

# Turkish Public Perceptions of Germany: Most Popular among the Unpopular

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## 1. Introduction

Turkish-German relations are a popular study subject, with extensive literature covering historical, political, social and economic dimensions including a number of interdisciplinary approaches.<sup>1</sup> The historical aspect of these studies focuses mainly on relations during the Ottoman period and two world wars, as well as Cold War era alliances against the communist threat.<sup>2</sup> Studies focusing on Turkish-German relations are much more extensive than most of those analysing Turkey's relations with other states both in terms of numbers as well as the scope and depth of issues covered, competing only with those on Turkish-Greek and Turkish-American relations. Yet, despite this wide range, one issue remains understudied: Turkish public opinion towards Germany. As outlined elsewhere in this volume,<sup>3</sup> narratives shape perceptions of reality and might in turn influence actions. In another contribution, the Turkish President's narration of

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- 1 Cf. Nuroğlu, Elif/ Bayrak Meydanoğlu, Ela Sibel/ Bayraklı, Enes. Turkish German affairs from an interdisciplinary perspective. Frankfurt am Main, 2015.
  - 2 Cf. Güçlü, Yücel. Turkish-German relations on the eve of world war two. In: *Turkish Studies*, 2000, 47, (2), pp. 73–94.; Bayraktar, Hatice/ Çalik, Ramazan. One Step Forward and Two Steps Back: The Slow Process of Re-establishing Diplomatic Relations between Germany and Turkey after the First World War. In: *Middle Eastern Studies*, 2011, 1, (2), pp. 315–327; Ozkan, Behlül. Cold war era relations between West Germany and Turkish political Islam: from an anti-communist alliance to a domestic security issue. In: *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 2019, 19, (1), pp. 31–54; Schönlau, Anke/ Schröder, Mirja. A Charged Friendship: German Narratives of EU-Turkey Relations in the Pre-accession Phase, 1959–1999. In this volume, pp. 57-77.
  - 3 Cf. Tekin, Funda/ Schönlau, Anke. The EU-German-Turkish Triangle. A Conceptual Framework for Narratives, Perceptions and Discourse of a Unique Relationship. In this volume, pp. 9-30; Özbey, Ebru Ece/ Hauge, Hanna-Lisa/ Eralp, Atilla. Identity Representations in Narratives on EU-Turkey Relations. In this volume, pp. 31-55.

EU-German-Turkish relations has been analysed.<sup>4</sup> To complement those contributions, this chapter considers the public perception of Germany in Turkey.

More recent studies have also engaged in the political and military aspects of bilateral relations with the ‘Syria question’ as well as the ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015, considered among the most challenging issues for Turkish-German relations.<sup>5</sup> They assume that shifting dynamics on bilateral relations would reflect on the future of the so-called ‘refugee deal’ (the EU-Turkey Statement on migration).<sup>6</sup> Additionally, it is assumed that the volatility of relations would prevent a rapprochement period between the two sides in the near future.<sup>7</sup> It is a significant yet unanswered question as to how these developments are perceived by the public in Turkey and what reaction will be provoked. Over recent years, especially under the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, foreign policy, specifically relations with other European states, has become much intertwined with domestic policy and consequently public opinion towards foreign policy is increasingly considered as a crucial factor in electoral strategies.<sup>8</sup>

Such an analysis is not possible without comparing historical and present Turkish public perceptions of Germany. Extensive studies on public opinion focus mainly on German perceptions of Turkey, rather than the reverse. In general, German public opinion towards Turkey is characterised as ‘Turkish-sceptic’.<sup>9</sup> Literature on the social aspect of bilateral relations concentrates predominantly on this Turkish-scepticism within

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4 Cf. Bedir, Nurdan Selay/ Gedikli, Ardahan Özkan/ Şenyuva, Özgehan. So Close Yet So Far: Turkey’s Relations with Germany in Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Narratives (2003–2018). In this volume, pp.111-139.

5 Cf. Turhan, Ebru. The Implications of the Refugee Crisis for Turkish-German Relations: An Analysis of the Critical Ebbs and Flows in the Bilateral Dialogue. In: *Öneri*, 2018, 13, (49), pp. 187–210.; Trunov, Philipp. German-Turkish Relations during the Modern Period: Military-Political Aspects. In: *Vostok. Afro-Aziatskie Obshchestva: Istorii i Sovremennost*, 2019, 94, (5), pp. 94–105; Hintz, Lisel. Rethinking Turkey’s ‘Rapprochements’: Trouble with Germany and Beyond. In: *Survival*, 2019, 61, (3), pp. 165–186.

6 Cf. Turhan, The Implications of the Refugee Crisis for Turkish-German Relations, 2018.

7 Cf. Hintz, Rethinking Turkey’s ‘Rapprochements’, 2019.

8 Cf. For a discussion on AKP foreign policy see: Canan-Sokullu, Ebru. “Transformation in Foreign and Security Policy in the AKP Era: Realpolitik Codes versus Instrumental Soft-Power”. In: Ebru Canan Sokullu (Ed.). *Turkey in Transition: Politics, Society and Foreign Policy*. Berlin, 2020, pp. 175–192.

9 Cf. Turhan, Ebru. Germany’s Domesticated European Policy: Implications for the EU and Turkey. In: Ebru Turhan (Ed.). *German-Turkish Relations Revisited*. The

German public opinion as well as integration problems encountered by Turkish immigrants and their descendants in Germany.<sup>10</sup> Some of these studies underline the relevance of identity as one of the primary reasons for Turkish-scepticism among German people.<sup>11</sup> Others stress the German media's role in reproducing Turkish-scepticism.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, these studies argue that the accumulation of integration related issues of individuals with Turkish origins produce a negative impact on German society's perception of Turkish immigrants. There are also further studies on public opinion which investigate German citizens' attitudes towards Turkey in comparison with other EU Member States.<sup>13</sup> These studies underline rising Islamophobia and the economic crisis as being primarily responsible for anti-Turkey sentiment among people living in Germany and the EU. For instance, it is argued that Turkish electoral campaigns in German cities for the series of elections that took place in the period 2014–2018<sup>14</sup> and the 2017 constitutional referendum created negative feelings among German people, hence contributed to Turkish-scepticism.<sup>15</sup> Other studies, such as those in this volume, suggest that the Gezi protests and the Turkish state's reaction in 2013 had already marked a turning point in the German Parlia-

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European Dimension, Domestic and Foreign Politics and Transnational Dynamics. Turkey and European Union Studies. Vol. 2. Baden-Baden, 2019, pp.143 – 163.

- 10 Cf. Yılmaz, Hakan. Turkish identity on the road to the EU: basic elements of French and German oppositional discourses. In: *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 2007, 9, (3), pp. 293–305.; Mora, Necla. Turkey and Turks in the German media. In: *Journal of Human Sciences*, 2009, 6, (2), pp. 606–625.; Mueller, Claus. Integrating Turkish communities: a German dilemma. In: *Population Research and Policy Review*, 2007, 25, (5–6), pp. 419–441.; Ramm, Christoph. The Muslim Makers. In: *Interventions*, 2010, 12, (2), pp. 183–197.
- 11 Yılmaz, Hakan. Turkish identity on the road to the EU.; Kaya, Ayhan. German-Turkish Transnational Space: A Separate Space of Their Own. In: *German Studies Review*, 2007, 30, (3), pp. 483–502.
- 12 Mora, Turkey and Turks in the German media, 2009.
- 13 Gerhards, Jürgen/ Hans, Silke. Why not Turkey? Attitudes towards Turkish Membership in the EU among Citizens in 27 European Countries. In: *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2011, 49, (4), pp. 741–766.; Öner, Selcen. Influential internal and external factors in German policy towards Turkey's EU membership: more than 'privileged partnership'; less than full membership? In: *Eastern Journal of European Studies*, 2014, 5, (2), pp. 95–118.
- 14 Turkish citizens resident in Germany have voted in the following: 2014 and 2018 Presidential Elections; June and November 2015 and 2018 Turkish General (Parliamentary Elections) and 2017 Turkish Constitutional Referendum.
- 15 Kuru, Deniz. Turkish Electoral Campaigns in Germany and the Wider Western Europe as Transnational Practices. In: Ebru Turhan (Ed.). *German-Turkish Relations Revisited*. Baden Baden, 2019, pp.187 – 205.

ment's narration of Turkey.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, some argue that political developments in Turkey after the failed coup attempt of 15 July 2016 created a mistrust towards Turkey as a modern democratic state.<sup>17</sup>

This chapter will address a considerable gap in the literature on perceptions of Turkish public towards Germany by analysing a number of opinion polls that have not yet been contextualised so as to shed light on the following questions: (1) Looking at a recent 15 years period, have public perceptions of Germany displayed significant changes, considering the amount and weight attributed to Germany in the Turkish political agenda (see other chapters in this volume)? (2) Is Germany perceived as having a special position compared with other European states? (3) Finally, are perceptions of Germany reflected on the present political polarisation that dominates the Turkish political scene? In other words, does Germany represent a fault line between supporters of the governing bloc and the opposition?

The time frame for our analysis is from 2004 to 2019, which was chosen as a basis given the availability over time of Turkish public opinion data on Germany and Turkish foreign policy. It also covers the AKP's rule, which came into being with the 2002 general elections.

## 2. Methodology and Data Sources

In order to answer these questions, this chapter uses two data sources. Firstly, we scrutinised the opinion polls Transatlantic Trends Survey (TTS) by the German Marshall Fund (2004–2008) and the Public Perceptions on Turkish foreign policy survey conducted by the Kadir Has University (2016–2019),<sup>18</sup> that included questions regarding Germany, thereafter creating a secondary data set by way of building on these two survey data.

Secondly, in depth statistical analysis is based on data provided by Istanbul Economics Research, taken from two public opinion surveys, one con-

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16 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, pp. 79-109, p. 91.

17 Aydın, Yaşar. German-Turkish Relations at Continuous Crossroads – Political and Structural Factors. In: Ebru Turhan (Ed.). German-Turkish Relations Revisited. Turkey and European Union Studies. Vol. 2. Baden-Baden, 2019, pp.165 – 183.

18 Cf. Aydın, Mustafa et. al. Research on Public Perceptions on Turkish Foreign Policy. Center for Turkish Studies. Kadir Has University. Istanbul, 2019.

ducted in September 2018 with 2,500 respondents and the other in December 2018 with 1,500 respondents across Turkey using the Computer Aided Telephone Interview (CATI) surveying technique. Results are deemed representative at a national level with a 95 % confidence interval, with +/- 2.2 percentage points and 2.5 percentage points accuracy, respectively.

### 3. Analysis and Findings

Analysis of available data reveals that from 2004 to 2019, our chosen timeframe, Turkish public opinion carried a rather negative view of other countries in general. Germany was no exception.

Data from the TTS demonstrates this negative attitude very clearly (Figure 23).

*Figure 23: Feelings Towards Countries Between 2004–2008<sup>19</sup> (0–100, mean scores)*

	TTS 2004	TTS 2005	TTS 2006	TTS 2007	TTS 2008
The UK	n/a	29.91	25.42	n/a	n/a
France	34.02	29.44	24.86	n/a	14.29
<b>Germany</b>	<b>45.63</b>	<b>44.22</b>	<b>43.56</b>	<b>n/a</b>	<b>31.47</b>
Spain	n/a	35.41	30.70	n/a	17.52
USA	27.86	27.97	19.84	11.35	14.28
Russia	20.98	24.39	21.40	21.13	16.92
Israel	12.50	14.43	12.41	4.96	6.44
China	40.60	46.33	39.38	28.09	26.76

Source: Transatlantic Trends Survey Data Set, calculations by the authors.

Respondents were asked to rate their feelings towards different foreign countries on a thermometer scale (0=Very Cold, 100=Very Warm) and opted for colder rather than warmer views for the countries investigated, all of which received mean scores below 50. The United States of America (USA) mean score is amongst the lowest, reaching only 20.26 out of 100 across all years investigated.

Even though Germany registers below 50 points for the years investigated here, it is actually the most popular country in this study with on

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<sup>19</sup> In particular years, certain countries were not included by the survey research team.

average ‘warmer’ feelings when compared with others included.<sup>20</sup> The mean score for Germany is 41.22/100 across the years 2004–2006 and 2008, while other states at that time in the EU, France, the UK and Spain, are rated significantly lower.

### 3.1 *Glass half full: Germany as a Partner*

About a decade later, the same characteristics of public opinion in Turkey still prevail, as suggested by the findings of the 2017 Kadir Has survey on Turkish foreign policy. The generally negative attitude towards other countries remains, particularly towards the Western states. Nonetheless, Germany is again the most popular among the unpopular, as it were.

Following the crisis and heated rhetoric that dominated 2017 after the failed coup attempt of 15 July 2016 and the referendum on Turkey’s political system in April 2017, public perceptions appear to have improved both in regard to Germany and other European states. The most recent findings of the Kadir Has Survey investigating this issue all indicate a bounce and increase in positive assessments.

As the Kadir Has University’s 2019 survey illustrates, the percentage of individuals who think Turkey should cooperate with Germany in its foreign policy has jumped from 1.7 % in 2016 to 8.9 % in 2019 (Figure 24). This figure makes Germany not only the most popular European state, but also the most popular Western state. Only the European Union as an institution is slightly more popular with 10.4 %, implying an increase of approximately three percentage points. It is noteworthy that North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) countries are considered as favourable partners to cooperate with. Respective support having more than doubled from 7.1 % in 2017 to 15.7 % in 2019. Comparing support for cooperation with individual NATO member countries, Germany also scores comparatively well with a level of 8 % compared to 3.1 % or 2.3 % for the United Kingdom and France respectively.

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20 Except for 2005, when China received a mean score of 46.33, two points above Germany; the reason for this exceptional spike is unclear and hence it must be subject to further investigation.

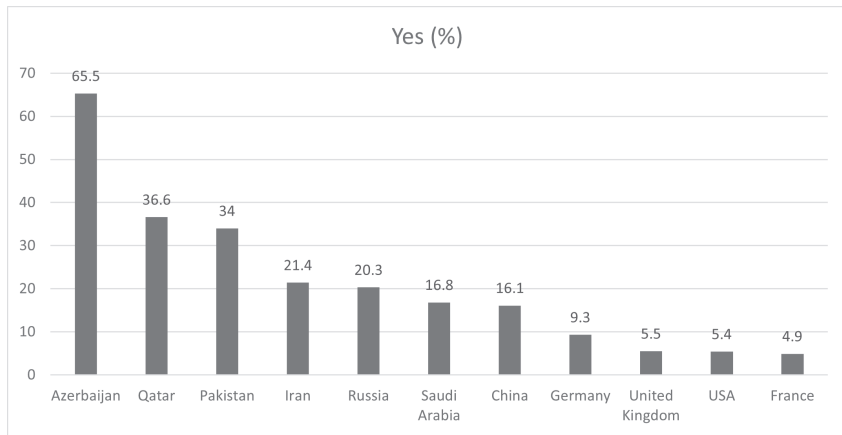
*Figure 24: Preference With Which Countries Turkey Should Cooperate in its Foreign Policy Between 2013–2019 (%)*

	2013	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Azerbaijan	12.4	18.7	48.5	59	45.4	44.5
Turkic Republics	11.3	16.2	16.7	37.4	31.8	41.2
Muslim Countries	12.5	19.5	9.8	22.4	23.4	19.2
NATO Countries	-	-	-	7.1	8.1	15.7
Russian Federation	6.8	9.4	3	7.8	13.2	12.9
European Union	10.3	7	8.1	4.1	7.6	10.4
China	4.2	3.7	3.1	3.4	4.8	10.4
<b>Germany</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>8.9</b>
USA	14.2	12.6	7.2	2.5	1.7	8.4
Qatar	-	-	-	-	-	6.9
Neighbour Countries	-	-	-	-	-	6.6
Pakistan	0.8	1.3	1.3	4.7	4.6	5.3
Iran	5.7	5.4	1.3	1.7	1.9	5
Shanghai Cooperation Organization	-	-	-	-	-	4.8
United Kingdom	3.6	1.8	1	0.9	1.4	3.1
France	2.1	1.3	1.2	0.4	1.5	2.3
Israel	1.4	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.3	1.8
Turkey should implement its foreign policy alone	20.7	22	22.6	14.7	15	15.6

Source: Aydın, Mustafa et al. Research on Public Perceptions on Turkish Foreign Policy, 2019.

The increased willingness to cooperate correlates with a growing perception of Germany as a friend. Participants of Kadir Has University’s survey were asked explicitly to name ‘Turkey’s friends’. As seen here in Figure 25, almost 10 % of respondents consider Germany as a friend compared to 5.5 % for the UK and 4.9 % for France, making it once again the most popular EU country and Western state. Answers to this question also highlight the Turkish public’s negative opinions about foreign countries and sense of isolation, generally unable to identify any friends of Turkey. However, as an exception 65 % of the public do consider Azerbaijan to be Turkey’s friend, along with Qatar and Pakistan with 36.6 % and 34 % respectively, followed by Iran and Russia. The positive evaluation of Russia is a new phenomenon, as in the 2018 edition of this study only 4.1 % of the respondents considered Russia as a friend.

Figure 25: Results on the Question of Whether These Countries are Friends of Turkey (2019)



Source: Aydın, Mustafa et al. Research on Public Perceptions on Turkish Foreign Policy, 2019.

The numbers from different data sources point in similar directions, with Turkish public opinion regarding foreign policy displaying some scepticism towards other countries. Indeed, historically positive evaluations of other states remain low, particularly so for those in Europe and the USA. In general terms, perceptions of amity are also significantly low as far as these states are concerned. However, it is significant that Germany is clearly perceived differently. Turkish public opinion has more positive evaluations of Germany, with the country being regarded as a potential partner for cooperation, more so than other European states and the USA.

### 3.2 They are Out to Get Us: Threat Perceptions

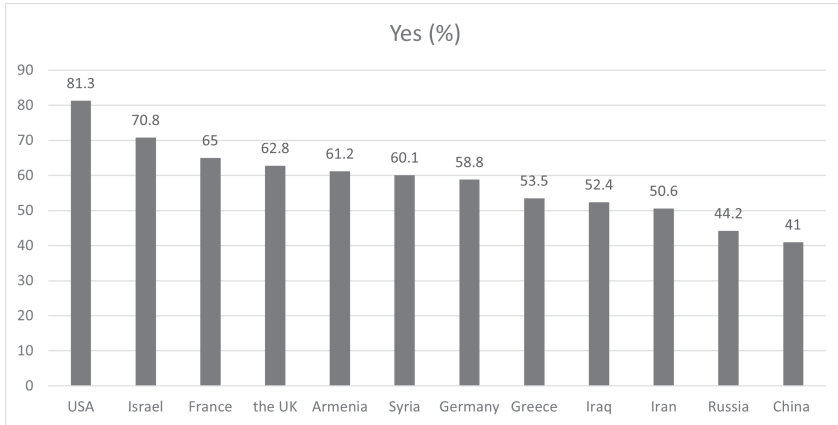
Yet, threat perceptions among Turkish public opinion are very high. When asked whether the listed countries posed a threat to Turkey or not, most respondents indicated that they consider almost all foreign countries as potential threats and Germany is no exception (see Figure 26).

Almost 60 % of respondents stated that Germany poses a threat to Turkey, while 27 % disagreed and 15 % said that they did not know. It is striking that Germany is regarded as posing a larger threat than Greece, 58.8 % versus 53.5 %, respectively. Traditionally, Greece is considered as



the historical other and a constant threat due to disagreements about the Aegean Sea.

*Figure 26: Results on the Question of Which Country or Countries Pose a Threat to Turkey? (2019)*



Source: Aydın, Mustafa et al. Research on Public Perceptions on Turkish Foreign Policy, 2019.

Data on threat perception was also collected in a public opinion survey in March/ April 2021, titled ‘Turkish Perceptions of the European Union’ conducted by The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF): It seems that the threat perception coming from Germany has decreased over time. When asked, ‘Which country or international community is the biggest threat to the national interests of Turkey according to your opinion?’ only 2.9 % have responded as Germany, making it the ninth country on the list, way under the USA (60.6 %); Israel (24 %); Russia (19 %) and Greece (15.3 %).<sup>21</sup> Hence, Germany is considered a threat by about 60 % (cf. Figure 27), but by far not the biggest or most important in comparison with other countries.

21 German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF). Turkish Perceptions of the European Union. 2021, 29.04.2021, <https://www.gmfus.org/publications/turkish-perceptions-european-union> [24.05.2021]; German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF). Turkish Perceptions of the European Union. 2022, 14.04.2022, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/turkish-perceptions-european-union-2022> [21.06.2022]. The Survey is part of the Turkey, Europe, and Global Issues Program.

According to another survey focusing on public opinion and foreign policy conducted by Istanbul Economics Research in late 2018 and 2019, our initial two findings are confirmed. Firstly, in Turkish public opinion negative stances towards foreign countries are dominant and secondly Germany is still the most popular EU state (Figure 24). This is a recurrent finding over time, similar to those from the earlier surveys one decade before, as presented in Figure 23 and 24. Average scores (out of 10) are between 2.2 and 3.5 (1 = distant feelings and 10 = close feelings). Japan receives the most positive evaluation, with 1 out of 4 respondents awarding a score of 6 or higher, partly owing to the fact that many people lack a strong opinion of the country as it is not an everyday partner of Turkey. The USA receive the lowest evaluation, with 7 out of 10 people giving the lowest score of 1. Only 1 out of 10 gave a positive score of 6 or above for their feelings towards the USA. From a global perspective, Germany is the second most favourable country, with a mean score of 3.13 out of 10. Among EU countries,<sup>22</sup> the United Kingdom with an average score of 2.53 out of 10 is in second place. Considering the strong fallout with Germany in 2017 and the extensive negative rhetoric being applied at the time, Germany's more recent popularity is important to note.

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22 Our analysis was conducted prior to the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union.

Figure 27: Turkish Public Perceptions of States in 2019. (1=distant feelings, 10=close feelings; mean scores)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total	Average (max=10)
Japan	44.4	6.8	7.1	6.4	10.8	7.4	4.6	5.1	2.4	5.0	100.0	3.48
<b>Germany</b>	<b>48.0</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>3.13</b>
Russia	47.6	10.3	8.8	5.4	13.5	4.0	3.9	3.3	-	3.2	100.0	2.93
China	54.2	9.0	8.9	6.3	11.0	3.8	2.8	2.0	0.5	1.5	100.0	2.57
United Kingdom	57.1	8.9	8.0	6.1	8.1	2.6	3.2	3.8	0.5	1.7	100.0	2.53
France	55.5	9.9	9.6	5.4	7.5	4.2	3.3	2.9	0.5	1.2	100.0	2.51
USA	70.3	6.2	4.8	3.0	5.4	2.2	2.0	1.8	0.8	3.5	100.0	2.20

Source: Istanbul Economics Research 2019 Foreign Policy Survey, calculations by the authors.

3.3 Leadership Matters: Foreign Leaders in the eyes of Turkish public.

The survey by Istanbul Economics Research includes separate items for assessing public opinion and foreign policy, with one question to do with perceptions of foreign leaders. The survey concludes that Turkish citizens perceive German Chancellor Angela Merkel as a successful leader. She is the second most popular world leader, immediately following Russian President Vladimir Putin. Putin spearheads this list as the leader considered most successful with a mean rating of 2.92 out of 5 points (1=not successful at all; 5=very successful, Figure 28).

Figure 28: Foreign Leaders according to the Turkish Public in 2019 (percent; 1=not successful at all; 5=very successful)

	Not successful at all	Unsuccessful	Neither successful nor unsuccessful	Successful	Very successful	Total	Average (max=5)
Russia – Vladimir Putin	26.8	14.5	13.5	30.3	14.9	100.0	2.92
<b>Germany – Angela Merkel</b>	<b>30.5</b>	<b>22.2</b>	<b>18.4</b>	<b>20.8</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>2.54</b>
France – Emmanuel Macron	36.7	27.9	19.8	10.7	5.0	100.0	2.19
USA – Donald Trump	46.9	27.5	11.5	8.8	5.4	100.0	1.98

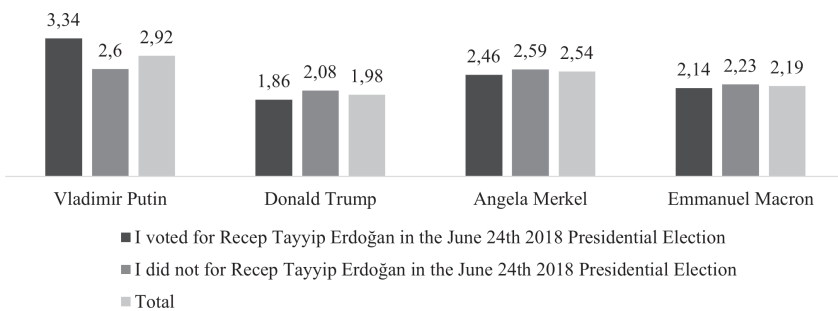
Source: Istanbul Economics Research 2019 Foreign Policy Survey – calculations by the authors.

Merkel has a mean approval score of 2.54 (out of 5). President Donald Trump is considered the least successful leader in Turkish eyes, with a success evaluation of 1.98 out of 5. President Putin’s popularity is of great significance. Considering Turkey’s polarised political scene between the government and opposition, it is important to see whether he is regarded as being successful across all parties or more positively evaluated by one particular group. The data reveals that individuals who voted for incumbent President Erdoğan in the presidential elections of 24 June 2018 had a significantly more positive evaluation of President Putin, compared with those who voted for another candidate. Among the Erdoğan voters, 41.5 % perceived President Putin as being successful and 19.2 % as very successful. Among those who did not vote for President Erdoğan, the figures are much lower, namely: 21.5 % successful and 11.8 % very successful. The av-

erage success score for President Putin is 3.34 (out of 5) for Erdoğan voters and 2.60 (out of 5) for those who did not vote for him (Figure 29).

Thus, we can clearly state that President Putin is considered to be the most successful foreign leader only by a certain group. These findings suggest that relations with Russia generally are part of party politics and part of the existing polarisation. A similar division on positive evaluations among Turkish voters is not valid for other leaders. For instance, the difference between President Erdoğan voters and non-voters on evaluations of President Trump, President Macron and Chancellor Merkel is insignificant and marginal (Figure 29).

*Figure 29: World Leaders' Ratings by Presidential Vote Preferences in 2018 (Mean, max=5)*



Source: Istanbul Economics Research 2019 Foreign Policy Survey, calculations by the authors.

This finding indicates that supporters of President Erdoğan are not only receptive to leadership cues, but also influenced by the close relationship between President Erdoğan and President Putin.<sup>23</sup>

Positive evaluations of Turkish public opinion towards Angela Merkel is a steady and stable one. In the 2001 GMF Survey, Chancellor Merkel is the third most positively evaluated foreign leader (13.3 % positive), following two Turkic leaders: President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev (57.1 % positive) and the Prime Minister of Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus Ersin Tatar (30.1 % positive).

23 For a detailed analysis on the evolution of Turkey-Russia relations and the impact of leadership, cf. Balta, Evren. From Geopolitical Competition to Strategic Partnership: Turkey and Russia after The Cold War. In: *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi*, 2019, 16, (63), pp.69 – 86.

The evaluation of Germany shows less signs of correlation between party endorsement and leaders' approval. Hence, it is possible to posit that for Turkish people generally Germany is considered as special and moreover this view is shared across all political parties. By contrast, Russia is clearly evaluated more positively by those who feel closer to the government and President Erdoğan. Thus, it is possible to argue that Germany has the advantage of being able to reach all sections of society in conducting its public diplomacy towards Turkey. Furthermore, any initiative to advance relations between Turkey and Germany is very likely to receive bipartisan support.

### 3.4. *Compartmentalisation of Relations: The Case of Education*

As the results of analysing President Erdoğan's narratives on Germany in this volume demonstrate, the President has been careful to compartmentalise the relations with Germany. Hence, the message is mixed. On the one hand, while Germany is a potential threat to Turkey, jealous of its achievements and even occasionally supporting terrorist activities against the country, on the other hand it is also a preferred business and trade partner, with German business people and tourists being most welcome in Turkey.<sup>24</sup> This distinction of issues is also relevant in public opinion. People tend to differentiate and compartmentalise their perceptions towards states.

As the Istanbul Economics Research survey highlights, Turkish respondents perceive Western education as providing a path towards the most opportunities for their children. While 3 out of 10 Turkish citizens express a desire for their children to seek higher education abroad (subject to financial means), a mere 2.1 % of those who indicated this preference chose Russia as their preferred destination. This is in clear contrast with the strongly positive feelings and desire for cooperation with Russia that exists in certain groups within Turkish society. It can thus be concluded that Russia is perceived as being a strong ally in the context of balancing Turkey's foreign relations. Nevertheless, from a higher educational standpoint even those who want to see improved relations between Turkey and Russia would still prefer to send their children to the leading destinations for realising self-fulfilment and prosperity, namely the United States, Ger-

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24 Bedir/ Gedikli/ Şenyuva. Turkey's Relations with Germany in Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Narratives (2003–2018), p. 128ff.

many and the United Kingdom. Moreover, this stance does not differ between voters of rival presidential candidates. Both those who voted for President Erdoğan and others who voted for his competitor Muharrem İnce in the presidential elections of 2018 list the same three destinations as their top targets for studies abroad.

In conclusion, although President Erdoğan's supporters view a political alliance with Russia and evaluate the Russian President Vladimir Putin significantly more positively than the rest of Turkish society, very few of them would choose Russia as their preferred destination for studies abroad.

This is a rather clear manifestation of the power that Germany has, along with the US and the UK, in terms of social relations and public perceptions in Turkey. Many studies on soft power include education as part of their evaluations, for which these results provide a very clear example. Hence, education appears as a very promising potential bridge to improve Turkish-German relations, which is popular and demanded by a large portion of Turkish society. Regardless of political relations between the two countries, for the Turkish people Germany is still a respected and popular destination for education. Further exploration of this potential is important in the strengthening of relations. A detailed analysis of higher education and further studies on the impact of cooperation in the field of education and learning mobility on bilateral relations needs to be supported and encouraged.

Figure 30: Choice of Destination for Higher Education by Presidential Vote (%)

	Recep Tayyip Erdogan	Muharrem İnce	Meral Akşener	Selahattin Demirtaş	Overall
United States	30.4	21.2	22.2	28.6	26.9
<b>Germany</b>	<b>19.6</b>	<b>18.2</b>	-	<b>19.0</b>	<b>17.0</b>
United Kingdom	19.6	21.2	5.6	4.8	17.0
Finland	2.2	7.6	16.7	9.5	7.9
France	2.2	1.5	16.7	4.8	3.7
Austria	2.2	1.5	16.7	-	3.6
Other	4.3	3.0	5.6	4.8	3.6
Switzerland	4.3	4.5	-	-	3.1
Norway	6.5	1.5	-	9.5	2.9
Belgium	2.2	3.0	-	4.8	2.8
Spain	-	1.5	-	4.8	2.2
Italy	4.3	1.5	-	-	2.2
Russia	-	1.5	5.6	9.5	2.1
Poland	-	4.5	-	-	1.8
Canada	2.2	1.5	5.6	-	1.6
Netherlands	-	3.0	-	-	1.0
Cyprus	-	3.0	-	-	1.0
China	-	-	5.6	-	0.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Istanbul Economics Research 2019 Foreign Policy Survey, calculations by the authors.

In 2021, Germany remained the most popular EU destination of choice for higher education. 18.8 % of the respondents chose Germany, when asked ‘In which European country would you prefer your child to get education?’, placing it on top of the list.<sup>25</sup> The UK is second (14.4 %) and France is third, with only 4.9 % of the respondents preferring to send their child to France.

Germany is not only considered as a successful country with a successful leader in the eyes of the Turkish public. On a completely different perspective, the GMF 2021 survey also revealed emotional social connections exist

25 “Turkish Perceptions of the European Union” Report by The German Marshall Fund of the United States.



as well. When asked ‘In terms of culture and lifestyle, to what extent do you consider people living in these countries close to yourself?’ almost half of the respondents (46.4 %) deemed people of Germany ‘close’, placing it on top of the list, people of Bulgaria second with 33 %.

#### 4. Discussion and Contextualisation

Turkish people’s mistrust towards foreign states is nothing new. In this regard, all studies indicate that Turkish public opinion displays low levels of trust particularly in Western countries, albeit Turkey has been part of this grouping for over a century. Hakan Yılmaz utilises the term ‘Sèvres Syndrome’ and points to the early history of Turkish modernisation to explain euroscepticism and mistrust towards European states.<sup>26</sup> In his extensive analysis of euroscepticism in Turkey, he links the issue of West-scepticism to increasingly negative attitudes towards the EU, arguing that: “At the popular level, identity Euroscepticism revolves around four key issues: national sovereignty; morality; negative discrimination; and Europe’s alleged hidden agenda to divide and rule Turkey (the so-called ‘Sèvres Syndrome’)”.<sup>27</sup> Yılmaz continues,

“The Sèvres Syndrome thus refers to a certain mode of perception and a resulting code of operation which are rooted in a traumatic past experience with the West and have not been revised since, no matter how the real relationship with the West has changed over the years. ‘Memory’ is not always what we ‘remember’ as autonomous subjects, but what we are ‘reminded’ of by those in positions of authority, using institutions that produce and disseminate ideology, such as schools, textbooks, museums, the media, cinema, literature, etc”.<sup>28</sup>

‘Anti-Westernism’ is thus a historically deeply rooted sentiment, which goes well beyond traditional fault lines in Turkish politics. Turkey has

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26 Yılmaz, Hakan. “Two Pillars of Nationalist Euroscepticism in Turkey: The Tanzimat and Sevres Syndromes”. In: Ingmar Karlsson/ Annika Strom Melin (Eds.). *Turkey, Sweden and the European Union: Experiences and Expectations*. Stockholm, 2006, pp. 29–40.

27 Yılmaz, Hakan. Euroscepticism in Turkey: Parties, Elites, and Public Opinion. In: *South European Society and Politics*, 2011, 16, (1), pp. 185–208.

28 Yılmaz, Hakan, Euroscepticism in Turkey.

become a deeply polarised society, especially during the last decade.<sup>29</sup> Studies reveal that despite the deep polarisation, there are issues that remain as islands of agreements which reach across groups. Through their extensive polarisation analysis, Emre Erdoğan and Pınar Semerci demonstrate that this anti-Western attitude is one of the strongest negative islands of agreement that goes beyond party lines, education and socio-economic differences.<sup>30</sup>

A detailed analysis of euroscepticism in Turkey is beyond the scope of this chapter.<sup>31</sup> However, it is important to follow the proposition by Hakan Yılmaz on the issue of “reminding” by those in positions of authority.<sup>32</sup> Regarding Western Europe in general and Germany in particular, over the past five years the Turkish public has been increasingly reminded by leading government figures of the potential threat. In other words, European states, particularly Germany, have been presented as a potential threat and enemy of Turkey. Although low levels of sympathy for and perceptions of threat from foreign states have been a long-standing characteristic of Turkish people, extensive use of ‘the enemy’ narrative by politicians is rather new.<sup>33</sup>

In her analysis of the 2017 crisis between European states and Turkey, considering the latter’s constitutional referendum campaigns in European states, Gözde Yılmaz argues that a post-truth strategy was actively adopted by the key AKP cadre, which relied on nationalist sentiments and the

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29 Cf. Erdoğan, Emre/ Semerci, Pınar Uyan. Dimensions of Polarization in Turkey 2017. Istanbul Bilgi University, Center for Migration Research, 2017.

30 Erdoğan, Emre/ Semerci, Pınar Uyan. Fanusta diyaloglar: Türkiye’de kutuplaşmanın boyutları. In: *Istanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları*, 2018.

31 If interested, for a detailed discussion and analysis on Euroscepticism in Turkey, in addition to the works by Hakan Yılmaz, see Yaka, Özge. Why Not EU? Dynamics of the Changing Turkish Attitudes towards EU Membership. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 2016, 24, (1), pp. 149–170; Çarkoğlu, Ali/ Kentmen, Çiğdem. Diagnosing Trends and Determinants in Public Support for Turkey’s EU membership. In: *South European Society and Politics*, 2011, 16, (3), pp. 365–379; Uguz, Hülya Eski/ Saygılı, Rukiye. Euro-Scepticism in Turkey of AKP Period in the Context of Temporary Tensions and Permanent Interests. In: *Inquiry*, 2017, 2, (1); Dikici Bilgin, Hasret. Westernist sceptics and anti-western reformers in the Turkish party system. In: *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 2017, 19, (2), pp. 191–208.

32 Yılmaz, Hakan. Two Pillars of Nationalist Euroscepticism in Turkey, p. 4.

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

underlying Sèvres Syndrome.<sup>34</sup> The portrayal of Germany and the Netherlands as states that are jealous of the “New Turkey” that is strong and influential was constructed and repeated by different actors on numerous platforms.<sup>35</sup> As Yılmaz argues, this post-truth portrayal of Germany constructed from half-truths and misinformation definitely took its toll on Turkish public opinion towards Germany. Yet, it is important to underline that despite the crisis as well as negative agenda setting and framing in 2017, attitudes towards Germany remain rather stable and are certainly not to be regarded as extremely negative.

### 5. Conclusion

Germany continues to be regarded as a popular country in Turkey. Most Turkish people at all different levels in society experience some level of exposure to news related with Germany through different channels: relatives and neighbours who are or have been part of the Turkish diaspora in Germany; millions of German tourists that visit Turkey; and music by Germans of Turkish origin (especially rap and hip hop).<sup>36</sup> Germany is also a popular country in the news, especially over the last five years, being considered as: the EU’s main engine; one of the principal actors shaping Turkey’s bid for EU membership; the main actor behind the 2016 EU-Turkey statement on migration; leading economic investor in Turkey and a key buyer of Turkish products. President Erdoğan speaks quite often about Germany and even uses it for comparison purposes to assess Turkey’s achievements.<sup>37</sup> Despite adverse framing as well as increasingly negative and conflictual statements over recent years, so far as Turkish public opinion is concerned Germany’s approval ratings remain stable. Indeed, Turks in general share a favourable view that Turkey should

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34 Yılmaz, Gözde. Post-truth politics in the 2017 Euro-Turkish crisis. In: *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 2019, 27, (2), pp. 237–246.

35 For another detailed analysis and examples of the narrative on the powerful “New Turkey” and the envious European states (in particular Germany) resorting into dirty politics to stop its ascent, see Üstün, Çiğdem. *The Rise and Fall of Europeanization*, Bern, Switzerland, 2017, especially chapter II of this book, *Turkey – EU relations hit by populist rhetoric* (with Özgehan Şenyuva).

36 For a detailed historical analysis of rap and hip hop music establishing a bridge between Turkey and Germany see Güney, Serhat. *Zor isimli çocuklar: bir gurbet hikâyesi*. In: *İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları*, 2015.

37 Bedir/ Gedikli/ Şenyuva. *Turkey’s Relations with Germany in Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Narratives (2003–2018)*, p. 135.

continue to cooperate and work with Germany. It is very important to recognize that the perceptions of Germany are not reflected on the present political polarisation that dominates the Turkish political scene. In other words, Germany does not represent a fault line between the supporters of the governing bloc and the opposition and the evaluations towards Germany are bipartisan in nature. Thus, Germany in general and relations (economic, cultural, social and political) with Germany is not a divisive issue and such policies are very likely to receive public support.

However, such popularity comes as a mixed blessing. Turkish public opinion towards Germany is complex and conflictual, namely the favourite Western European state with a successful leader, but lacks translation into a stable and positive evaluation. People's generally negative attitudes towards the West include Germany. Over the years Turkish evaluation has been rather volatile, to the extent that Germany is also considered as a potential threat to Turkey and hence for some any cooperation should be avoided. Having said that, it is important to recognise that the Turkish public displays suspicions and a lack of trust towards almost all foreign states.

Thus, it would be fair to argue that Germany needs to invest more in public diplomacy so as to increase its level of trust and thereby improve Turkish public opinion in this regard. On a more positive note, Germany has built extensive credit in the eyes of Turkish people over a long period of time, despite constantly being on the political agenda and at times framed in a very negative narrative by Turkey's leadership. Germany's position is resilient and hence there is vast potential for building a positive agenda both through traditional diplomacy as well as public and citizen diplomacy. Considering the cultural affinity that is evident in the recent survey, the potential of public and citizen diplomacy is very significant. Education, as demonstrated in this chapter, is one such field that carries such a potential which could therefore be further exploited.