bir tanesi de 5 yıl 10 aya mahkûm olmuş olan güya sözde gazetecidir. Sözde gazeteci bir boşluktan yararlanmış kaçmış Almanya'ya gelmiş sığınmıştır. Şu anda Almanya'dadır. Ve kendisi taltif edilmiştir. El üstünde tutulmuştur".

Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'dan Almanya'da flaş açıklamalar. In: Hürriyet, 29.09.2018.

57 "Hele hele işte bu devasa güçlü zannettiğimiz ülkeleri başında olanların değil medyalarının yönettiğini gördüm. Çünkü yaptığım görüşmelerde; "medya şöyle diyor, medya böyle diyor", söyledikleri bu. Ben de kendilerine şunu söyledim: "Halkınız ne diyor bunu düşünmüyor musun? Bırakın medyayı" dedim". T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı. Yükseköğretim Akademik Yılı Açılış Töreninde Yaptıkları Konuşma, 2018.



Figure 14: Narrative Distribution within Political Dimension



Source: own compilation.

The political dimension also includes the *triangular relation* between Turkey-Germany-EU and the debate of *Turkey's membership to the EU* (see Figure 14). It is remarkable to note that the *triangular relation* is referred to continually throughout the relevant years between 2003 and 2018. In this sense, Erdoğan also regards Germany as one of the most important actors to be persuaded on the road to *full membership*. Particularly, his objection to the '*privileged partnership*' suggested by Chancellor Angela Merkel and Turkey's emphasis on *full membership* in 2008 and 2009 have a remarkable place in the *triangular relationship*. An example of Erdoğan's stance on the '*privileged partnership*' approach is an interview with Turkish news channel, NTV, where he criticised the idea saying: "There is no such thing in the [EU] *acquis communautaire*, but Merkel insists upon a "privileged partnership". Whatever it is".<sup>58</sup> Addressing the Turkish Parliament in 2018, he expressed his disappointment on the stagnating membership process and suggested unequal treatment of Turkey by the EU: "Of course, we could not remain silent in the face of injustices and double standards applied to our country in the process of full membership of the European

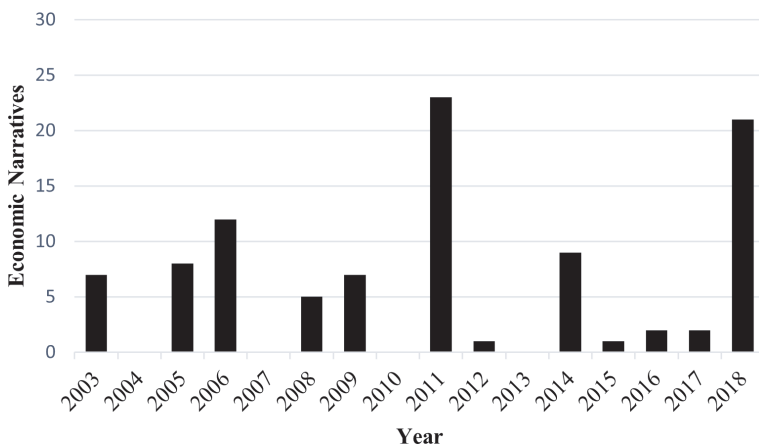
58 "Avrupa Birliği müktesebatı içinde böyle bir şey yok ama Merkel tutturmuş "imtiyazlı ortaklık". Nasıl bir şeyse". Erdoğan'ın konuşmasının tam metni. In: NTV, 11.06.2009, [https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/erdoganin-konusmasinin-tam-metni,aLzuEGq-8k6LVNb\\_uQWamg](https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/erdoganin-konusmasinin-tam-metni,aLzuEGq-8k6LVNb_uQWamg) [12.07.2021].

Union. Some European countries turned their animosity against Turkey into a domestic policy issue which deepened and expanded certain problems”.<sup>59</sup> Despite Erdoğan’s continual emphasis on positive narratives such as *friendship, cooperation and solidarity*, he periodically resorts to conflictual statements demonstrating Turkey’s resentment due to injustices and double standards caused by the European side.

#### 4.3. The Economic Dimension

Economic relations and partnership are historically among the most prominent aspects of bilateral relations between Turkey and Germany. Thus, this section analyses those speeches that have been categorised under the *economic dimension*, which comprises certain sub-dimensions such as: *economic cooperation, investment, tourism, economic assistance, refugee aid, German companies, growth rate and economic crisis*. Erdoğan’s economic references peaked in 2011 and 2018 (see Figure 15).

Figure 15: Narrative Distribution of Economic Dimension over Years



Source: own compilation.

59 “Avrupa Birliği tam üyelik sürecinde ülkemize yapılan haksızlıklar ve uygulanan çifte standart karşısında elbette sessiz kalamazdık. Kimi Avrupa ülkelerinin Türkiye karşıtlığını bir iç politika malzemesi haline dönüştürmesi, sıkıntıların derinleşmesine ve yaygınlaşmasına sebep oldu”. T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı. TBMM 27. Dönem 2. Yasama Yılı Açış Konuşması, 2018.

These two years respectively mark the period of post-2008 global economic crisis and the relative recession of Turkey's economy in 2018. During the first years of the AKP administration at the beginning of the 2000s, Turkey endeavoured to accelerate neoliberal institutionalisation building on the 'double anchors' of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the EU.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, inflation proved to be continually negative and GDP growth was very stable, which contributed to 'AKP's electoral success' in the post-2001 era.<sup>61</sup> This period of relative stability and growth came to an end, though, after the 2008 global economic crisis when the Turkish economy experienced an economic recession. Although Turkey was "slightly touched"<sup>62</sup> by the 2008 economic crisis, the same cannot be said for the post-2016 era. With increasing capital outflows and political uncertainty, Turkey's economy experienced serious recession in the third quarter of 2016 for the first time since the global financial crisis in 2008/09.<sup>63</sup> The impact of this on the economy was further exacerbated by the August 2018 currency crisis.<sup>64</sup> As argued below, such shifts in Turkey's economy created the already existing need for capital and had an essential impact on the *economic dimension* of Erdoğan's messages.

The sub-dimensions of *investment* and *economic cooperation* are of particular importance in explaining the peaks of economy-related narratives in 2011 and 2018. Erdoğan encourages and promotes German investment initiatives in Turkey, especially during the years associated with economic recession in the post-2008 period and in 2018. He often refers directly (and sometimes indirectly) to German companies and in doing so he conveys mainly two narratives: he praises the economic partnership between Germany and Turkey based on mutual benefits, as understood from his following speech:

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60 Cf. Bedirhanoğlu, Pınar/ Yalman, L. Galip. State, class and the discourse: reflections on the neoliberal transformation in Turkey. In: Alfredo Saad-Filho, and Galip L. Yalman. Economic transitions to neoliberalism in middle-income countries: policy dilemmas, economic crises, and forms of resistance. London, 2009.

61 Cf. Öniş, Ziya. The Triumph of Conservative Globalism: The Political Economy of the AKP Era. In: *Turkish Studies*, 2012, 13(2). p. 138.

62 "Kriz teğet geçti dedim, etkilemedi demedim". In: CNN Türk, 03.04.2009, <https://www.cnnturk.com/video/2009/04/03/programlar/5n1k/index.html> [12.07.2021].

63 Cf. Akçay, Ümit. Türkiye'de neoliberal popülizm, otoriterleşme ve kriz. In: *Toplum ve Bilim*, 2019, 147. pp. 64–65.

64 Cf. Bedirhanoğlu, Pınar. Social constitution of the AKP's strong state through financialisation: state in crisis, or crisis state? In: Pınar Bedirhanoğlu, Çağlar Dölek, Funda Hülagü, Özlem Kaygusuz (Eds.). *Turkey's new state in the making: transformations in legality, economy, and coercion*. London, 2020.

“More than 4,000 German companies are active in our country. Germany is the country with the most companies in Turkey. In one sense, leading German companies operating in Turkey profit by various price advantages and increase their profitability benefiting from incentives, and besides, they also contribute to the production, technology and export levels of Turkish industry”.<sup>65</sup>

He also highlights the longstanding history of the economic partnership by stating for instance “German companies have played an active role in the development initiatives of late Ottoman period and have undertaken the management of economic activities in different fields”.<sup>66</sup> This indicates that he has a consistent element in his narratives on *economic cooperation* and *investment*.

The sub-dimension of *tourism* and German tourists represent a similarly consistent and important element in Erdoğan’s economy-related narratives. *Tourism* is extremely significant for Turkish economic development in that foreign currency inflows fuel investment and employment opportunities. In a 2006 speech, he stated: “Germany is the country that sends the highest number of tourists to Turkey, followed by Russia. My heart’s desire is that Russia does not catch Germany. I want this difference to continuously increase”.<sup>67</sup> In 2017, Erdoğan encouraged German Turks to organise their weddings and celebrations in Turkey saying: “Our foreign guests that will come to Turkey for such reasons will find an opportunity to personally see, recognise and experience the beauties of Turkey, and I

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65 “Ülkemizde 4 binden fazla Alman firması faaliyet gösteriyor. Sayı bakımından Türkiye’de en çok şirketi bulunan ülke Almanya. Türkiye’de faaliyet gösteren önde gelen Alman firmaları, bir yandan Türkiye’deki çeşitli fiyat avantajları ve teşviklerden yararlanarak karlılıklarını artırırken, öte yandan, Türk sanayisinin üretim, teknoloji ve ihracat seviyesinin geliştirilmesine de katkı sağlıyorlar”. Cf. “NATO’nun ne işi var Libya’da?”. In: Sabah, 28.02.2011, [https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2011/02/28/natonun\\_ne\\_isi\\_var\\_libyada](https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2011/02/28/natonun_ne_isi_var_libyada) [12.07.2021].

66 “Alman firmaları, Osmanlı’nın son dönemlerinde hayata geçirilen kalkınma hamlelerinde etkin rol oynamış, farklı alanlarda yürütülen ekonomik faaliyetlerin işletmesini üstlenmişlerdir.” Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan’dan Almanya’da flaş açıklamalar. In: Hürriyet, 29.09.2018.

67 “Almanya, Türkiye’ye en fazla turist gönderen ülkedir. Rusya şimdi arkadan geliyor. Gönlüm şunu arz ediyor; Rusya turizmde Almanya’yı yakalamasını istiyorum. Bu farkın artarak devam etmesini istiyorum”. Erdoğan Alman turist istedi. In: Internethaber, 06.10.2006, <https://www.internethaber.com/erdogan-alman-turist-istedi-46121h.htm> [12.07.2021].

believe that they will re-visit Turkey every year".<sup>68</sup> Again, the message is welcoming and does not address political leadership but people directly in attracting tourists to Turkey.

Economic activity in EU-Turkey relations is not restricted to investments and trade partnerships. Through the 3+3 billion Euro 'Facility for Refugees in Turkey' (short: Refugee Facility), the EU funds infrastructure development and direct financial support for refugees living in Turkey.<sup>69</sup> Hence, the issues of *economic assistance* as well as *humanitarian and refugee aid* were considered as sub-dimensions of the economic dimension. However, our findings show that these sub-dimensions are seldomly treated in purely economic terms, but are connected to the relationship's political or geopolitical dimensions. Erdoğan utilises funding from the Refugee Facility as an instrument embedded in his political and geopolitical narratives. Indeed, a row over the pace of fund disbursements characterised implementation of this Facility.<sup>70</sup> Funds are framed as an unpaid bill and unfulfilled political responsibility by the EU and thus connected to the *political dimension* and *geopolitical dimensions* – areas where the EU supposedly mistreats Turkey. For instance, in a 2016 speech Erdoğan says of the *refugee aid*:

"I do not understand the attitude of demanding projects for the contribution they speak of. Merkel actually visited Nizip.<sup>71</sup> What we, Turkey, have done is very visible. What project are you asking for? What you call projects is what we have already accomplished. No one should try to deceive us by saying things like projects".<sup>72</sup>

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68 "Böyle vesilelerle ülkemize gelecek yabancı misafirlerimizin Türkiye'nin güzelliklerini bizzat görme, tanıma, yaşama imkânı bulduklarında ziyaretlerini her yıl tekrarlayacaklarına inanıyorum". T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı. Turizm Sektör Temsilcileri ile Buluşmasında Yaptıkları Konuşma, 2017.

69 Cf. European Commission. The EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey, 2021, [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news\\_corner/migration\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news_corner/migration_en) [12.07.2021].

70 Cf. Gotev, Georgi. EU and Turkey agree on €3 billion refugee deal. In: Euractiv.com, 30.11.2015; Guarascio, Francesco, Gümrükçü, Tuvan. EU, Turkey in stand-off over funds to tackle new migrant crisis. In: Reuters, 06.03.2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-security-turkey-eu-idUSKBN20T1RH> [21.07.2021].

71 Nizip is a district and city of Gaziantep Province of south-eastern Turkey. It is a strategically important place at the Syrian border.

72 The focus of the visit was the use of EU funds for concrete projects developed for refugees in Turkey. This is a controversial issue, as the funding is being used only in the form of project funding rather than a general budget allocated

Hence, it is plausible that aspects of the economic dimension, such as *economic assistance*, are becoming increasingly conflictual and embedded within some of his political and geopolitical narratives, whereas his narrative of the economic dimension of the relationship in other areas promotes an active economic partnership and a cooperative attitude, as shown above in examples of the sub-dimensions *investment*, *economic cooperation* and *tourism*.

#### 4.4. *The Societal Dimension*

The *societal dimension* entails a variety of sub-dimensions which were selected in line with the most important societal developments affecting the triangular relationship between EU, Germany and Turkey. These include the following sub-dimensions: *German Turks*, *religion (Islam)*, *education*, *racism*, *Turkish Associations in Germany*, *culture and language (German)*. As with other thematic dimensions, the *societal dimension* entails both cooperative and conflictual narratives most of which are related to social, political and economic issues faced by *German Turks*.

As presented earlier, Erdoğan frequently draws his audience's attention to alleged differences and dualities between Turkey and the EU and Germany. This corresponds with narratives that occur under the *societal dimension* of his statements. Herein, the emphasis on *societal integration* of Turks in Germany or Germans of Turkish origin (*German Turks*) as well as their economic and political relations and ties within the German society are central to Erdoğan's narrative, being by far the mostly referred to sub-dimension under the *societal dimension*, as shown in Figure 16. Under the sub-dimension of '*German Turks*', which entails references to *assimilation*<sup>73</sup>/*integration* and *Gastarbeiter*,<sup>74</sup> there is a relative consistency

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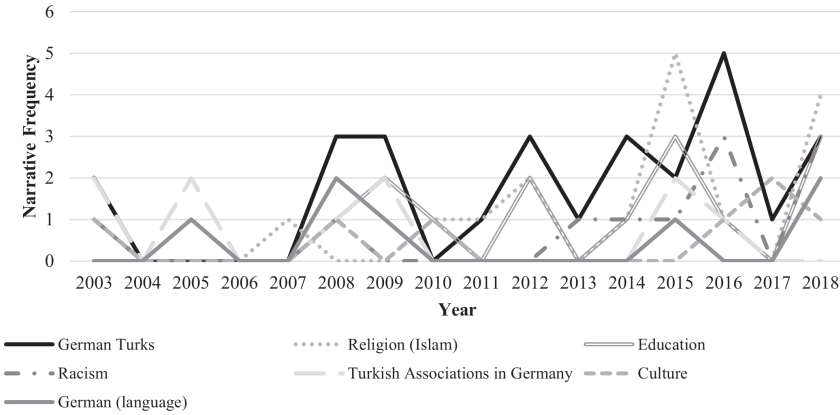
for the use of officials. "Sözünü ettikleri katkı için Türkiye'den proje isteme eğilimlerine de anlam veremiyorum. Mesela Merkel, Nizip'i gezip gördü aslında. Türkiye olarak bizim yaptıklarımız ortada. Bizden neyin projesini istiyorsunuz? Sizin proje dediklerinizi biz çoktan hayata geçirmişiz. Proje vesaire diyerek hiç kimse bizi aldatmaya kalkmasın". Erdoğan'dan anayasa çıkışı: İslam vurgusuna ihtiyaç yok. In: Hürriyet, 28.04.2016, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/laiklik-ladinilik-olursa-itaraz-gelir-40095714> [12.07.2021].

73 Erdoğan'dan Köln'de Adeta Seçim Öncesi Propagandası. In: Bianet, 11.02.2008, <https://m.bianet.org/biamag/siyaset/104793-erdogan-dan-koln-de-adeta-secim-once-si-propagandasi> [12.07.2021].

74 A German notion used to identify foreign labour force that came to Germany from the late 1950s to the 1970s.

in the distribution by years (see the black line in Figure 16). Erdoğan keeps this dimension on top of his agenda, frequently repeating it with a consistent emphasis and message over the years.

Figure 16: Narrative Distribution within Societal Dimension



Source: own compilation.

The two sub-dimensions of *education* and *religion* are equally important in his narrative. On education, Erdoğan affirmatively emphasises the importance of language learning (German) for *German Turks* as well as opening high schools offering Turkish education. *Religion* is also mentioned equally frequently, despite its sensitivity, underlined by critical or accusatory statements on the matter. Erdoğan mostly talks about *discrimination* against Muslims as a religious group in Europe. Criticising campaigns and signboards of the Federal Ministry of Interior in 2012 associating a headscarved woman with religious fundamentalism, for instance, he urged Germany to cancel out such campaigns stating: “I’m calling out to Germany. What is being done to our sisters wearing headscarves, putting them on billboards as a means of exclusion, cannot be considered as freedom of belief dear Merkel! You have to take action!”<sup>75</sup>

75 “Almanya’ya sesleniyorum. Orada başörtülü kızlarımıza yapılan, dışlama sebebi olarak billboardlara yerleştirmek inanç özgürlüğü olarak değerlendirilemez ey Merkel. Onun için adımlarını atmak zorundasınız.” Erdoğan’dan AK Parti kongresinde tarihi konuşma. In: Hürriyet, 30.09.2012, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/erdogandan-ak-parti-kongresinde-tarihi-konusma-21589232> [12.07.2021].

Another finding under the *societal dimension* points towards a narrative revision in terms of the citizenship status of *German Turks*. While Erdoğan firmly encourages *German Turks* to apply for *German citizenship* in the pre-2010 period, this emphasis is revised thereafter. He starts drawing more attention to the importance of *dual citizenship* for *German Turks*. In a Berlin press conference speech with Merkel, he declares his revised stance by claiming: “We find it more prudent to open the path of dual citizenship for our citizens here so that they become German citizens”.<sup>76</sup> This may be linked with the increasingly stagnating accession process after 2007 and *Turkey’s membership* goal slowly fading away. Another related finding concerning the sub-dimension of *integration* is that Erdoğan generally refers to this together with *assimilation*. In a 2008 Köln address to around 15,000 German Turks, he stated: “Nobody can expect you to be assimilated. For assimilation is a crime against humanity. We need to know that”.<sup>77</sup> This speech is particularly significant in having attracted negative press in Germany for the Turkish president and was perceived as open confrontation. However, in the same speech Erdoğan also points towards the importance of *integration* saying: “In today’s Germany, in Europe, in today’s world, you can no longer and you should not see yourself as the “other” or temporary”.<sup>78</sup> In other words, he consistently encourages *German Turks* to integrate with German society whereas he also warns them against the danger of *assimilation* in his speeches.

Overall, *German Turks* have formed an important element under the *societal dimension* for Erdoğan which he referred to consistently between 2003 and 2018. During the initial years of the AKP, he emphasised their societal and economic *integration* pointing towards the importance of *language learning* and *education*. However, over time conflictual statements about issues including *racism* and *discrimination* appeared more frequently in Erdoğan’s speeches which may reflect his personal sensitivities. With the backsliding of bilateral relations between Germany and Turkey post-2013,

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76 “Biz buradaki vatandaşlarımızın, soydaşlarımızın Alman vatandaşlığına alınması noktasında çifte vatandaşlık yolunun açılmasını çok daha isabetli buluyoruz.” Erdoğan: Açlık grevi tamamen şov. In: Hürriyet, 01.11.2012, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/erdogan-aclik-grevi-tamamen-sov-21820930> [12.07.2021].

77 “Kimse sizden asimilasyon konusunda hoşgörü bekleyemez. Zira asimilasyon bir insanlık suçudur. Bunu böyle bilmemiz lazım”. Erdoğan: “Asimilasyon İnsanlık Suçudur”, In: Haber7,12.02.2008, <https://www.haber7.com/siyaset/haber/299710-erdogan-asimilasyon-insanlik-sucu> [12.07.2021].

78 “Bugünün Almanya’sında, Avrupa’sında, bugünün dünyasında artık kendinizi öteki olarak, geçici olarak göremezsiniz, görmemelisiniz”. Erdoğan: “Asimilasyon İnsanlık Suçudur”. In: Haber7,12.02.2008.



his *societal dimension* narratives assumed a harsher tone, notably his call out to *German Turks* not to vote for CDU/CSU, SPD and the Green Party in 2017.<sup>79</sup> As elsewhere, Erdoğan's *societal dimension* narrative reveals contradictory signs of conflict and cooperation.

#### 4.5. *The Cross-Cutting Dimension*

The *cross-cutting dimension* entails several sub-dimensions including *governmental issues, economy, education, press, informatics & technology, transportation, health and social life*. Indeed, comparison with other countries is a common element in Erdoğan's speeches. In a variety of issues cutting across different dimensions, he frequently compares Turkey with other countries, and this is mostly true for Germany. While Erdoğan uses comparison as a method to counter criticisms concerning government policies from time to time, this style is also used to praise Turkey's successes in different fields.

Our analysis demonstrates that Erdoğan often takes Germany as a reference point for several thematic sub-dimensions such as *education, transportation, health and governmental issues*. However, he generally perceives and uses this reference point in a competitive manner. As mentioned earlier, Germany is referred to not as a model or an example for Turkey to follow or to imitate, but as a reference point to beat or to draw lessons from. For instance, in the societal dimension, we identified the sub-dimensions of *young population* and "*at least three children*" policy,<sup>80</sup> that shall encourage young people to have three or more children to counteract Germany's aging population. In 2012, Erdoğan stated that "if you did not have three children, we would become as today's Germany in 2037. I do not want to become as they are. I want our population to be young. We would be successful if an educated, young and dynamic population existed".<sup>81</sup>

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79 Cf. Erdoğan'dan Almanya'daki Türklere: O partilere oy vermeyin. In: Evrensel, 2017.

80 Cf. Erdoğan Insists on Demanding Three Children. In: Al Monitor, 13.08.2013, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2013/08/erdogan-asks-turks-to-have-three-children.html> [12.07.2021].

81 "Çünkü 3 çocuk doğurmadığımız takdirde 2037'de Almanya'nın bugün geldiği duruma geleceğiz. Ben bu duruma gelmek istemiyorum. Nüfusumuzun genç kalmasını istiyorum. Eğitimli genç dinamik bir nüfus olursa başarılı oluruz". Başbakan Erdoğan: Üç Çocuk Doğurmazsak... In: Beyaz Gazete, 31.10.2012,

Yet, Erdoğan occasionally refers to Germany as a success story that Turkey should aim to catch up with. For instance, he stresses and compares the number of *universities* and university students in Turkey with those in Germany even though he admits that Turkey needs a breakthrough in terms of *education* quality. Addressing Justice and Development Party (AKP) members in 2018, he puts forward the following:

“When I was talking to the Chancellor during my trip to Germany, I asked her, “*What is the number of students in your universities?*” Germany’s population is around 82 million and ours 81 million. She told me that they had 3 million university students including those at various institutes. Here, we have 7 million 600 thousand university students. We may not be at their level in terms of the quality of education right now; but after 5 or 10 years, we will reach and exceed that level if God’s willing”.<sup>82</sup>

Again, Erdoğan refers to Germany in a competitive manner stating Turkey’s desire to surpass the quality of German universities even though Germany’s success is acknowledged.

The President is apt to make historical references and comparisons between Germany and Turkey occurring in his narrative mostly in terms of *governmental issues* for the sake of justifying current Turkish domestic politics (see Figure 17). For instance, as a response to the criticisms against the expulsion of thousands of civil servants with alleged connections to the failed coup attempt in 2016, he stated in 2017: “Now some people say; “*Aren’t these people victimised?*” What victim? Do you know how many people were expelled from the state after the reunification of East Germany and West Germany? 600 thousand people were expelled”.<sup>83</sup> A similar comparison was used to counter criticisms concerning low levels

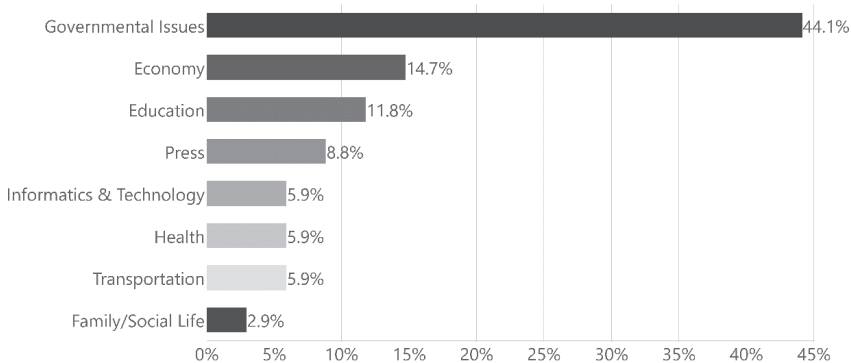
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<https://beyazgazete.com/haber/2012/10/31/basbakan-erdogan-uc-cocuk-dogur-mazsak-1481012.html> [12.07.2021].

- 82 “Almanya seyahatimde Şansölyeyle konuşurken kendisine sordum, “Üniversitelerinizdeki öğrenci sayısı nedir” diye. Almanya’nın nüfusu 82 milyon civarında, bizim de 81. Bana enstitüleriyle beraber 3 milyon üniversiteli öğrencilerinin olduğunu söyledi. İşte bizim bakın 7 milyon 600 bin üniversiteli öğrencimiz var. Nitelik olarak onların seviyesinde şu anda olmayabiliriz; ama 5 yıl, 10 yıl sonra Allah’ın izniyle biz o seviyeyi de yakalayacağız ve aşacağız”. T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı. AK Parti Grup Toplantısında Yaptıkları Konuşma, 2018.
- 83 “Şimdi bazıları diyor ki; “Bu insanlar mağdur edilmiyor mu?” Ne mağduru? Doğru Almanya-Batı Almanya birleşmesinden sonra devletin yapılanmasında ne kadar kişi devletten çıkarıldı biliyor musunuz? 600 bin kişi çıkarıldı”. T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı. 35. Muhtarlar Toplantısında Yaptıkları Konuşma, 2017.

of precautions in the 2014 mining disaster in the town of Soma leading to the death of 301 miners, where Erdoğan referred to similar disasters in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain so as to prove mining disasters “typical” and bypass criticisms.<sup>84</sup>

*Figure 17: Narrative Distribution within Cross-Cutting Dimension*



Source: own compilation.

In Erdoğan's narratives, Germany appears as a reference country which Turkey aims to draw lessons from in a variety of governmental and public policy issues even after the deterioration of bilateral relations. Particularly after the backsliding of EU-Turkey relations following Gezi Park protests in 2013, he capitalises on historical misdoings of his Western counterparts or Western countries to justify Turkish policies today. Hence, the underlying allegation of Turkey's unfair treatment by the EU or Western countries is a frequent narrative of Turkey's relationship with the EU over recent years. However, these allegations from the Turkish side are voiced alongside positive and cooperative narratives regarding bilateral relations between the two countries.

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84 Cf. Turkish PM cites 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain to prove mine accidents are “typical”. In: *Hürriyet Daily News*, 14.05.2014, <https://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/turkish-pm-cites-19th-century-britain-to-prove-mine-accidents-are-typical-66472> [12.07.2021].

## 5. Conclusion

As our findings indicate, there are no clear-cut boundaries between the thematic dimensions<sup>85</sup> as detailed above in the *refugee deal* example. Our analysis shows that President Erdoğan's framing of bilateral relations has been multifaceted and dependent upon historical, contextual and conjunctural conditions. Research showed that his statements in different thematic dimensions are not always in harmony with each other, and at certain times even conflictual. To illustrate, Erdoğan's occasional accusatory narratives go hand in hand with his calls for cooperation and friendship under different dimensions. Consequently, our analysis indicates a conflictual cooperation scenario between Turkey and Germany based on either timewise or dimension-related inconsistencies in his narrative, which is inevitably reflected in EU-Turkey relations and Germany's role in these relations. Our findings do not reveal any turning points in Erdoğan's narratives resulting from his position as a Prime Minister or a President. Rather, turning points and changes in his narratives stem from domestic and international conjunctures.

Politically, the Gezi Park Protest in 2013 appears as a turning point in terms of Erdoğan's increasing use of an accusatory and conflictual narrative in response to growing Western concerns and criticisms about Turkey's democratic state of affairs. Whereas positive narratives such as *friendship, cooperation and solidarity* find an extensive place in Erdoğan's narratives until 2010, his accusatory narratives peak particularly after the failed coup attempt in 2016 when several topics including the *Syrian issue, refugee deal* and *terror/terrorism* become controversial issues within the *triangular relationship* between Turkey-Germany-EU.

Despite his accusatory narratives used regarding several political issues including the convicted journalist Can Dündar, Erdoğan puts vast emphasis on *economic cooperation* through initiatives such as encouraging *tourism* and *investment*, which he narrates within a friendship framework by implying a shared and common history. Economically, Germany is seen as a major economic partner which Turkey does not want to lose. Yet, within the societal dimension, issues concerning *German Turks* continue to feature heavily in Erdoğan's narratives, albeit with certain changes over time. Nevertheless, the Turkish president seems to aim at separating economic issues from politics because of the economic importance he assigns

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85 Cf. Turhan, Ebru. *The Asymmetrical Development of Political and Economic Relations between Turkey and the EU*, 2015.

to Germany and EU. Historical references for the economic partnership between Germany and Turkey can be found in the same speeches where Erdoğan takes a critical stance against Germany's attitude and policies over *terror/terrorism* related issues.<sup>86</sup> Hence, it is plausible to argue that he uses different narratives at the same time to pursue several approaches in Turkey-Germany relations over diverse dimensions.

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86 Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'dan Almanya'da flaş açıklamalar. In: Hürriyet, 29.09.2018.

