



MAGYC

Migration Governance and Asylum Crises

Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

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MAGYC: The MAGYC (**Migr**Ation **G**overnance and **AsY**lum **C**risis) project seeks to assess **how migration governance has responded to the recent “refugee crises” and has since been influenced by it, and how crises at large shape policy responses to migration.** This four-year research project (2018–2022) **brings together twelve international partners:** the Hugo Observatory from the University of Liège (Coordinator), Sciences Po, the University of Economics in Bratislava, the GIGA institute of Global and Area Studies, Lund University, the IDMC, SOAS University of London, the University of Milan, the Lebanese American University, the University of Macedonia, Sabanci University, IfPO/CNRS.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Parliamentary Deliberations and the Turkish Political System.....	6
An Analysis of Political Preferences through Parliamentary Deliberations.....	10
Conclusion.....	27
References.....	29

MAGYC WORKING PAPER

Abstract

Since 2011, Turkey has unexpectedly become a host country to the largest refugee population in the world, leading to a major change in its migration governance structures. The presence of 3.7 million Syrian refugees in Turkey led to intense internal political debates over the Turkish responses to the Syrian crisis as well as policies to be adopted to deal with this unprecedented flow of people. This paper provides an in-depth analysis of the Turkish Parliamentary debates over the Syrian refugees, and assesses how the Turkish migration deal with the EU has highlighted the existing political cleavages in the country. The paper analyses the political deliberations in the Turkish Parliament, the main legislative body in Turkish politics by utilizing multiple keywords with regards to Turkish migration deal. The paper's extensive coding of the Turkish Parliamentary debates reflects the divide among the five main political parties in the Parliament- the AKP, CHP, MHP, İyi Party and the HDP over the refugee issue. In addition, the political discourse utilized in these deliberations reveal these parties' political preferences and ideologies, albeit over the refugee issue. The paper contributes to the MAGYC objectives by demonstrating the extent to which migration governance challenges are projected onto political deliberations at the domestic level, and illuminating the domestic-foreign linkages over migratory policies. It needs to be noted that while the Syrian refugee crisis did not lead to the emergence of these political cleavages in Turkey, it has, nonetheless, highlighted the already existing cleavages and unexpectedly also deepened them with regards to these political preferences and ideologies.

Introduction

Democratic Parliaments are the main venues where deliberations on policies are conducted, revealing policy preferences of political groups as well as their ideological positions (Rico Motos, 2019; Chambers, 2004). The Turkish Parliament is no exception, the deliberations conducted in the Turkish parliament- the Turkish Grand National Assembly- on various policy options reveal different political groups' preferences, their ideologies, but also the extent to which political contestations between different political groups play a role in shaping parliamentary decisions. Parliaments act as the main venues where partisan debates take place, and arenas which are utilized by politicians to reveal their strategic preferences and/or to garner support for their positions. Parliamentary debates, therefore, form the basis of political debates with multiple functions (Chambers, 2009; Bachtiger and Parkinson, 2019). Recent scholarly debate began to focus on parliamentary debates in areas where the executive plays the decisive role (Baldwin, 2005), in particular with regards to foreign policy related matters.

When the Syrian crisis erupted in 2011, leading to an unprecedented flow of Syrian refugees onto Turkish territories, the Turkish government adopted an open-door policy (Kale and et.al, 2018; Rygiel and et.al, 2016), explaining this decision based on humanitarian reasons (Muftuler-Bac, 2020; Saatcioglu, 2019). Fast forward almost ten years, Turkey has become the host country to the largest number of refugees in the world with 4.1 million refugees residing in Turkey, 3.7 million of which are of Syrian origin (Memisoglu and Ilgit, 2017; Kale and et.al, 2018). The presence of Syrians in Turkey has led to intense political debates in the Turkish Parliament. While most of the decisions relating to the Syrians were taken by the Turkish executive branch, their adoption still needed legislative approval, and/or legal changes to Turkey's migration policy. These legal amendments need to be ratified in the Turkish Parliament, requiring a consensus among the Parliamentarians on their rationale. Similarly, while the executive is the key decision maker on the refugee related matters, the magnitude of these refugees hosted in Turkey has, nonetheless, become a political matter marking contestations between different political parties.

This is why, this paper provides an in-depth analysis of the Turkish Parliamentary debates on the Syrian refugees, and assesses how the Turkish migration deal with the EU has highlighted the existing political cleavages in the country. These political deliberations in the Turkish Parliament are analysed by utilizing multiple keywords with regards to the Syrians in Turkey. In terms of its key findings, the paper, with its extensive coding of the Turkish Parliamentary debates, reflects the divide among the five main political parties currently holding seats in the Parliament on this highly divisive issue. In addition, the paper's analysis of qualitative and quantitative political discourses utilized in these deliberations reveal the political parties' preferences and ideologies, which in some cases have become more visible over the refugee issue.

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

The executive branch is the key decision maker in all foreign policy related matters in Turkey, yet the legislature still plays a role in checking the executive's accountability and provide the background within which executive decisions are made. As a deliberative institution, the Parliament emerges as the main institution where political confrontations are more visible, rather than compromise and consensus building (Dryzek, 2010). Yet, it plays a key function for the control of the executive decision, even in least democratic countries. According to Steiner and et., al (2004), parliamentary discourses are speech acts where the discourse itself plays both communicative and strategic roles. Similarly, Rico Motos (2019:6), claims 'parliamentary discourse is characterized by a regulated interaction between participants'. This paper utilizes these conceptual arguments to analyse the deliberations in the Turkish Parliament, and these debates form the basis of the regulated interactions between the members of the Parliament. At the same time, the public nature of these deliberations ensure that the 'participants' are aware of a domestic audience evaluating their discourses and positions. The domestic audience aspect of the Parliamentary deliberations plays an important role in bringing the political parties closer to their constituents. Consequently, the Parliamentarians utilize their speeches at the Parliament to respond to the needs, demands and the expectations of their constituents. It is precisely this element of reasoned discourses in the political arena that makes Parliamentary deliberations an important tool to assess political dynamics (Chambers, 2009). At the same time, the Parliamentary deliberations are critical in shaping the boundaries within which the executive could devise its policies and packages for the Syrian refugees. In other words, if there is significant resistance and opposition to the government's position on the Syrians, we would expect the government less inclined to host these refugees or propose legal changes to the Turkish migration policies- as analysed in a previous Magyc Working paper (Muftuler-Bac, 2020).

The paper contributes to the MAGYC objectives by demonstrating the extent to which migration governance challenges are projected onto political deliberations at the domestic level, and illuminating the domestic-foreign linkages over migratory policies. It needs to be noted that while the Syrian refugee crisis did not lead to the emergence of these political cleavages in Turkey, it has, nonetheless, highlighted the already existing cleavages and unexpectedly also deepened them with regards to these political preferences and ideologies. The paper first provides an analysis of the theoretical framework for understanding political deliberations, second, it assesses the political system in Turkey with the role that the Turkish Parliament plays in Turkish politics changed over time. Third, after explaining its main methodology, the paper provides both a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the Turkish Parliamentary deliberations from 2015 to 2019 on the Syrians, highlighting the key similarities and differences among the political parties. The paper concludes by noting that the Turkish Parliamentary deliberations provide a detailed glimpse onto the political cleavages over the refugee issue, deepening these fault lines even further.

Parliamentary Deliberations and the Turkish Political System

Parliaments have not always been the main target of scholarly inquiry in assessing governmental choices. Yet, the context within which such parliamentary debates take place is critical in shaping the tone of the discussions. Democratic representation and deliberations in the Parliament are, of course, closely linked together (Baldwin, 2005). The exercise of political judgment as reflected in parliamentary debates reveals the extent to which different political groups contest each other over issue areas- but this contestation is rooted in their ideological differences (Bachtinger and Parkinson, 2019). In particular, the degree of political polarization on the issue being discussed rests both on the perceived salience of the issue but also on the political distance between the parties represented in the Parliament.

Political disagreements lie at the centre of politics, especially in democratic systems. Therefore, to come up with mutually beneficial outcomes over which there is at least a minimum level of agreement is a challenge in democracies, needing both convincing arguments from all involved parties and a set of overriding incentives for all parties to adopt common solutions. As all politics involve a resolution of overarching disagreements for mutually acceptable outcomes- either through coercion or persuasion-, the need for compromise could only be satisfied with extensive deliberations.

As a result, political debates in institutionalized settings lie at the very centre of politics in democracies, and Parliaments provide the most formal venue for such settings. Deliberations that take place within the institutionalized setting of the Parliament are shaped by time and format limitations. These constraints form the context within which the Parliamentarians interact with each other, and judge each other's political agenda, performance, and abilities. These interactions are essential tools for the formulation of policy tools on specific issue areas. In well-functioning democracies, agreements and decisions need to be made after careful elaboration and debates that prevail within set, clearly defined boundaries. The articulation of different policy positions via open debate brings forth the critical role that Parliaments play in democracies, as vehicles of consensus building. It is for this reason that this paper looks into the Parliamentary deliberations to tease out the modalities of political contestation in Turkey.

In presenting a detailed analysis of the parliamentary deliberations from 2015 (the eruption of the refugee crisis) to 2019, this paper provides an analysis of the political discourses, and relatedly the political preferences of the main actors in the Turkish Parliament. The paper's empirical data consists of a quantitative assessment of the political deliberations in the Parliament where the terms 'Syrians', 'refugees', 'immigrant', and 'asylum-seekers' were utilized and a qualitative coding of the terminology employed in these discourses.

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

Our analysis covers the parliamentary debates between June 23, 2015, and July 7, 2019. These dates overlap with the beginning and end of legislative periods, when the Parliament is in session. Our empirical analysis encompasses the coding of Parliament deliberations with pre specified encoding procedures, with a manually collected qualitative dataset which covers 3676 group of declarations from 390 different Parliamentarians from 2015 to 2019. This analysis is premised on a textual analysis of official documents, namely the parliamentary minutes. The parliamentary minutes of The Grand National Assembly of Turkey are recorded by stenographers which include every sentence that is uttered in the Parliament. In other words, unlike traditional parliamentary minutes, which are recorded based on a summary of opinions and conclusions, Turkish parliamentary minutes are recorded as full transcripts. Thus, the official minutes occasionally include iterations or unfinished sentences. Instead of considering each instance of words as an individual observation, the textual analysis only covers finished sentences and exclude iterative sentences that do not contain any other additional opinions.

For the textual analysis, we tried to assess parliamentarians' attitudes toward refugees based on our own interpretations and evaluation of these declarations. Although a significant part of deliberations reveals attitudes toward Syrians effortlessly by containing phrases such as physical harm to Turkey, 'kinship-based relations', and/or 'brotherhood', in most cases uncovering the exact meaning behind the uttered word was a challenge. Thus, we coded the deliberations without any distinctive keywords as indifferent attitudes, while negative and positive attitudes towards Syrians are coded accordingly. As a result, clustered observations around the indifferent category along with unintentional subjectivity of our coding process for the classification of deliberations might have yielded biased results in quantitative analyses. However, since this paper relies mostly on the descriptive analysis of Parliamentary deliberations, we do not expect that such problems over the categorization of attitudes would substantially alter our key findings.

At the same time, we note that despite widely being employed, employing quantitative research methods for the creation of qualitative datasets is relatively trickier. Because the quantification of qualitative data causes loss of valuable information, this study refrains to employ solely quantitative methods. On the other hand, descriptive and visual representations of qualitative data can enhance and support the arguments.

Therefore, the empirical parts of the paper are structured to present the key findings along with their in-depth analyses. We categorized the main takeaways under five key findings that focus on the different aspects of the textual analysis. Taken into consideration of relatively long-time frame of our analysis, the key findings can be increased in number. Categorizing each and every finding of parliamentary analysis, however, is challenging. Apart from the space limitation, forcing discourses to fit under a specific category in order to compare them would contradict the essential nature of deliberations. Despite

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

not fitting in any of the five key findings, none of these unreported results lead to any biases for our key findings.

Prior to the analysis of deliberations in the Turkish Parliament, some background information on the Parliament and its role in Turkish politics is needed. When the Turkish Republic was established in 1923, it was designed to be a Parliamentary system, with the Turkish Parliament established as the representative of the Turkish people, and their sovereignty. From 1923 to 2018, the Turkish political system operated as a parliamentary system with the political party holding the majority of the electorates' votes forming the government with its Party leader serving as the Prime Minister. The Head of State, the President, who holds mostly ceremonial duties was elected by a Parliamentary majority. The head of government- the prime minister-together with the Council of Ministers constituted the executive branch of the government. The Prime Minister and the Ministers were also parliamentarians serving in the Parliament. Parliamentary elections were held every 5 years, and the Parliament elected the President- the Head of State every seven years. The system rested on a separation of powers between various branches of the government, and the executive was accountable to the legislative. The political party holding the majority of the votes also held the majority of the seats in the Turkish Parliament, and had the mandate to form the government. The leader of the party holding the majority was elected as the Prime Minister. From 1923 to 2014, this system worked in ensuring that all executive policies were voted upon and approved by the legislative.

However, profound legal changes adopted since 2014 in Turkish politics radically transformed the Turkish political system, in particular the separation of powers between these different branches of Turkish government as well as the interinstitutional balances. The first major change came with legal reforms an electoral rules adopted in 2010. The legal amendment modified the system for the election of the President from a Parliamentary majority electing the President to one where the President was to be elected directly by the Turkish people with general elections to be held every 5 years. The first Presidential election was held in Summer 2014, with the leader of the ruling party, the Justice and Development Party, Recep Tayyip Erdogan becoming the first directly elected President of the Turkish Republic. However, under this new system, the President could not simultaneously hold the leadership of a political party. The Prime Minister remained responsible for the formulation of everyday policies. It soon turned out that a President elected with popular vote was not content in solely being a ceremonial Head of State. It is for this reason that the Turkish political system found itself in the midst of a major transformation after 2017.

The most important political transformation in Turkey came with a Constitutional amendment which was accepted by the Turkish public in a referendum held on April 16, 2017. With the 2017 Constitutional Referendum, the Turkish Parliamentary system was revised, the post of the Prime Minister was

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

abolished in its entirety, and a presidential system was set up, where the elected President would form the Cabinet of Ministers and acts as the Head of Government. For the first time in Turkish Republic's history, the Ministers were not elected Parliamentarians with a seat in the Turkish legislature. The implementation of these Constitutional changes with elections held in June 2018 toppled the century old tradition of parliamentary system in Turkey, and replaced it with a Presidential System. These legal changes played an important role in altering the separation of powers in Turkish politics, but also diminished the central role the Turkish Parliament played in shaping policy preferences. With the formation of a new government in 2018, the President, his cabinet of ministers- none of whom are parliamentarians- and his advisors represented the main locus of political power. Yet, despite these radical political changes, and governmental transformation in Turkey, the Parliament still matters as the key mechanism for legislative decisions and as the venue for political contestations. The Parliament remains the only institution where the opposition parties voice their policy preferences, challenge the President and his executive decrees, and where political parties compete with each other to maintain electoral support. There are currently 5 political parties in the Turkish parliament following the June 2018 elections, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), the Republican People's Party (CHP), the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), the İyi Party (İYİP) and the People's Democracy Party (HDP). Table 1 presents the distribution of seats in the Turkish Parliament in 2015 and 2018- following general elections in these years.

Table 1: The Distribution of Seats in the Turkish Parliament

Political Party	General Elections			
	November 2015		June 2018	
	Seats	Share (%)	Seats	Share (%)
Justice and Development Party (AKP)	317	57,64	295	49,26
Republican People's Party (CHP)	134	24,36	146	24,33
People's Democracy Party (HDP)	59	10,73	67	11,17
Nationalist Action Party (MHP)	40	7,27	49	8,17
İyi Party (İYİP)	-	-	43	7,16
Total	550	100	600	100

Since the electoral system in Turkey has an electoral threshold of 10% nationwide, political parties receiving less than 10% of the votes do not have seats in the Parliament. This distribution of seats in the Turkish Parliament is important in assessing Parliamentary debates- as 50% of the seats are occupied by Parliamentarians from the AKP- whose leader also is the President of the Turkish Republic. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) has the majority of

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

the votes and therefore the seats under the Turkish electoral system's rules, the CHP and İYİ Party represents the main opposition. The MHP coming from a nationalist tradition was in opposition to the AKP at the beginning of 2015 but entered into an electoral coalition with the AKP and harmonized its position accordingly. The HDP represents the Kurdish minority as well as the more liberal sections of the Turkish society. The AKP has been in power since 2002 and has formulated all of the main policies in Turkey since then (Kaya, 2012; Tolay, 2012). The CHP represents the secular political actors in Turkey and the MHP is purely nationalist, but both parties have a preference in preserving the Turkish ethnic identity and protecting the Turkish territory from outside influence. When the MHP entered into a coalition with the AKP in 2015, a number of its members resigned and formed the İYİ Party, which has a more nationalist outlook compared to the other parties. The HDP represents the Kurdish vote but also has a more global outlook and differ from other political actors in Turkey with its universalist approach. The next section provides our detailed empirical analysis of the Parliamentary Deliberations over the Syrian refugees.

An Analysis of Political Preferences in Turkey Through Parliamentary Deliberations

The role of Parliaments as venues of political debates is significant in assessing political preferences with regards to policy formulations. The following analysis of Parliamentary debates and deliberations reveal both similarities and commonalities between these different political parties in Turkey with regards to their political positions towards the Syrian refugees and Turkish migratory governance strategies developed to deal with the Syrian refugees. These political parties diverge from each other along their ideologies, political vision, and their historical legacies. These divergences shape their positions on the Syrian crisis as well as their views on the receptiveness towards Syrian refugees and their stays in Turkey.

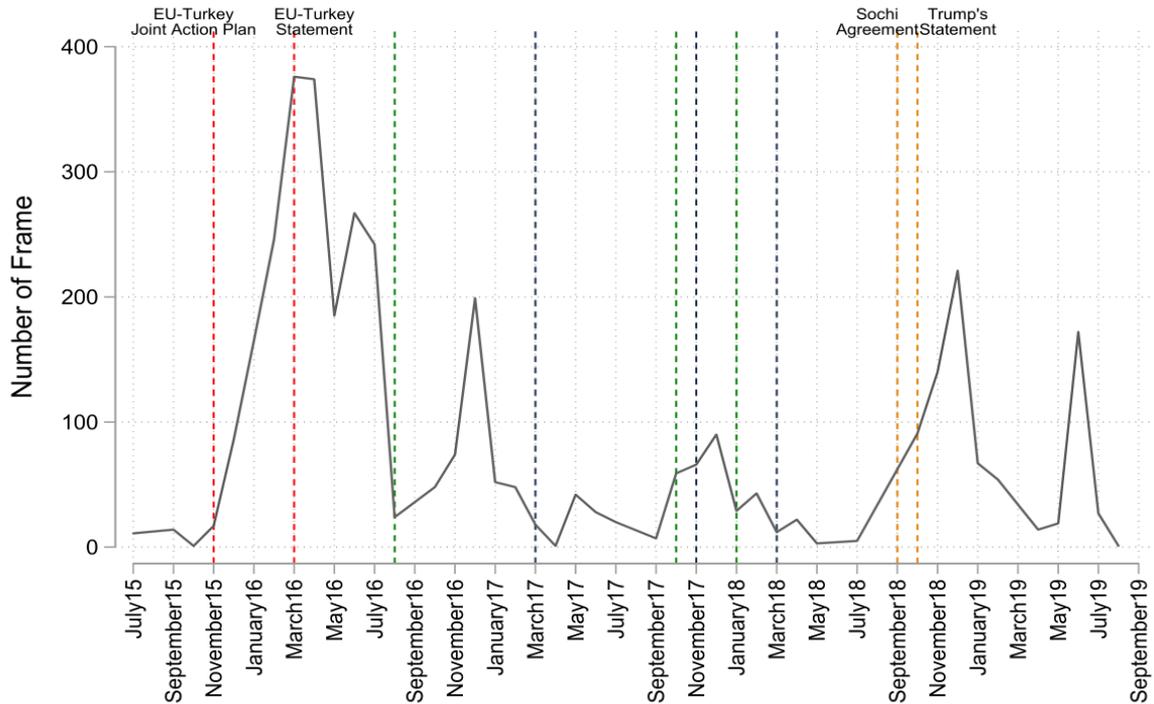
Having summarized the methodology of the textual analysis, our first task involves noting the frequency of the terms utilized in the Parliament. In order to assess the salience of the 'Syrians' and/or the 'refugee crisis', we recorded the absolute number of times where the Parliamentarians utilized these terms in their deliberations. In other words, we first aimed to ascertain whether the frequency of the deliberations in the Parliament have increased or decreased in this time period. Our first key finding, therefore, is tied to the frequency of the deliberations.

Finding 1: The deliberations on the refugee crisis in the Turkish Parliament declined in their frequency over the years.

Our analysis pointed out that there were significant overlaps between the frequency of parliamentary deliberations, and important turning points of the Syrian crisis. Figure 1 demonstrates on our first main finding.

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

Figure 1: Total Number of Deliberations



We have found that there is a decline in the frequency of discussions on the Syrian refugees over time, as well as multiple peaks where these discussions intensified. Furthermore, our main finding indicates that these fluctuations in the frequency of deliberations are tied to important turning points in Turkish domestic and foreign policies. For example, the multiple peak points as shown in Figure 1, on the frequency of deliberations in the Turkish Parliament on the Syrians correspond to external developments as indicated on Figure 1. Similarly, when other more pressing issues erupt in Turkish politics such as Constitutional changes, 2016 military take-over attempt, or economic crisis, the frequency of these debates on Syrians and their plight declines. Directly related to our first finding, we were able to ascertain that there is an overall decline over the years on the sheer number of times the Syrians were discussed in the Turkish Parliament.

In addition, our other related finding is that these deliberations are closely linked to Turkish foreign policy and the international context within which Turkish foreign policy objectives are formulated. Figure 1 demonstrates multiple peaks from 2015 to 2020, which are directly parallel to various crisis points in Syria. The first peak is around the late 2015 and early 2016. This is when there was an unprecedented flow of Syrians towards the European Union, leading to the adoption of a Joint Action plan and a Turkey-EU statement in November 2015 and March 2016 respectively (Akcapar-Koser and Simsek, 2018; Okyay, 2017). In these deliberations, the parliamentarians emphasized the refugee issue either to support or criticize Turkey's bilateral relationship with the EU and its refugee deal. Although the dialogue between Turkey and the EU on the issue

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

of cross-border mobilization of refugees started in 2013, with the Joint Action Plan in November 2015, the two sides agreed to work on stopping the refugee flows into South-eastern borders of the EU from the Mediterranean route (Müftüler-Baç 2020). Based on the framework of the Joint Action Plan in November 2015, both sides agreed on EU-Turkey Refugee Statement in March 2016 to cooperate on preventing unauthorized mobilization of refugees from the Aegean Sea. According to the Turkish-EU refugee deal, *“all-new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into Greek islands as from 20 March 2016 will be returned to Turkey”* and *“for every Syrian being returned to Turkey from Greek islands, another Syrian will be resettled from Turkey to the EU.”*³

When we assess the parliamentarians' deliberations on this bilateral solution between Turkey and the EU to the refugee crisis, there were mixed results. There was a sharp divide among the Parliamentarians over the EU-Turkey deal, while one group of parliamentarians, mainly from the AKP supported the EU deal as beneficial for Turkish interests, the opposition parties accused the AKP for engineering a deal that transformed Turkey into an external gate keeper for the EU (Fisunoglu and Sert, 2019), without any concrete benefits in return.

On the one hand, then Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu from the AKP stated: *“as the European Union accepts the burden-sharing on refugees and deals with the refugee problem around a joint program, a new era will open before us.”*⁴ Davutoğlu within the ruling AKP supported close cooperation with the EU, which eventually might lead to visa liberation for Turkish citizens incorporated into the March 2016 Turkey-EU statement. After Davutoğlu resigned in 2016, more AKP parliamentarians were critical of the EU, and instead praised Turkey's role. The AKP Parliamentarians were almost unanimous in this condemnation of the EU's inability to deal with the refugees. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan reflected this general view in the AKP as: *“European countries have trampled the values they defended until today as they prefer to close their border gates instead of embracing the refugees.”*⁵

On the other hand, the opposition parties have criticized Turkey's close cooperation with the EU, but there was a difference among these parties with regards to what they have chosen to focus on as their central argumentation for this opposition. Although most of the parliamentarians from the opposition parties clearly supported a diplomatic solution to the refugee crisis, they were critical of the government's commitments to the EU, particularly as they had the potential to become heavy burdens that Turkey will end up carrying. For instance, as a nationalist party, some parliamentarians from the MHP

³ EU-Turkey Statement, 18 March 2016. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement>.

⁴ TBMM Minutes, November 30, 2015.

⁵ Parliamentary Minutes, October 1, 2016.

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

emphasized the demographic repercussion of hosting Syrian refugees for the future of Turkey's population balances:

We embrace refugees within the framework of human rights, we try to help them in the most humanitarian issues. However, we do these only to solve our temporary problems, to obtain short-term expectations of interest or to re-update relations with Europe, to appear sympathetic to them. As the Nationalist Movement Party, we want to remind that taking this demographic threat has enormous risks.⁶

Similarly, CHP, as the main opposition party criticized the government, claiming the AKP was using Syrians as 'bargaining-chip' against the EU, in an attempt to fix their foreign-policy failures with the EU, by accepting new commitments:

"By giving 3 billion euros (the EU agree to give this amount to the Turkish government to host Syrians), giving 3 billion euros in bribes, it is not for anyone to say: 'You keep them, you become a warden of them, you become an outpost of them.' Unfortunately, Turkey has accepted it. With this agreement, only 72 thousand refugees, who are actually highly qualified, will go to Europe."⁷

As the refugee crisis unfolded, the nature in the Parliamentary deliberations transformed from an emphasis on how to stop unauthorized immigration to Europe to how to stop additional refugee flows from Syria to Turkey. This led to an alteration in the contents of deliberations. Consequently, as Figure 1 demonstrates, we observe the second peak in the intensity of deliberations after July 2016 when the debates in the Turkish Parliament seemed to focus on a saturation point for the Turkish ability to host refugees being reached.

This peak seems to be related to military operations on the Syrian border at this time which targeted terrorist organizations operating in Northern Syria to infiltrate Turkish territories.

In Figure 1, each green line indicates the beginning of cross-border military operations whereas the respective dark blue line indicates its official ending date. The parliamentarians frame the refugee crisis as either justification or motivation for holding military operations to Northern Syria to create "safe havens." It is also worth highlighting that Turkey's relationship with the EU further deteriorated with these cross-border operations in Northern Syria. Accordingly, during his first appearance in the Parliament after the military take-over

⁶ Parliamentary Minutes, December 25, 2015.

⁷ Parliamentary Minutes, March 22, 2016.

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

attempt in 2016, President Erdoğan defended the aim of the then ongoing operation as: *“As the Syrian lands are made safe step by step, both the terrorism problem and refugee problem will be resolved.”*⁸ While the government engaged in these military operations across the border, the AKP parliamentarians in their declarations focused on their justifications. For example, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu stated that after clearing the areas from the terrorist organizations, not only the Syrian refugees in Turkey will be resettled to their homelands, but also other Syrians: *“... we think that we can settle our brothers and sisters who live in difficult conditions especially in other parts of Syria.”*⁹ Similarly, the Minister of National Defence Fikri Işık stressed the operations were in compliance with international law: *“this operation, to create a safe zone free of terrorism for our Syrian brothers and sisters, was initiated in accordance with the Article 51 of the UN Charter on the right of self-defence and the relevant UNSC resolutions, and is in full compliance with international law.”*¹⁰

As shown in Figure 1, during the first peak, Parliamentary deliberations focused on the EU-Turkey relations, and the second peak was related to cross-border military operations to Northern Syria. In this second peak, the MHP clearly sided with the AKP with the argument that these operations would resolve both terror and refugee problems together. As a matter of fact, on some occasions, MHP parliamentarians were the ones that suggested the government to hold additional operations since *“... by clearing all the terror elements from the east of the Euphrates after Manbij, we need to ensure that our Syrian brothers and sisters will be resettled and lived in peace and security.”*¹¹ We can, therefore, observe a qualitative difference in the MHP's position from March 2016 to July 2016 in terms of their approval of the AKP government's position on the Syrians.

On the other hand, CHP has consistently criticized the government. Yet, the CHP was highly cautious in not discrediting military operations, as the AKP government equated the military operations with the anti-terror campaign, and being in opposition would then be interpreted as a 'pro-terrorist' stance. Instead, the CHP parliamentarians pointed out the AKP's mistakes in their overall foreign policy decisions toward the Syrian crisis, and then use the Turkish military capabilities to solve this issue, as: *“You [government] are responsible for this bloodshed, the reason why Mehmetçik (the pseudonym used for Turkish soldiers) is in a cross-border operation, they are the martyrs of these operations; because of the faulty medium and long-term foreign policies that you have put forward.”*¹²

⁸ Parliamentary Minutes, October 1, 2016.

⁹ TBMM Minutes, December 12, 2016.

¹⁰ TBMM Minutes, December 22, 2016.

¹¹ TBMM Minutes, April 3, 2018.

¹² TBMM Minutes, January 1, 2018.

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

Finally, with regards to our findings on the frequency of deliberations, we observe a third peak in deliberations on the Syrian refugees in late 2018 and early 2019. These two peaks coincide with the Russian-Turkish agreement- the Sochi agreement and American President Donald Trump's announcement of his intention to withdraw American troops from Syria. Both the Sochi agreement and the American withdrawal brought forth a discussion on creating buffer zones in Northern Syria. The declining American influence over Syria has also given a new importance to trilateral summits between Turkey, Russia and Iran. It is within the context of these summits that the Turkish and Russian presidents signed the Sochi agreement on 17 September 2018. According to the Sochi Agreement, the parties agreed to establish de-militarized zones of 15-20 kilometres in depth in Northern Syria beyond which radical terrorist groups were expected to withdraw by October 15. These newly established de-militarized zones are to be patrolled and monitored jointly by the Turkish and Russian military personnel. President Erdoğan defined the Sochi agreement as "*highly appreciated by the international community*"¹³ and praised Turkey's role in the region since the country was "*taking direct initiatives and had a right to say a word over the disputes.*"¹⁴

Similar to the former military operations, the opposition parties expressed their support to the government's position with regards to the Sochi Agreement, particularly the MHP. The Sochi agreement addressed the Turkish public's expectation that it would de-escalate the conflict and relatedly prevent any additional refugee flows from Northern Syria. Yet, regardless of a possible solution to the ongoing conflicts within Northern Syria, the Sochi Agreement was not flawless in the eyes of CHP parliamentarians. That is because in the Sochi meeting, neither Putin nor Erdogan made any concrete declarations with regards to how they were planning to differentiate between radical groups, i.e. the terrorist groups. For most of the opposition parliamentarians, on top of this uncertainty over the definition of radical groups, how and where these groups were going to withdraw posed urgent questions. Hence, they questioned the agreement as: "*If one of the undisclosed elements of the Sochi Agreement is the withdrawal of jihadists over the territories of Turkey, on what basis these assurances were given? Does this commitment not jeopardize Turkey's national security?*"¹⁵ The concern upon how to contain these terrorists in the Turkish territory, with what kind of security measures was indeed, a pressing one.

In short, the Syrian civil war has undergone a radical transformation since it initially began in 2011. The multi-faced nature of the conflict forced countries with conflicting interests to adjust their policy positions. As a country that shares a physical border of approximately 911 kilometres with Syria, Turkish foreign policy decisions with regards to the Syrian conflict have been decisive in

¹³ TBMM Minutes, October 1, 2018.

¹⁴ TBMM Minutes, October 1, 2018.

¹⁵ TBMM Minutes, October 3, 2018.

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

shaping its trajectory. Our main finding is that Turkish foreign policy changes along with drastic changes in foreign policies of other actors such as the EU, the USA and Russia, have considerably impacted the frequency of the deliberations. We noted that there is a clear linkage between these peaks in Parliamentary deliberations on the Syrians and significant turning points in the external environment. Yet, it is still not clear whether this frequency of deliberations differed from one political party to another. It seems that all political parties were similar in discussing the Syrians and the refugee crisis in their frequency. This brings us to our 2nd key finding.

Finding 2: There is not a significant variation among political parties with respect to the frequency of their deliberations on the refugee crisis.

Figure 2: Total Number of Deliberations by Political Parties

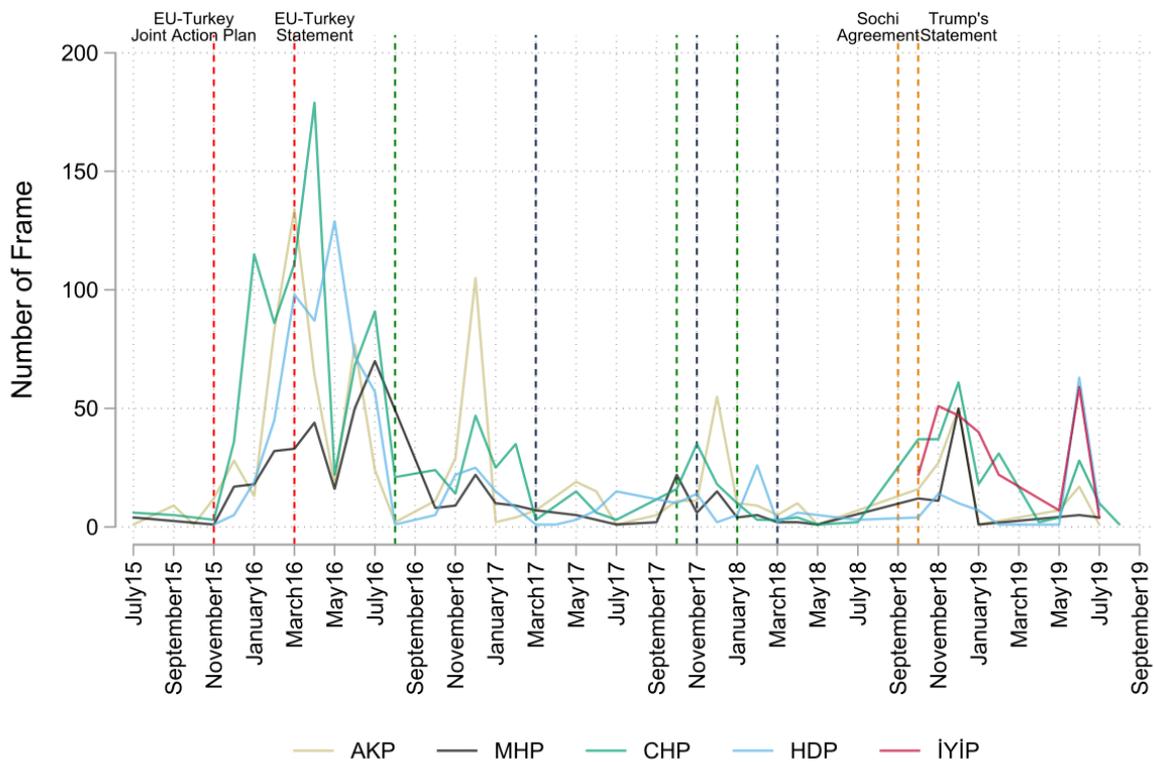


Figure 2 presents the differences among the political parties with regards to their deliberations as reported in Figure 1.¹⁶ One of our key findings here as revealed by Figure 2 is that there does not seem to be a significant variation among the political parties in the way they formulate their deliberations when such discussions were held on the refugee crisis. Although we observe party-specific deliberation peaks on some occasions, parliamentarians seem to focus on the refugee issue at roughly the same time. Nonetheless, two of these peaks require particular attention. A clear disparity among the Parliamentarians could be observed in mid-2016, when the CHP

¹⁶ There are other parliamentarians from two different parties (DP and BBP), but their total share in the dataset is only very minor (4 observations). Hence, they were excluded from the dataset.

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

parliamentarians intensified their deliberations on the refugee issue. This result goes together with our first key finding. After the Turkey-EU statement in March 2016, the parliament almost exclusively discussed the refugee issue with respect to the diplomatic solutions developed with the EU. We can easily observe that the CHP parliamentarians brought up this topic more often compared to other political parties in the parliament. It is also worth noting that those deliberations, including other parliamentarians as well, did not solely consist of criticism of or support to Turkey-EU refugee deal. Instead, most of these deliberations focused on the current domestic repercussions of the crisis. The Turkish-EU deal did not create new debates but fuelled the already existing divides with respect to Turkey's relations with the EU. Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, CHP parliamentarians interpreted the EU agreement as 'putting Turkey in a situation to take care of Syrian refugees in order to secure the EU's external borders'. Along with these criticisms, disputes over: "*which of the asylum seeker to be sent back; by whom, when and how the 3 billion Euros will be paid; and how much of the needs of the asylum seekers will be met by the EU,*"¹⁷ most especially "*turning country into a refugee camp*"¹⁸ were the most prominent. Finally, the CHP parliamentarians were also dissatisfied with the current state of the Turkish-EU relationship, with the argument that the AKP government transformed this half-century-long diplomatic relations into a mere refugee debate without any significant progress in the accession process. To put it in a nutshell, our main finding here is that variation among the political parties with respect to the frequency of their deliberations is observed in early 2016, parallel to the first peak in the frequency of deliberations. In addition, the CHP parliamentarians were most vocal at this time in voicing their discontent towards Turkey-EU deal.

It is, of course, not surprising that CHP criticizes the government more often for accepting into the Turkish territory more than 3.5 million Syrians. As the main opposition and second-largest party in the parliament, such a criticism is to be expected. However, CHP failed to voice similar concerns when cross-border military operations to Northern Syria were on the table. The main opposition party did not just approve sending Turkish troops to Syria and Iraq, but their tone of criticisms softened considerably compared to their position on the refugee issue. More importantly, the sheer volume of the CHP parliamentarians' deliberations on the refugee crisis has decreased, as shown in Figure 2. Furthermore, all political parties in the parliament, with the exception of HDP, supported military operations and refrained from harsh criticisms. As discussed earlier under Finding 1, one might argue that the reason behind this fragile unity is the government's claims of identifying its foreign policy decisions as solution to national security problems. Indeed, we observe the second peak in just after the first cross-border military operation, Operation Euphrates Shield in July 2016. The intensification of deliberations was partly based on the government's insistence that these operations were necessary to

¹⁷ TBMM Minutes, April 20, 2016.

¹⁸ TBMM Minutes, April 27, 2016.

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

ensure Turkey's territorial security. The Minister of National Defence at the time, Fikri Işık expressed the main aim of the operations as: *"advancement of the Syrian opposition forces in the field against Daesh and the removal of Daesh from the places that currently control across our borders."*¹⁹ While defending the necessity of military operations, the incumbent parliamentarians praised Turkish role as: *"We are a nation, a state that opened its lands, its homes, its hearts to our 3 million Syrian citizens, our Syrian brothers and sisters."*²⁰ The AKP clearly utilized the Syrian refugee crisis in an attempt to unify the domestic audience as well. To do so, they pointed out to 'outsiders' namely, the Europeans as the antithesis of the Turkish position on Syria. One AKP parliamentarian defined the Western countries 'role' while defending the military operation as follows:

*"... [European states] bring to say: "We tried to overthrow you on July 15th by making a coup, but we failed again. That is why we are dealing with you; we are fighting you." They are attempting to call us to account because they say: "You should have died on July 15th, but you did not." They say: "you will not protect Syrians", "you will turn a blind eye to what is happening in Syria", "you will not protect the oppressed and the victims in the sectarian war in Iraq", "we fight Daesh, you do not get involved. If Daesh attacks you, do not fight Daesh even if suicide bombers attack you", "never touch PKK, PYD", "never fight terrorists", and finally, "you will not reach out to FETÖ, you will not deal with FETÖ." However, we are an independent state, an independent country, we do not accept any of these conditions."*²¹

This above-quoted deliberation was not unique in its sentiment, but perfectly depicts how the government tried to put together all the major threats the AKP government faced in order to garner domestic support: the attempted coup on July 15th, protecting refugees, fighting terrorist organizations such as Daesh, PKK, PYD, and FETÖ, all were grouped together to create a 'us' versus 'them' rhetoric. Thus, not only the political parties differed on when they brought the Syrians into the Parliamentary debates, but also on the content of their deliberations.

In short, our analysis of party-specific deliberations reveals two peaks: the CHP parliamentarians' criticisms of the EU deal on the refugee issue and the AKP parliamentarians' justifications for holding cross border military operations in Northern Syria. In addition, a notable finding for variation among the political parties is that after 2019, we rarely observe any deliberations from MHP parliamentarians on the refugee issue. The nationalist party seem to put its

¹⁹ TBMM Minutes, October 1, 2016.

²⁰ TBMM Minutes, October 26, 2016.

²¹ TBMM Minutes, November 24, 2016.

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

sharp criticism on hold in 2016 despite their previous claims that the AKP policies of opening doors to the Syrians were changing the demographic structure of the country. A sharp decline in the MHP's deliberations on the Syrians could be observed in Figure 2. After 2018, although MHP parliamentarians discussed the refugee issue every once in a while, we observe a considerable decrease in their overall frequency. It is probable that when the MHP formed an alliance with AKP to support Erdoğan in the 2018 presidential elections, it motivated the MHP parliamentarians to focus on other topics rather than criticizing the AKP government, eradicating its role as an opposition party. Eventually, this policy stance of criticizing the AKP government from a nationalist perspective was fulfilled by İYİP parliamentarians who entered the Parliament with the 2018 general elections. İYİP parliamentarians mostly came from the same tradition as the MHP parliamentarians, and indeed some of them were former MHP parliamentarians who simply refused to refrain from criticizing the AKP government.

Having discussed the linkages between deliberations and Turkish foreign policy, it is worthwhile to differentiate political parties' positions on the refugee crisis, not only in terms of their frequency as discussed above, but also with respect to their content. We observed that if there is not a significant variation among political parties in terms of the frequency of their deliberations on the Syrians, perhaps the content of their deliberations might differ, which brings us to our 3rd key finding.

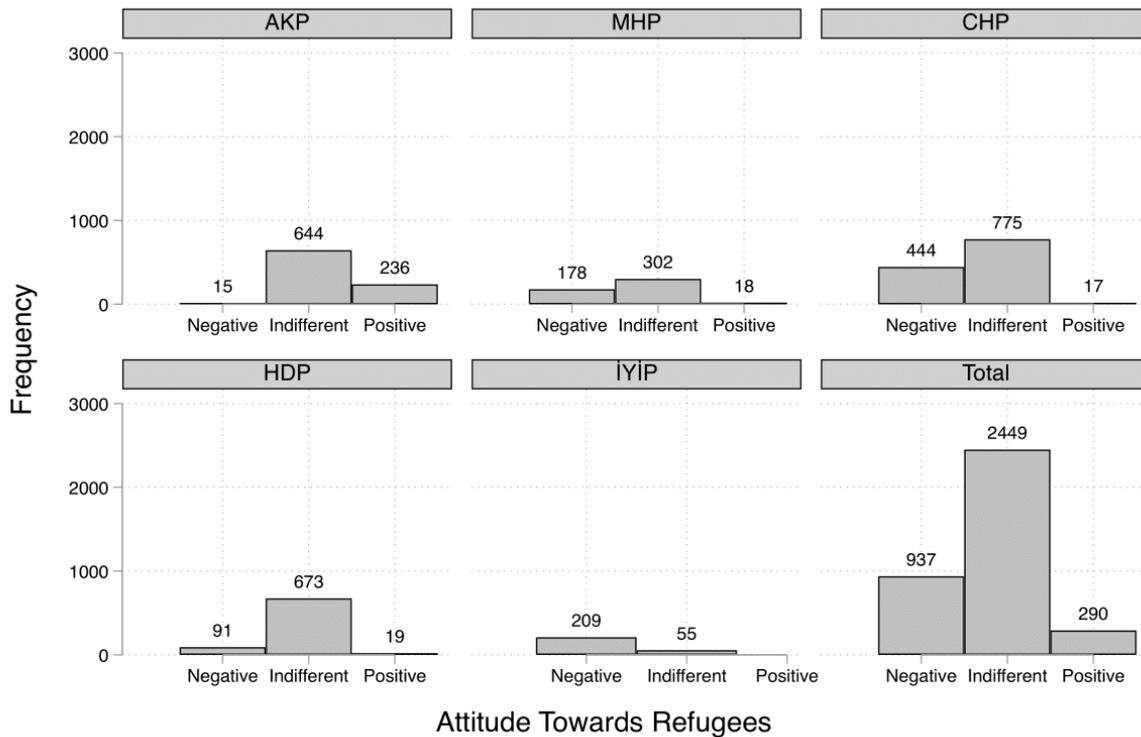
Finding 3: The attitudes from political parties as reflected by their parliamentarians towards Syrian refugees are mostly indifferent, without any negative or positive connotations.

Figure 3 (below) depicts the attitudes towards Syrians by five main political parties in the parliament as well as the overall attitudes of parliamentarians. Looking at the lower-right bars in Figure 3, we can easily observe that the attitudes towards refugees are mostly indifferent. Even when the above-mentioned drawbacks on classification are taken into account, this would not alter the results since the majority of attitude-revealing deliberations have been coded accordingly. Hence, the first and foremost conclusion from Figure 3 is that none of the political parties voice strongly critical harsh statements on the Syrian refugees. On the other hand, as lower-right and upper-left graphs in Figure 3 demonstrate positive attitudes only compose only around 7% of the total deliberations, and perhaps unsurprisingly almost all of those positive deliberations were by AKP parliamentarians. Surprisingly, all but one, incumbent party parliamentarians have never used any negative sentences. During the deliberations, incumbent AKP parliamentarians consistently praised Turkish open door policy when they responded to criticism from the opposition parties as follows: *"... instead of bragging about this country that meets all kinds of needs of 4 million refugees; care, shelter, transfers the most social aid to the world, and gains the appreciation of the world, you*

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

throw mud to us.”²² Although positive deliberations are directly associated with the incumbent parliamentarians, negative deliberations are dispersed among all opposition parties, with the HDP as the only exception.

Figure 3: Attitudes Towards Syrian Refugees by Political Parties



Comparing the upper-right graph in Figure 3 with other graphs reveals that CHP has the highest frequency of negative deliberations. However, the lower-middle graph shows that İYIP has the highest share of negative deliberations by far compared to the party's overall indifferent attitude. Indeed, İYIP is an exception in the parliament, precisely as İYIP parliamentarians are critical of both the presence of the refugees and the government's handling of the crisis. At this stage, the establishment of İYIP is worth remembering as the party's roots stem from the former parliamentarians from MHP, who have resigned when the MHP entered an alliance with the AKP. Precisely because of these internal divisions in the MHP, the upper-middle graph in Figure 3 indicate more neutral attitudes compared to negative ones. All in all, the analysis of parliamentarians' attitudes towards Syrian refugees reveal that the vast majority of negative deliberations are by the CHP and İYIP parliamentarians, but only a minority of those declarations are associated with the HDP parliamentarians.

Perhaps the most intriguing finding as reflected in Figure 3 is the HDP parliamentarians' stance on the refugee issue. The HDP parliamentarians have mostly stayed neutral in their rhetoric, and emphasized the humanitarian

²² TBMM Minutes, April 4, 2018.

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

aspects of the crisis. Yet, there are a couple of instances where HDP considerably differed from other opposition parties. First of all, according to HDP "... regarding the refugees, the concept of 'the problems they cause by coming to Turkey' is very faulty,"²³ because even though their legal status is not defined properly, HDP parliamentarians focused on the fact that those people escaped from atrocities of war, which were ignored by both other parliamentarians and the general public. Second, contrary to other opposition parties, the HDP parliamentarians were dissatisfied with some of the harsh rhetoric towards the Syrians, even if such deliberations were rare. The HDP revealed its position as: "we [HDP parliamentarians] will never make any concessions to anti-immigrant hate speeches from neither the right nor the left wing, and we will say: 'We are all Syrians' against these hate speeches."²⁴ Third, similar to the incumbent party, HDP explicitly "... support the open-door policy to refugees in such war environments."²⁵ However, similar to other opposition parties, they criticized the way the incumbent party has governed the settlement process. Finally, the HDP parliamentarians stressed the integration related problems that Syrian refugees faced in Turkey including human-trafficking, healthcare, and lack of education services.

In short, these parliamentary debates indicate that a difference in attitudes toward Syrian refugees could be observed among the political parties. The ruling AKP party is primarily concerned with finding support for its policy decisions by emphasizing cultural and religious justifications of their actions. The opposition parties, including the HDP, however, stress multiple negative aspects of the way the refugee crisis was handled. Yet, it should be noted that the deliberations in the Turkish parliament have rarely include an exclusionary view of the Syrians. The AKP party perceives this inclusionary view of the Syrians as a source of jubilation for Turkey, a trait that sets the Turks apart from the rest in terms of their hospitality towards the Syrians. "... in Turkey, apart from few marginal approaches, there was no mainstream approach from political parties in terms of using refugees as a tool for domestic politics or building racism and fascism towards them."²⁶

Nonetheless, our the textual analysis of attitudes reveal a variation among the political parties with regards to the ways they categorize different perspectives. As hosting 3.5 million Syrians is not without material costs, we aimed to assess whether there is a variation among political parties in terms of framing these costs.

²³ TBMM Minutes, March 03, 2016.

²⁴ TBMM Minutes, July 12, 2016.

²⁵ TBMM Minutes, November 29, 2018.

²⁶ TBMM Minutes, December 12, 2016.

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

Finding 4: There is a significant variation among political parties on their framing of the discussions with regards to the possible impact of Syrian refugees on Turkey.

Our main analyses for this key finding relate to the possible impact that Syrian refugees might have on the Turkish economy, cultural integration, domestic politics and security as possible material and immaterial costs. As the number of Syrians hosted in Turkey are substantial, we expect significant discussions in the Parliament with regards to these costs and also some variation among the political parties in the framing of these possible costs.

Figure 4: Negative Attitudes Towards Syrian Refugees by Political Parties

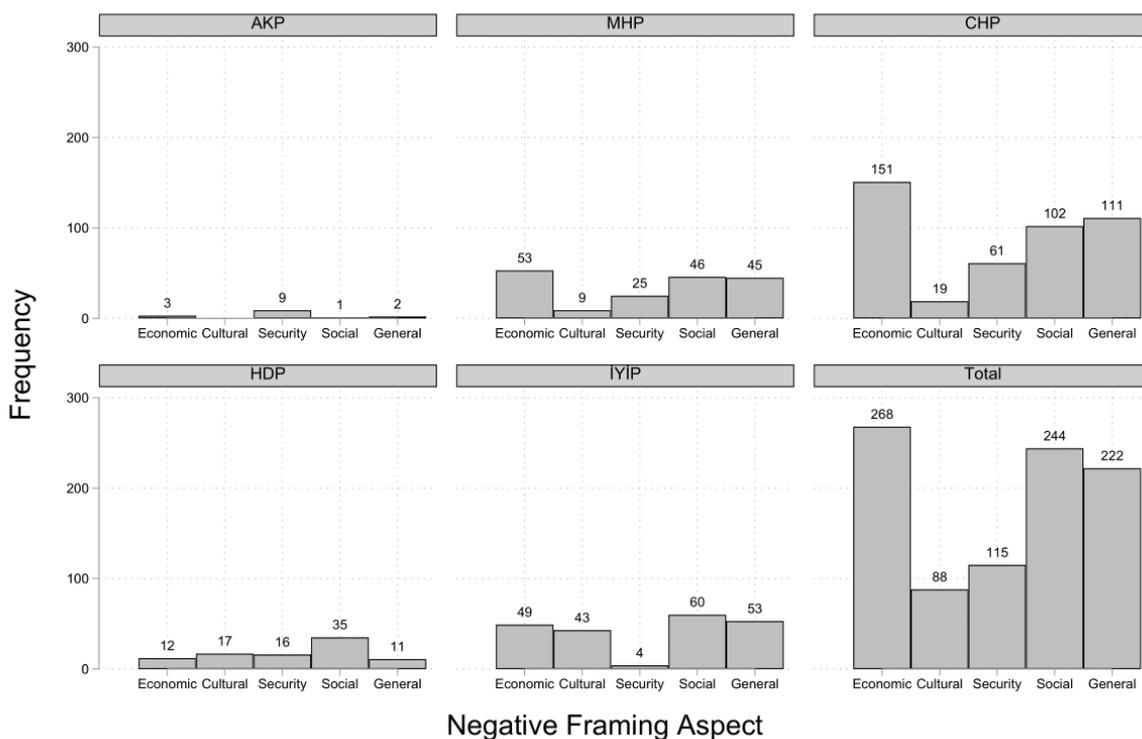


Figure 4 separates the nature of negative aspects that Parliamentarians focus upon based on five main categories: economic, cultural, social, security, and general.²⁷ Figure 4 reveals that the AKP parliamentarians do not stress the negative impacts of refugees on both economic welfare and social inclusion in Turkey. On the other hand, the opposition parties in general, however, stress the economic burden of refugees. The CHP parliamentarians, in particular, consistently criticize the government’s decision of hosting millions of refugees as causing serious harm to the national economy. These economic burdens of the refugees were the main topic of the debates as the Turkish economy has entered a serious stagnation period over the last couple of years. According to CHP parliamentarians “*Syrian refugees are preferred over Turkish citizens since*

²⁷ Sentences that include several negative aspects are coded as “general”.

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

they are low-wage workers and work without insurance, which causes a further increase in unemployment;"²⁸ yet, their economic effects are not limited to unemployment. *"Since they will spread to touristic areas and beaches, they will seriously harm tourism",* which is one of the sources of highest income in Turkey.²⁹ The direct economic consequences of hosting Syrian refugees are, however, only one aspect of these criticisms. The opposition parties, particularly CHP, was also critical of the amount of money that is allocated for refugees: *"Spending an estimated amount of \$40 billion on Syrians, while your own people are in need is wrong."*³⁰

In addition to criticizing the AKP government from the economic perspective; compared to CHP, both İYİP and HDP concentrate more on the negative aspects of the social inclusion of the Syrian refugee crisis, though from different angles. The HDP parliamentarians argue that the government is following a policy of assimilation in South-Eastern districts: *"... by placing these refugees in the Kurdish populated areas, there is an effort to disrupt the demographic structure of our opponents, to design them according to our own law, according to ourselves, and to gain an upper hand there in the future."*³¹ On the other hand, the İYİP Parliamentarians stress the disrupting effects that the Syrians might have on the demographic composition in Turkey and point out that in such cities as Kilis the majority of residents are now Syrian refugees rather than Turkish citizens. One İYİP parliamentarian summarized the party's main position as:

*"Since the police forces were not able to speak Arabic, a communication disorder was encountered with Syrians, so Kilis Provincial Police Department decided to open an Arabic language course. The policemen attending the course declared that "Because of the large number of Syrians in Kilis, we could not speak and communicate, so this course is important for us." Imagine a city on Turkish soil where the number of Syrians is higher than Turkish citizens, and the security forces of a Turkish state whose official language is Turkish have to learn Arabic in order to communicate and ensure public safety. These bitter statements are the actual depiction of the reality of Turkey that you and your faulty Syrian foreign policy has brought."*³²

Although the opposition parties, particularly İYİP, perceived this situation as dramatic and harmful, the AKP parliamentarians disagreed and instead put forth a contrasting view of Kilis: *"The people of Kilis with a population of approximately 100 thousand live together with our 120 thousand Syrian brothers and sisters. That's why we nominate Kilis for the Nobel Peace Prize. Kilis deserves*

²⁸ TBMM Minutes, January 5, 2017.

²⁹ TBMM Minutes, April 14, 2016.

³⁰ TBMM Minutes, October 3, 2018.

³¹ TBMM Minutes, May 5, 2016.

³² TBMM Minutes, January 1, 2019.

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

*a lot, in this sense, Kilis teaches the world.”*³³ Moreover, rather than criticizing the refugees in Turkey, AKP parliamentarians emphasize the atrocities toward refugees in Europe in order to glorify their open-door policy.

*Last year there were 800 attacks on refugee centres in Germany, they forced refugees to wear red wristbands in Wales, Norway is placing them on poles, Denmark is confiscating the jewelleries of asylum seekers, even the Belgian Ministry of Migration told his Greek colleague to” throw them into the sea”. Where is human conscience and rule of law in those acts? Today, indeed, Europe is behind even medieval Europe in terms of conscience, rule of law, and human rights.*³⁴

This was a clear emphasis on how Turkey adopts a humanitarian approach, while the Europeans fail to do so. While the frequency of deliberations and capturing variation among political parties are important findings of our analysis, we also assessed whether there is a variation among the political parties in terms of the terminology they have utilized when they refer to “Syrians”. That is because the exact manner with which the Parliamentarians refer to Syrians differ, i.e., as Syrians, refugees, illegal migrants, immigrants. It is possible that this variation could also reflect the party positions on the Syrians’ perceived legal status.

Finding 5: Turkish Parliamentarians refer to the Syrians interchangeably as either ‘Syrians’ or ‘refugees’, but there is a variation in the legal implications of this terminology according to different political parties.

In order to see if there is a variation among political parties in the way within which they refer to Syrians, we looked at the frequency of the term utilized in the Parliament- with Syrian, refugee, asylum and immigrant identified as the keywords. Figure 5 visualizes the frequency with which these terms were utilized. It should be noted that the Parliamentarians occasionally use two words interchangeably or employ commonly used phrases (e.g., Syrian refugees). Since using those observations for visual analysis would have caused duplicative results, 678 observations are excluded from Figure 5. On the other hand, considering the fact that 542 of those observations contain phrases that start with Syrians and followed mostly by a refugee and to lesser extent asylum seekers, excluding those observations would not alter the results. All in all, our main finding here is that there is a general tendency in the parliament using the terms Syrians and refugees together or as interchangeably as alternatives. First, our findings indicate that while the AKP Parliamentarians commonly use the terms Syrians and refugees, they also employ a variety of concepts such as brothers and sisters or guests. The interesting finding here is that such terminology of kinship ties are rarely used by other parties. Furthermore, utilizing

³³ TBMM Minutes, February 28, 2016.

³⁴ TBMM Minutes, February 28, 2016

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

such terms as brothers and sisters mostly reflects subjective interpretations of the subject rather than defining a legal categorization. We also found out that this type of categorization is more common when the deliberations were built upon praising Turkey or criticizing other actors, mostly the European countries, “... *sharing our food is not a favour, but it is an honour for us. While we spend 8 billion dollars on our Syrian guests, some European countries covet the jewellery of the refugees;*”³⁵ or Assad; “*We have not only opened our doors to our Syrian brothers and sisters who escaped from the war and the cruelty of Assad, but we have also opened our hearts.*”³⁶ The AKP parliamentarians utilize terms that both reveal their policy stances (i.e., positive framing of the issue) and consolidate their domestic audience by emphasizing cultural and religious ties with the Syrians. Similar to AKP, the main opposition party, CHP also prioritizes the terms Syrians and refugees; however, CHP parliamentarians were more hesitant to utilize terms that do not define any legal categorization. The CHP, nonetheless, stressed that “I do not see our Syrian brothers and sisters, which we share a common history, as others.”³⁷ Rather, the terminology decision is driven as a reaction to AKP parliamentarians' employing of these terms as giving legal rights to Syrian refugees, such as granting mass citizenship to Syrians. The CHP parliamentarians opposed these legal moves, while maintaining cultural ties with the Syrians. However, other than this minor difference over the justification of legal rights to Syrians due to kinship ties, our findings did not indicate any significant differences between AKP and CHP with regards to the way they refer to the Syrians.

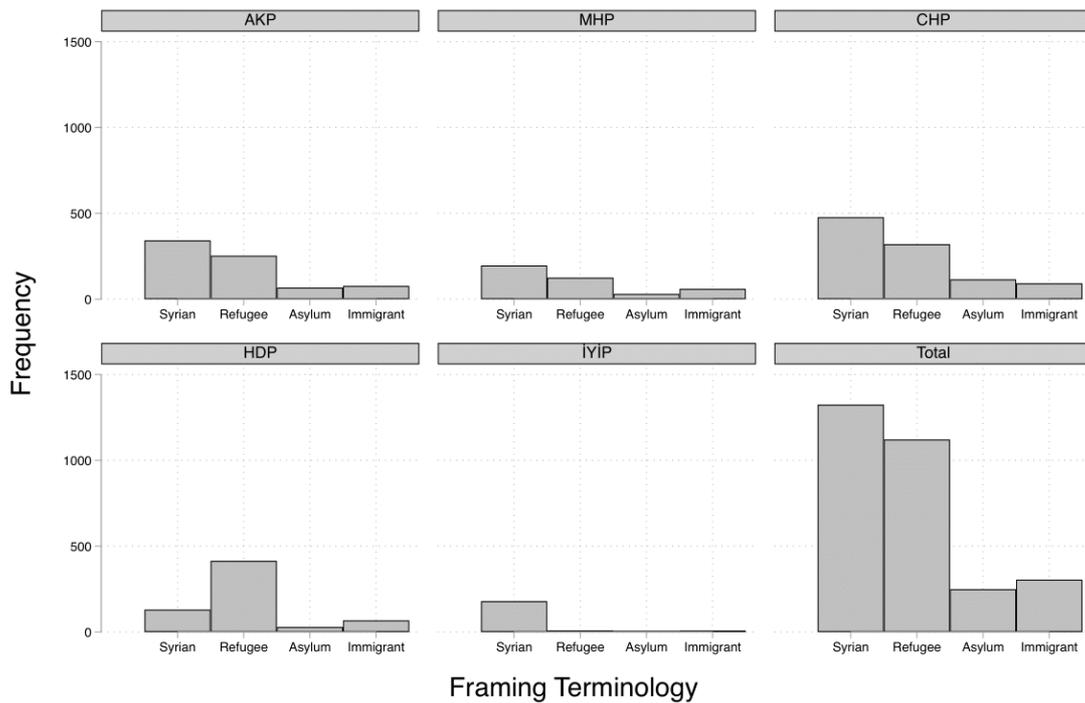
³⁵ TBMM Minutes, March 2, 2016.

³⁶ TBMM Minutes, February 28, 2016.

³⁷ TBMM Minutes, July 28, 2016.

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

Figure 5: Framing Terminology of Syrians by Political Parties



Yet, the precise way within which the Syrians are referred to indicates the policy position of the political parties. Despite the lack of major terminological divergences between the CHP, AKP and MHP, both HDP and İYİP substantively differ from other parties both in the way they refer to Syrians as well as their policy stances. Figure 5 reveals that the HDP parliamentarians were the only ones that prioritize the 'refugee' terminology. Instead of labelling them as "Syrians", unlike other parliamentarians, the HDP parliamentarians framed the debate within legal categorizations. They, consistently criticized the government and its existing migration laws, arguing that Syrians are refugees. According to the HDP Parliamentarians, "only we call them refugees, laws of the Turkish Republic do not allow to call them as such;"³⁸ consequently, "[Syrian citizens] can only become refugees only when they go to Europe, they can benefit from all the rights of refugees."³⁹ As one of the HDP parliamentarians summarized the issue as follows:

"Turkey does not recognize the right of refugees to those who come from Syria, this is why we are still using the "asylum seekers" concept. That is because Turkey placed reservations on The Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the New York Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. Turkey only grants refugee rights to the arrivals from the West, and another country's citizens coming from the East of Turkey does not

³⁸ TBMM Minutes, February 2, 2018.

³⁹ TBMM Minutes, June 27, 2019.

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

receive any refugee rights. The only right granted in this regard is permission to pass to a third country. ⁴⁰

Yet, the HPD parliamentarians rarely utilize the concept of asylum seekers, instead they refer to Syrians as refugees. Furthermore, according to HDP parliamentarians, the government's policies towards Syrians were not well prepared nor focused on solving issues. Most importantly, the HDP was "... *not against accepting refugees. We are struggling with these unprepared policies that will both ruin the lives of refugees and become a huge burden on the shoulders of the people of this country.*"⁴¹ Along with that, every once in a while, HDP parliamentarians reveal their discontent about how the refugee debates are constructed such that "*calling 'the refugee problem' to the children who lost their lives almost every day in the Aegean sea will certainly not cover up your destruction and inadequacies.*" HDP's underlining of the legal vacuum in Turkey's migration governance system was in line with the content of their deliberations, which emphasize the humanitarian aspect of the crisis. In short, the HDP parliamentarians were uniform on their insistence on granting refugee rights to Syrians.

Finally, our findings point out that the IYIP parliamentarians insisted on the term "Syrians" without referring to them as refugees since that would allow a categorization of these people under a different legal category. IYIP parliamentarians questioned the government several times as: "*Have Syrians secretly been given refugee status in private, that we do not know about?*"⁴² Despite this stance against categorization of Syrians as refugees, IYIP parliamentarians also referred to Syrians as refugees in numerous cases. This, in return, indicates that in the Turkish parliament, Syrians are generally referred to as 'refugees', at least in individual deliberations; however, as policy grounds, IYIP has strictly criticized any legal rights for refugees, unlike the HDP parliamentarians who insisted on those legal rights.

Conclusion

This paper analysed the Turkish Parliamentarians' deliberations on the Syrian refugees from 2015 to 2019. We coded these deliberations by assessing the frequency of "Syrians", 'refugees', 'asylum seekers' and 'immigrants'. Our quantitative and qualitative analysis highlighted multiple patterns in the deliberations, reflecting the political preferences and attitudes of the Turkish parliamentarians. The coding of the parliamentary debates revealed similarities, common patterns among the Parliamentarians coming from different political parties, but also significant divergences in the way the Parliamentarians framed their views on the Syrians. A key related finding in terms of divergences was in relation to the HDP Parliamentarians' views on the

⁴⁰ TBMM Minutes November 29, 2018.

⁴¹ TBMM Minutes, May 3, 2016.

⁴² TBMM Minutes, February 20, 2019.

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

Syrian refugees, which differed most significantly from other political parties' positions.

The paper had five main findings which could be summarized as follows. The first main finding is with regards to the frequency of deliberations in the Turkish Parliament. We have found out that the Parliamentary deliberations on the Syrians had multiple peaks in the period we have chosen to analyze. What was particularly interesting was that each of these peaks has pertained to the alterations and developments in the external environment. In particular, we observed the highest frequency of deliberations in the Parliament parallel to the adoption of the November 2015 Turkey and the EU Joint Action plan and the March 2016 Turkey-EU refugee deal. Similarly, the September 2018 Sochi Agreement with Russia and the January 2019 American withdrawal of its troops from Syria provided the basis for similar peaks, though less intense compared to the EU deal. This finding enabled us to come to multiple conclusions. First, the salience of the Syrian refugees has declined over time, after it reached a peak in 2016. Second, changes in Turkish foreign policy choices along with the actions of other actors such as the EU, USA and Russia led to intensified debates in the Turkish Parliament with regards to the Syrians.

Our second key finding based on the quantitative analysis of Parliamentary deliberations was that there did not seem to be a significant variation among political parties in terms of the frequency of their deliberations on the Syrian refugees. In other words, almost all political parties were more or less similar in the frequency of their deliberations on the Syrians. This finding was a bit surprising as we expected the frequency of deliberations to be much higher among the opposition parties.

Our third finding is that we also found out that there is, nonetheless, some variation in terms of framing attitudes towards the Syrians- as positive or neutral. Surprisingly, none of the political parties expressed xenophobic or highly negative attitudes towards the Syrians. Despite the revelation that none of the Turkish Parliamentarians were voicing negative attitudes towards the Syrians, there was still some significant criticism of the AKP's handling of the refugee crisis by the opposition parties. The CHP and the IYI Party were critical over the possible material costs of hosting Syrians in Turkey, and also of the unexpected consequences of the AKP's foreign policy miscalculations in Turkish domestic politics.

Our fourth finding related to the marked difference that the HDP has in the Turkish Parliament in terms of its attitudes towards the Syrians, in particular in terms of how they framed their legal status in Turkey. Of all the political parties in the Turkish Parliament, the HDP differed the most from other political parties in its criticism of the Turkish government's migration policy with regards to the ongoing reservations on the Geneva Convention. Furthermore, the HDP had voiced its discontent as to how under these reservations to the Geneva Convention, the Syrians could not be legally recognized as refugees by the Turkish government. All political parties, however, were almost in agreement

D3.7 Turkish perceptions of the EU migration deal based on Turkish Parliamentary Debates

that Turkey differed from other political states and/or actors- especially the EU- in its receptiveness towards the Syrians. Its receptiveness towards the Syrians in their hour of need was a source of pride for all political parties, irrespective of their political orientation.

To sum up, this paper attempted to understand political attitudes in Turkey towards the Syrians, and other refugees by its extensive analysis of the Parliamentary deliberations. Its findings matter for the MAGYC project, precisely because hosting refugees and/or accepting asylum seekers into one's country is not a decision to be taken in a vacuum. Political preferences as reflected by different political parties in a democratic setting need to be assessed to formulate policy options that all political actors agree upon. The need to build a consensus on these policy options and legal steps to accommodate the Syrians was underlined as a critical element in assessing the Turkish position towards migratory challenges in general.

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