THINKACT
Policy Magazine

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European Integration Association

The European Integration Association (EIG) is a youth-led civil society organization based in Türkiye, established in **2019**, and dedicated to promoting European values, democratic participation, and civic engagement among young people. Since its foundation, EIG has actively worked to bridge the gap between European institutions and local communities by equipping youth with tools, platforms, and opportunities for meaningful involvement in public life.

EIG is the initiator of the **ThinkACT** program, a European Parliament simulation that enables young people to explore EU policymaking processes and develop youth-led policy recommendations.

Additionally, EIG coordinates international networks such as **Agile Europe**, which support cross-border cooperation, non-formal education, and grassroots initiatives aligned with the **EU Youth Strategy** and the **EU Youth Goals**.

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INTRODUCTION

At a time of high uncertainty and democratic participation is being redefined, the political agency of youth across Europe is both tested and reawakened, the need for civic spaces where critical thinking, institutional knowledge, and political imagination intersect has never been greater. Think-ACT was born from this urgency.

What began as a modest series of monthly online simulations, connecting students of political science from leading universities in Istanbul, has evolved into a structured and ambitious initiative that cultivates the future architects of public policy. ThinkACT is not only a European Parliament simulation program; it is the seed of a youth-led think tank, one that draws its strength from diversity of thought, intellectual rigor, and democratic engagement.

Throughout the year, participants engaged in complex discussions reflecting the real machinery of European governance. They assumed roles as Members of the European Parliament, lobbyists, NGO representatives, journalists, and European Commission officials. They debated topics ranging from migration and cybersecurity to the climate crisis and the future of European integration. These conversations, rich, challenging, and forward-looking, form the backbone of this publication.

The ThinkACT Policy Magazine is more than a record of our activities. It is an invitation. An invitation to listen to youth as legitimate stakeholders in shaping European policy. It is a declaration that young people do not simply inherit the future; they have the capacity to design it.
As the Executive Director of Avrupa Entegrasyon Derneği, I am proud to witness this first edition come to life. I sincerely thank all our contributors, partners, and participants who have made this journey possible. Special gratitude goes to our academic collaborators and institutional supporters who see value in youth-driven policy thinking, not as a symbolic gesture but as a structural necessity.

We believe that ThinkACT can grow into a pan-European youth think tank, grounded in local realities yet fluent in global governance. With every edition, every simulation, and every policy idea, we move one step closer to that vision.

Let this publication serve not only as a reflection of the debates we've had, but as a blueprint for the conversations we still must have.

Turgut Kaan Akkoca
Executive Director & President
European Integration Association

EDITORIAL

During these chaotic days in which the world axis is taking on a new shape and position, the outlook of the continent that has given the world its basic structure for millennia, namely Europe, together with the role it will play in the new world order, and the level of importance it will have, are undoubtedly among the most serious issues that need to be diagnosed and monitored.

Pursuantly, this Special Issue of ThinkACT magazine is dedicated to the crucial subject of the European Union's (EU) fate and future. Naturally, in order to properly examine such a situation, it is necessary to approach the matter from many angles — the articles featured on these pages have been selected with this in mind, as they do offer more than mere educated guessing by investigating the subjects they handle and stipulating the likely and probable, as well as necessary, projections in many occasions.

In this regard, firstly, the European Union's aim and project to transition to environmentally friendly (green), sustainable, and renewable energy and nullify the carbon emission throughout the continent by following the footsteps of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and Paris (Climate) Agreement are explored in four different articles; *Tuğçe Arslan* initiates a brief introduction to the matter of effectiveness of the European Green Deal (EGD), the challenges it faces, and its political impacts by examining the perspectives of political parties in Europe towards the EGD and analyzing how they shape its implementation; moreover, *Elenur Kaman*'s article discusses the issue on a deeper and wider scale with a broader context by evaluating the eight main action plans of the EGD and investigating its green roadmap together with the 55-eligible package proposed by the European Commission.

Furthermore, within such scope, *Beste Babar*'s article yields toward the sustainable development goals of this program over the NextGenerationEU initiative of the EU and breaks down the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on its emergence and development process over the necessity of and inclination towards digitalization thereby. As a separate, yet related and similar topic, *Emre Çağrı Karaman* covers the impact of climate change on the European automotive industry by stating the challenges, policies, and future perspectives in relation with the transformative and climate-neutral mentality of the EU.

Secondly, as the dynamics that molded the Middle East, Mesopotamia and Asia tend to shift or alter on a major scale within the transition phase from the first to the second quarter of the 21 st century, *Zehra Ayyüce Balcı* neatly discusses the economic relationships between Türkiye and the EU, by mainly focusing on their Customs Union beginning from its genesis and foundation, stating the main characteristics and problems that define its current status in its 30 th anniversary and also anticipating the legal adjustments that need to be implemented to establish a more equitable and fair balance of power and strengthen the bonds between them thereby. Furthermore, *Sude Evkuran* conducts a research on the SEPA system together with the payment methods of the world's premier commercial actors and criticizes the fact that Türkiye has not yet been included within it, together with the ongoing reasoning and possible solutions on such matter.

Thirdly, *Aybüke Özmen* analyzes the present security and defense policies of Europe, which has a history identified with wars, through a detailed and powerful reading of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War and NATO (as a concept and foundation), and examines the views and preferences of EU countries in terms of their armed force capacity, military investments, and defense potential. Additionally, *Emir Can Aydınoğlu* discusses the EU's pending the question of strategic autonomy and military industry, and how it will address it by explaining the oncoming new formulation of the European grand strategy and its wider implications as per the NATO summit held in The Hague as of June 2025, with focusing on the inventory of the EU's arsenal and its facilities as well.

Lastly, the subject of population homogeneity and entirety of Europe will be addressed in four different articles over the migration phenomenon, which (by referring to the "After Europe" title of Ivan Krastev) can be deemed as and become a "leaderless/unled revolt" if not controlled or monitored with care, eventually.

Under such assumption, *Fatma Sena Özkan* investigates the migrant integration process within the EU over three countries (namely, Sweden, France and the Netherlands) as a case study, by taking their different approaches, economic and cultural status quos for "national identity" perceptions and motivations on this matter into account. *Zeynep Artuker*'s article further studies the forced migration within the history of Europe, together with the general and common practices on this subject throughout the founding and amending legislative documents of the EU (such as the Maastricht, Amsterdam and Lisbon Treaties), over the concept of religion and the notion of asylum.

Furthermore, *İpek İnci Öge* discusses migration as a diplomatic tool mainly over the relations between Greece and Türkiye on such matter, considering the recent political history of Türkiye, the everlasting disputes between these two countries and their impacts on the EU region. And lastly, *Eren Anter* reviews the concept of migration in detail, considering its past and present and relevancy with the functionality of the institution of "citizenship", through neoliberal and nationalist denominators with also foreseeing the xenophobia and cultural disintegration (de-Europeanization) inclination towards migration-management policies among European countries and in between the EU and several other key countries (such as Türkiye), together with their outcomes both in the core centers and peripheral regions of the states.

Overall, this special issue of ThinkACT magazine does cover many of the essential topics on the permanency of the EU and thereafter contributes significantly to the related pending discussions by utilizing many polished insights of the authors and practical attitudes derived from various significant resources. We sincerely hope it will claim its own grounds in literature throughout the flow of the sands of time.

Orhan Efe Özenç
Editor

The Role of the European Green Deal in Addressing Climate Change: A Critical Evaluation

Tuğçe Arslan

Abstract: The European Green Deal (EGD) is a comprehensive policy initiative of the European Union (EU) that aims to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. This article critically evaluates the effectiveness of the EGD, the challenges it faces, and its political impacts. While this initiative is an important step in the fight against climate change, it also faces economic and political obstacles. Additionally, the article examines the perspectives of political parties in Europe towards the EGD and analyzes how they shape its implementation and effects.

Climate change remains one of the most urgent global issues, and the EU has taken a leading role in environmental policies. Announced by Ursula von der Leyen in 2019, the European Green Deal aims to transform the European economy towards sustainability while ensuring economic growth and social inclusion. However, achieving these goals depends on the implementation process and political and economic support.

The European Green Deal includes a wide range of policies covering various sectors. First, we will discuss its main objectives and strategies. The first and most fundamental goal is to become a climate-neutral continent. The EU aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 and reach net zero emissions by 2050. This goal is followed by the sustainable economy objective. To achieve this, the EU promotes the transition to a circular economy model, which aims to minimize waste and maximize resource efficiency. Third, the EGD seeks to improve the energy performance of buildings and accelerate the transition to renewable energy sources. Another strategic objective is sustainable transportation, which can be achieved by promoting electric vehicles and developing public transportation. Finally, the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) aims to ensure that imported products in the EU meet environmental standards and prevent carbon leakage.

The EGD has sparked intense debates among European political parties, receiving different levels of support and opposition. We can categorize the political perspectives on the EGD into three main groups:

Supporters (Greens, Social Democrats, and Some Center-Right Parties): Advocates argue that the EGD is vital for fighting climate change and ensuring long-term economic sustainability. The German Green Party and left-wing parties in Scandinavian countries demand a faster implementation of the EGD.

Moderate Supporters (Christian Democrats and Liberals): These parties generally support the EGD but emphasize a transition process that protects industrial competitiveness and economic balance.

Skeptics (Conservatives and Far-Right Parties): Parties like the National Rally in France and AfD in Germany argue that the EGD could harm national economies and impose excessive regulations. The Fidesz government in Hungary is concerned about energy security and economic impacts.

Despite its ambitious goals, the EGD faces serious challenges. The transition process can be particularly difficult for regions dependent on fossil fuels, such as coal, which may lead to job losses. Due to economic concerns, countries like Poland, which rely heavily on fossil fuels, oppose certain regulations. Even though relevant policies are in place, implementation and compliance levels vary significantly between countries. Additionally, some critics argue that strict EU regulations may put European industries at a disadvantage against international competitors.

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In conclusion EGD positions the EU as a global leader in climate policy. Through mechanisms like CBAM, the EU aims to extend its environmental standards beyond its borders. However, since climate change is a global issue, all major economies must act together. While the European Green Deal is a bold step in tackling climate change, it must overcome political, economic, and implementation challenges. It enjoys strong support from political groups advocating for environmental policies, while conservative and nationalist parties criticize it for endangering economic interests. Ultimately, the success of the EGD will depend on its ability to balance economic resilience with sustainability goals.

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- Various news and policy reports on the European Green Deal and its implications.

The European Green Deal and Climate Change

Elenur Kaman

Abstract

Global warming and climate change have caused many environmental problems, such as droughts, hurricanes, floods, melting glaciers, rising sea levels, and farming land getting worse. Since these problems affect the whole world, the climate crisis has shown how connected climate, environmental sustainability, and security are. So, **ecological** worries are now a big deal in international talks. Green theory, a new way to look at things, focuses on environmental and ecological issues instead of just human ones.

The European Union has recently made policies that match green theory, especially in its climate, environmental, and energy plans. A good example is the European Green Deal (EGD), which the European Commission introduced. This study will add to what's already known by looking at the EGD using green theory. It will check if green theory is helpful for understanding the EU's changes in politics, economy, and environment. It will also see what these changes mean for how the world handles environmental issues.

Introduction

The EU's environmental policy has evolved significantly since its inception in the 1960s, with the European Green Deal marking a transformative moment in the EU's commitment to environmental sustainability. Through a combination of legislative measures, institutional frameworks, and international cooperation, the EU has made significant strides in addressing environmental challenges and promoting sustainable development. However, the road ahead is not without its challenges.

As evidenced by the protests we have witnessed in recent days, it will not be as easy as declared to achieve a consensus on the implementation of the EU's ambitious environmental targets, encompassing reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, increased renewable energy utilization, promoting sustainable agriculture and halting biodiversity loss, require substantial sectoral transformations.

However, the enforcement of these targets faces hurdles due to the EU's fragmented institutional structure, leading to disparities in implementation across member states and potential economic concerns. In addition, the current global economic crisis and various external factors also complicate the acceptance and implementation of these ambitious targets at a societal and governmental level. Therefore, the EU must continue to navigate complex policy landscapes, engage with diverse stakeholders, and adapt to changing.

Success will depend on the EU's ability to balance economic growth with environmental protection, foster innovation, and promote green technologies. As the EU looks toward the future, it must remain committed to its environmental goals, working collaboratively with member states and international partners to achieve a climate-neutral Europe by 2050. By doing so, the EU can continue to lead by example, demonstrating the importance of environmental stewardship and sustainability on the global stag.[1]

European Green Deal

The green economy is an economic model that aims to develop low carbon emissions, protect the environmental system while ensuring resource efficiency and creating prosperity for everyone.

[1]Atıf/Citation: Cemal Kakışım, (2022), "Avrupa Yeşil Mutabakatı: Yeşil Teori Perspektifinden Bir Analiz", Stratejik ve Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi, C.6, S.1 Mart 2022, s.1-16.

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Within the scope of the green economy, the EU has developed policies in energy and infrastructure systems, transportation, industry, agriculture and many other areas. For example; in energy policies, it has updated the "Clean Energy for All Europeans" package to strengthen the energy system and protect the environment by ensuring the transition to clean energy.[2] The circular economic action plan, which is one of the requirements of the green economy and one of the most important elements of the European Green Deal, has been adopted.[3]

Many studies have evaluated the EU's climate targets from different perspectives. Studies evaluating the EU's green economy policies have generally evaluated the issue in terms of its effects on member and candidate countries. In this context, sustainable development and circular economic issues have come to the fore. The EU's climate policies have generally been studied through scenarios prepared by EU institutions or international energy organizations.

There are other studies in the literature that examine the EU's energy transition scenarios and create new scenario models. Jonsson et al. (2015) focused on energy security through the EU Energy Roadmap scenarios. In their study, Capros et al. (2018) evaluated the EU's energy outlook until 2050 through the European Commission's "Clean Energy for All Europeans" package and created a scenario. Mikova, Eichhamme and Pfluger (2019) proposed an approach for North-Western European countries through low-carbon scenarios for Europe. Hainsch et al. (2021) evaluated energy scenarios in their study and determined which political, technological and social attitudes the EU Green Deal would change.

In domestic literature, there are limited studies that address the green economy and the EU's climate policies together. In this study, the European Green Deal and climate targets were examined within the scope of the green economy and the possibility of the EU reaching

its climate targets in 2050 was determined by economy and the possibility of the EU reaching its climate targets in 2050 was determined by using the future energy scenarios of international energy organizations.

The Targets
In 2019, the EU took a step that will transform the world economy in order to take on a leading role in creating norms in the world regarding the environment and climate. The European Commission announced the EGD in 2019, which will transform not only the European continent but also the economy, production infrastructure, resource consumption profile, and environmental and climate policies of countries trading with Europe. The EGD, which has the ultimate aim of transforming the EU into a fair and prosperous society with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy, has 3 main goals: to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2050, to provide an economic growth model independent of resource use, and to leave no one and no region out (European Commission, 2020e).

The EDG has 8 main action plans:

1. Climate:
The EGD's goal is for Europe to have no climate impact by 2050. The European Climate Law makes it a legal requirement to lower net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to what they were in 1990.

2. Energy:
The plan to switch to clean energy has three main things: making sure there's a reliable and cheap energy supply, combining and digitizing the energy market, and making energy use better. By 2030, the hope is to get 40% of the EU's energy from renewables and cut energy use by 36%.

3. Agriculture:
Good food systems are key to the EGD. The EU wants to make sure there's enough food even with climate change, lower the environmental

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[2] European Commission, 2019c.
[3] European Commission. 2020a.

damage from making food, and guide the world toward lasting agriculture—from the farm all the way to your plate.

4. Industry:
To have no climate impact, the EGD backs technologies that don't produce many emissions and lasting products. Europe plans to use its industry to be the best in the world at clean ideas and eco-friendly production.

5. Environment & Oceans:
The EGD promises to protect nature, lower pollution, switch to using resources over and over, and restore forests, soils, and wetlands. The aim is a healthier natural world that can take in carbon and handle climate change better.

6. Transport:
Since transport makes up 25% of EU emissions, the target is to bring that down by 90% by 2050. This means pushing electric vehicles, putting in charging spots everywhere, bringing in cars that don't emit anything by 2035, and supporting cleaner fuels in planes and ships.

7. Finance & Regional Development:
At least €1 trillion will be put into lasting projects in the next ten years. Member states need to use at least 37% of their Recovery and Resilience Facility funds for changes and projects related to climate.

8. Research & Innovation:
New ideas are what make the EGD work. Through programs like Horizon Europe -with 35% of its money going to climate change- the EU grows green and lets people be part of lasting change.

European Green Deal: Green Roadmap to Achieve EU Climate Goals
In 2019, the EU Commission published the European Green Deal, creating a roadmap to combat climate and environmental challenges and make the EU economy more competitive. With this roadmap, a comprehensive green transformation was launched in all policy areas, especially in the areas of climate, energy, transport, agriculture and industry. The European Green Deal aims to reduce Europe's emissions by at least 55% by 2030 and 100% by 2050, making Europe the world's first climate-neutral continent.

The main aim of the deal is to transform the EU into a competitive economy with a resource-efficient, clean and circular economy. It also aims to ensure Europe's energy security and reduce external dependency on energy in response to situations such as the disruption of the global energy market caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The European Commission has set three main targets to be achieved by 2030 in its 2030 Climate and Energy Framework:

· Reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% compared to 1990 levels,

· Increasing the share of renewable energy in EU energy production to at least 32%, and

· Achieving a 32.5% improvement in energy efficiency across the EU.

75% of the European Union's greenhouse gas emissions come from energy production and consumption, while 25% come from transportation (European Council, 2022; European Environment Agency, 2022). Therefore, the decarbonization of energy systems is of great importance for the EU to reach its carbon neutrality target by 2050. The Constitutional Court aims to decarbonize energy systems and reduce emissions from transportation by 90% (European Environment Agency, 2022: 13). In order to achieve these goals, the Commission has established a package in accordance with Article 55 and the Border Carbon Adjustment Mechanism (BCDM)[4].

The 55-Eligible Package
The European Commission has published the 55-eligible package to meet the climate targets

[4] Küçük, G. & B. Yüce-Dural (2024), "Türkiye'nin Avrupa Yeşil Mutabakatına Uyumu Kapsamında Yeşil Ekonomi Performansı: Değerlendirme ve Perspektifler", Sosyoekonomi, 32(60), 445-467

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· Reduce methane emissions from the energy sector by 30% by 2030.

· Reduce the environmental footprint and increase the use of green fuels in the aviation and maritime sectors.

· Support citizens and businesses most affected by the transition with a social climate fund.

· Increase the EU renewable energy target from 32% to 40%.

· Ensure that all new buildings in the EU are zero-emission by 2030 to make buildings greener.

· Create a hydrogen and decarbonized gas market.

Cutting Emissions in Livestock Farming: What's Next?

When people talk about zero emissions, they usually mean getting rid of carbon dioxide and other gases that trap heat, like methane from farm animals. But reaching zero emissions doesn't have to mean getting rid of all animals or old-fashioned farming.

Livestock farming is a big source of methane, which is bad news for the climate. This makes people worry about what will happen to regular animal farming. Still, the point is to lower emissions while still producing enough food, not to stop raising animals completely.

New ideas like lab-grown meat and plant-based options are becoming popular as ways to reduce the impact of our food on the environment. Changes to farming, like adjusting what animals eat and improving how manure is handled, are also aimed at lowering emissions.

Basically, zero emissions policies try to lower environmental damage without stopping farming or getting rid of animals. Moving forward means using new tech and good practices to balance climate goals with making sure we have enough food and a stable economy.

set for 2030 and 2050. The 55-eligible package,a strengthened legislative package, consists of five new pieces of legislation on climate, energy, transport, buildings, land use and forestry. The 55-eligible package also introduces regulations in key areas such as renewable energy, energy efficiency and the carbon border mechanism and social climate fund. The legislation in the 55-eligible package aims to align the EU's efforts to meet its 2030 targets.

The proposals in the package include:

· Reforming the EU Emissions Trading System, including the aviation sector in the emissions reduction system and ensuring that the system operates more ambitiously.

· Reducing the risk of carbon leakage through the Border Carbon Adjustment Mechanism, thus reducing emissions outside the EU.

· Introduce binding commitments for each Member State to reduce emissions in the land use and forestry sectors.

· Reduce emissions from cars and vans by 100% by 2030 and beyond.

Analysis Results

SKDM is one of the important tools that help the Constitutional Court achieve its climate targets. SKDM is a carbon border tax. The main purpose of the mechanism is to prevent carbon leakage arising from flexible emission practices in EU trading partner countries and to encourage non-EU countries to adopt carbon pricing policies. Another aim is to gradually eliminate the free allowances in the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) with SKDM. The EU ETS is a carbon market based on cap-and-trade of emission allowances in the energy-intensive manufacturing sector and the aviation sector. SKDM operates under the EU ETS and carbon fees are determined according to the weekly average in the EU ETS. SKDM covers sectors such as cement, aluminium, fertilizer, electricity generation, iron and steel, which contribute the most to the EU's emissions growth.

According to the SKDM regulation published in July 2021, SKDM will initially focus on these five sectors with a high risk of carbon leakage. In the first stage, a data collection process will be established to determine the risk of carbon emission leakage. In the second stage, it is planned to expand the scope of the sector to other sectors such as electricity. SKDM is a system that requires importers operating in the EU to purchase carbon certificates depending on the amount of carbon in the products they import, in accordance with the requirements of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The final implementation of the system is set for 2026.

Evaluation of the European Green Deal in Light of Scenario-Based Findings

Looking at different possible futures, it seems the European Green Deal (EGD) helps the EU move toward its climate goals for 2030 and 2050, but it's not enough by itself.

When we checked 15 different scenarios, even the best cases only cut CO_2 emissions by about 95% by 2050. That's not quite climate neutral. Using more electricity and renewable energy like wind and solar helps reduce carbon and makes energy use better. But we need to speed up how fast we're going green. Things like the

Emissions Trading System (ETS) need to be made stronger. Right now, we probably won't hit the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C target.

From a green point of view, the EGD is a good move to include environmental issues in how we make political and economic decisions. But, green thinking says we need bigger changes, and the EU's current plans might not be changing things enough to really deal with the climate problem. Still, because the EU is a big player in politics and the economy, its environmental rules can affect countries that want to join and other countries around the globe. This could help spread green ideas faster worldwide.

Conclusion

The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) is important for the EU's climate goals. It stops carbon leakage from imports and drives global carbon pricing. At first, it focuses on high-emission areas like cement, aluminium, and steel. Importers have to buy carbon certificates that match EU emission prices. It should be fully working by 2026.

Studies of the European Green Deal (EGD) show that it moves the EU closer to its climate targets for 2030 and 2050. Still, the policies we have now aren't enough to be fully carbon neutral. More electric power and renewable energy help with cutting emissions and improving energy use, but we need to speed up the change and make things like the Emissions Trading System stronger. It's not likely the EU will meet the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C target if we don't do more. From a green point of view, the EGD is good because it puts environmental issues into policy, but it could need bigger changes. Still, the EU's rules could push other countries to use green policies too, especially those that want to join or work with the EU.

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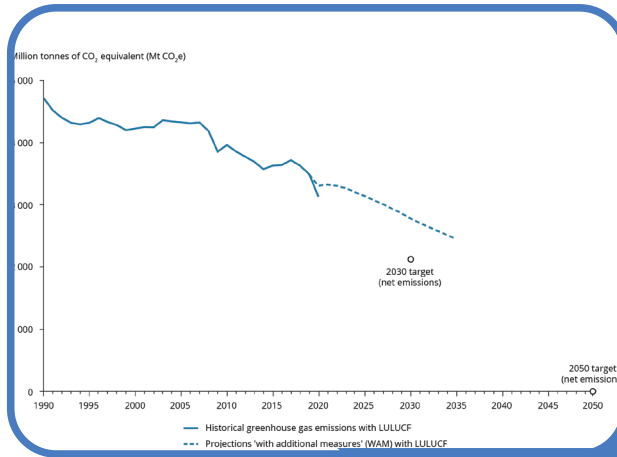
NextGenerationEU: The European Union's Post-COVID-19 Recovery Strategy

Beste Babar

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has global effects, has left the European Union (EU) facing a serious crisis by deeply affecting economic systems while reducing environmental problems (European Commission, 2020). This crisis has caused serious problems in the European economy, as health systems have become inadequate, supply chains have been disrupted, and labor markets have experienced major fluctuations (European Commission, 2021). Markets that stopped and even declined due to the transition from office to home in working systems and the restrictions in social life have been one of the critical points of this return (European Parliament, 2021). Looking for a way out of this process, the EU has put into action a plan called NextGenerationEU (NGEU), which we can call an economic recovery package, in order to recover this problematic period experienced by the sectors, support economic transformation, and create a more resilient structure for the future (European Commission, 2020).

Green Transformation and Economic Recovery

Sustainable Development Goals are grouped around three areas: environmental, social, and economic (United Nations, 2015). Although each of them is correlated with each other, they are strengthened in different titles. The 'principle of sustainable development' is of great importance in the EU's economic recovery process (European Commission, 2021). Here we encounter the concept we call green transformation. Green transformation is an effort to align economic growth with environmental sustainability (European Environment Agency, 2021). This transformation includes many critical topics such as transitioning to low carbon emissions in industrial production, integrating sectors into green while opening up a job area for workers, encouraging renewable energy sources, and developing environmentally friendly transportation systems (European Commission, 2020).

The EU aims to create a 'carbon-free economy' with no carbon emissions by 2050 (European Commission, 2019). For this purpose, a significant portion of the NGEU funds collected within the EU serves this purpose (European Commission, 2020). Here, the highest funds are allocated to renewable energy projects, technologies that increase energy efficiency, and 'low-carbon production processes' in the industrial sector (European Commission, 2021). Even though the use of electric vehicles in the transportation sector is still a critical and controversial issue among the EU, the basic policy is to popularize it (European Parliament, 2022). Here, projects such as the creation of sustainable transportation networks in cities are examined effectively (European Environment Agency, 2021).

If you want to change something that has been around for years and on which the system is built, this will bring many difficulties. There are also some difficulties in front of the NGEU transformation process. Many sectors are dependent on fossil fuels, and here are three critical points in the transformation process of these sectors: the lack of sufficient information, the high cost of technological and environmentally friendly machinery and projects in the sectoral transition, and one of the most critical points, the employment problem experienced during the transformation process (European Commission, 2021). At this point, many of the EU's policies that support the transition to a green economy begin to show themselves (European Parliament, 2021). With these policies, it is of great importance to 'diversify employment areas' and retrain the workforce (European Commission, 2020). Another process is regulations. The EU's new environmental policies require new regulations in the industrial and agricultural sectors (European Commission, 2021).

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One of the biggest lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic here has been the need to 'breathe life into the world' (European Environment Agency, 2021). While incentives are offered for industrial organizations to transition to low-carbon emission production, it is also aimed to adopt sustainable production models in the agricultural sector (European Parliament, 2022).

In this process, the 'adaptation of developing countries to green transformation' stands out as a critical element (United Nations, 2021). The most basic arguments that stand out even in today's Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings are shaped around this (United Nations, 2021). While developed countries have acquired wealth by polluting the environment and damaging it, they expect developing countries to integrate into this process with their low financial capacities (European Commission, 2021). This process is a challenging one for developing or underdeveloped countries. The EU aims to accelerate the green transformation on a global scale by putting financial support mechanisms into place for such countries (European Commission, 2020). Additionally, strict regulations for the industrial sector are introduced to reduce carbon emissions, encouraging long-term sustainable growth (European Parliament, 2022).

Digitalization and Strategy to Increase Europe's Competitiveness

Digital transformation is another critical component of the EU's economic recovery strategy (European Commission, 2021). Strengthening digital infrastructure, using smart technologies in industry, and making progress in data security are the main areas where the EU aims to increase its competitiveness in the global market (European Parliament, 2022).

The NextGenerationEU program aims to accelerate Europe's digital transformation by 'increasing investments in information technologies' (European Commission, 2020).

Investments in areas such as high-speed internet access, digital public services, and artificial intelligence will increase efficiency in public administration as well as economic growth (European Commission, 2021).

However, the risks brought by digitalization should not be ignored. 'Cyber security threats' are becoming a greater risk with the development of the digital economy (European Parliament, 2022). Therefore, the EU should strengthen legal regulations to protect individuals' personal data and increase digital security measures (European Commission, 2020).

Conclusion

NextGenerationEU offers a comprehensive strategy to accelerate the EU's post-COVID-19 economic recovery and create a sustainable growth model in the long term (European Commission, 2021). Key components such as green transformation, digitalization, and social justice aim to increase Europe's competitiveness in the global market and strengthen social welfare (European Parliament, 2022).

However, this transformation process carries risks that must be managed carefully. Reducing social inequalities, adapting the workforce to the new economic order, and increasing digital security measures will determine the success of the program (European Commission, 2020). If the EU implements these strategies effectively, NextGenerationEU can go beyond being just an economic recovery program and turn into a permanent transformation project shaping the future of Europe (European Parliament, 2022).

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The Impact of Climate Change on the European Automotive Industry: Challenges, Policies, and Future Perspectives

Emre Çağrı Karaman

Climate change has emerged as one of the most urgent global issues, directly affecting industries with high carbon footprints. Among these, European automotive manufacturers stand at a crossroads, facing the dual pressure of reducing greenhouse gas emissions while maintaining global competitiveness. The sector, responsible for approximately 15% of the EU's total CO_2 emissions, is undergoing a structural transformation driven by environmental regulations, technological innovations, and shifting consumer preferences.

1. Challenges Posed by Climate Change

Automotive manufacturers face numerous challenges arising from both regulatory pressures and environmental factors. Increasing climate variability is leading to more frequent natural disasters, which disrupt production lines. The 2021 floods in Germany, which temporarily halted operations at several production sites, serve as a notable example. In addition, compliance with strict EU emissions targets has significantly increased production costs. According to the European Commission's CO_2 emissions standards, the average emissions of new cars must be reduced by 55% by 2030 compared to 2021 levels. This puts immense pressure on traditional manufacturers relying on internal combustion engines.

Moreover, adapting to sectoral transformations requires substantial investment. Some of these changes include the growing adoption of electric vehicles, advancements in battery technology, expansion of charging infrastructure, and retraining of the workforce. For instance, Volkswagen allocated €35 billion between 2020 and 2025 solely for the development of electric vehicles. However, smaller firms often lack the capital reserves for such strategic shifts, raising concerns about industry consolidation and job losses.

2. Policy Landscape and Its Effects

The European Green Deal and the "Fit for 55" package lie at the heart of the EU's climate strategy. The Green Deal aims to make Europe climate-neutral by 2050, and the automotive sector plays a critical role in achieving this target. One of the most transformative regulations is the 2023 decision by the European Parliament to ban the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles by 2035. While this measure promotes the adoption of electric vehicles, it also compels automakers to accelerate R&D and invest in innovations such as alternative fuels.

Additionally, carbon pricing mechanisms like the EU Emissions Trading System are being extended to cover road transport. This places an added cost burden on automotive suppliers reliant on logistics. On the other hand, government subsidies and tax incentives support demand-side transitions. In 2022 alone, Germany allocated €1.9 billion to electric vehicle subsidies, which significantly boosted local EV sales by 22% compared to the previous year.

3. Comparative and Sectoral Analysis

When comparing countries, stark differences can be observed in the adoption of electric vehicles and the implementation of related policies. Although not an EU member, Norway stands out as a leading example. Thanks to financial incentives, over 80% of new cars sold in 2022 were electric. In contrast, Southern European countries like Italy and Greece have lagged behind due to economic disparities and insufficient infrastructure.

Leading automotive manufacturers with high profit margins have managed the transition more effectively, enabling a smoother shift toward electrification. Budget vehicle brands, however, face greater pressure to offer

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affordable electric cars without compromising on margins.

4. Future Perspectives

Looking ahead, the European automotive industry is preparing for a technological shift. Digitalization, autonomous driving, and sustainable materials are poised to redefine mobility. Furthermore, the circular economy concept is gaining traction, particularly in areas aligned with EU resource efficiency goals, such as battery recycling and second-life applications.

However, global competition remains intense. China currently dominates battery supply chains and EV component production, raising strategic concerns over Europe's autonomy. As a result, EU-level industrial policy may need to focus on securing raw materials, promoting innovation clusters, and enhancing transnational R&D collaboration.

In conclusion, climate change presents existential challenges for the European automotive industry, while simultaneously offering opportunities for transformation and leadership in sustainable mobility. Success will depend on a balanced mix of policy support, technological adaptation, and economic resilience.

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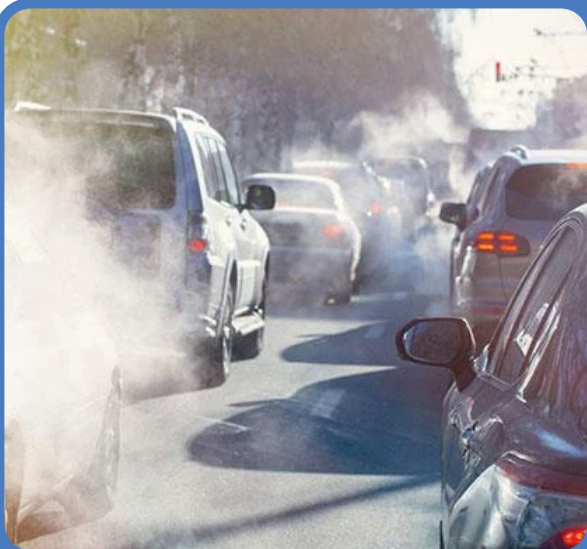
A Reading of Türkiye–EU Relations Through the Axis of the Customs Union

Zehra Ayyüce Balcı

Introduction

In its relations with the EU, Türkiye possesses a unique status that sets it apart from other countries in several ways: it is the only large and industrialized country to have established a comprehensive Customs Union with the EU.[1] This has indeed created a mix of substantial opportunities and structural difficulties. Recently, following U.S. President Donald Trump's tariff decisions,[2] the need for modernization of the Customs Union has once again come to the forefront. The modernization of the Customs Union—which has long been voiced in both academic and business communities—is, at its core, a strategic necessity aimed at addressing resolving a structural issue: the Customs Union was originally established to prepare Türkiye for EU membership, but no one anticipated such a long delay in the accession process. Therefore, the Customs Union must be updated to reflect today's realities. The purpose of this paper is to examine Türkiye–EU relations through the development of the Customs Union and to assess the need for its modernization considering current developments.

The Process Leading to the Customs Union

The Ankara Agreement (12 September 1963) provided Türkiye with a roadmap toward its ultimate objective of full membership in the European Economic Community (EEC). As of 6 March 1995, the 12-year transitional period envisaged in the Additional Protocol to the Ankara Agreement (which entered into force in 1973) for the establishment of a Customs Union had not only expired but had been exceeded by more than a decade. After experiencing prolonged political and economic instability, Türkiye entered negotiations with the European Community to establish a Customs Union. The EU, which had long wanted to include Türkiye in the Customs Union, only agreed to sit at the table after it promised the member state Greece to begin full membership negotiations with the Greek Cypriot Administration. [3]

To understand the motivations and strategies of the parties at that time, it is useful to go back about eight years to another key date in Türkiye–EU relations. On 14 April 1987, Türkiye officially applied for full membership in the EU. This application was made in the context of significant transformations that followed a 23-year-long and largely unproductive association process between the parties.

The Commission, somewhat surprised by the application, delayed its response until 1989.[4] The reply, delivered as a detailed report, was negative and grounded mainly for two key reasons. First, the Community had just gone through a recent enlargement and was preoccupied with the establishment of the Single Market following the 1986 Single European Act, rendering it reluctant to accept new members. Second, as thoroughly discussed in the Commission's opinion, Türkiye was not yet ready to begin the candidacy process.

[1]Other countries in a customs union with the European Union: San Marino and Andorra. Other candidate countries or countries with close trade ties to the EU (such as Ukraine, Serbia, or Moldova) are not part of the Customs Union but rather engage with the EU through Free Trade Agreements or similar arrangements. In this regard, Türkiye remains the only large and industrialized country with such a comprehensive, institutionalized, and binding customs union relationship with the EU.

[2]The White House. (2025, April 2). Fact sheet: President Donald J. Trump declares national emergency to increase our competitive edge, protect our sovereignty, and strengthen our national and economic security. Retrieved from,https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/04/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-declares-national-emergency-to-increase-our-competitive-edge-protect-our-sovereignty-and-strengthen-our-national-and-economic-security/

[3]Vidal-Folch, X. (1995, March 4). "Grecia levanta su veto a la unión aduanera entre Turquía y la UE." El País. Retrieved from,https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/greece_lifts_its_veto_on_the_customs_union_between_turkey_and_the_eu_from_el_pais_4_march_1995-en-b728bd6a-7ee2-4c89-a2e5-50c68b79a5a7.html

[4]European Commission. (1989). Commission opinion on Turkey's request for accession to the Community (SEC (89) 2290 final). Brussels, 20 December 1989, p. 4. Retrieved from https://www.cvce.eu/obj/commission_opinion_on_turkey_s_request_for_accession_to_the_community_20_december_1989-en-4cc1acf8-06b2-40c5-bb1e-bb3d4860e7c1.html

The Commission highlighted Türkiye's insufficient development of political pluralism, lack of progress in human rights and minority rights, high inflation and unemployment rates, and ongoing disputes with Greece over Cyprus and the Aegean as major factors that would create serious adjustment constraints in its integration with the European Community.

One such constraint was expressed as follows: *"To avoid endangering the survival of whole sectors of its industry, Turkey has slowed down the timetable for liberalization and customs union laid down in the Ankara Agreement and has even introduced a new system of import taxes contrary to the provisions of the Agreement."[5]*

However, back in 1971, the EU had unilaterally eliminated customs duties and quantitative restrictions on nearly all industrial goods imported from Türkiye, except for certain petroleum and textile products.[6] From the EU's perspective, the Customs Union became one of the key pillars of the Matutes Package, which was to be proposed as an alternative to candidacy.[7] Here, beyond the expectation that unfulfilled promises would be honored, there was also a fundamental difference in approach. The EU preferred to engage with Türkiye not as a future member state, but as a stable country with a large market, one that could be economically tied to the EU through the Customs Union and with whom good relations would be maintained for economic and security reasons.[8]

This approach is also evident in the fact that the Customs Union decision taken by the Association Council on 6 March 1995 was also voted on in the European Parliament under the "assent procedure".[9] From a legal perspective, a decision taken jointly by the Association Council is binding between the parties. However, the European Parliament's involvement in the process demonstrates that the EU did not see the Customs Union -as Türkiye did- as "the final step before membership," but rather as a commercial agreement and a tool for economic cooperation.

The Commission's Proposal and the Scope of the Customs Union

The Commission's proposal was disappointing for the Turkish side. The newspaper Cumhuriyet headlined the situation with: "No Full Membership, Let's Offer the Customs Union Instead."[10] In reality, the membership application had been submitted with the aims of counterbalancing the power Greece had gained through its EU membership—and thus its veto power—and benefiting from the new wave of enlargement. However, there appeared to be no alternative but to settle for the proposal at hand. Following the rejection of Türkiye's membership application on the grounds of "not yet being ready," the Customs Union was seen by Türkiye as a stepping stone toward achieving full membership. It was anticipated that full membership would be achieved within 4 to 8 years after the Customs Union entered into force (Kabaalioğlu 2012: 14).[11] The failure of this projection to materialize is one of the fundamental reasons behind today's calls for modernization.

Scope of the Customs Union

The Customs Union between Türkiye and the EU, which came into effect on 31 December 1995, covers the free movement of industrial products and processed agricultural goods. Agricultural products, services, and public procurement are

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[5]Ibid, p. 4
[6]Economic Development Foundation (IKV). (n.d.). Gümrük Birliği [Customs Union]. Retrieved May 1, 2025, from https://www.ikv.org.tr/ikv.asp?lng=tr&id=38
[7]European Union Center of North Carolina. (2008). Brief: Turkey's Quest for EU Membership. EU Briefings, March 2008, p. 2.
[8]Nas, Ç., & Özer, Y. (2017). Turkey and EU integration: Achievements and obstacles (p. 34). Routledge.
[9]bid.
[10]Cumhuriyet. (1995, April 19). Tam üyelik olmadı Gümrük Birliği verelim.
[11]Nas, Ç., & Özer, Y. (2017). Turkey and EU integration: Achievements and obstacles (p. 34). Routledge.

excluded from this scope. Türkiye also undertook a series of legislative and policy alignment obligations that went beyond merely removing tariffs. These include:[12]

·   Harmonization of customs legislation with that of the EU,

·   Alignment with technical regulations (TBTs),

·   Compliance with competition law,

·   Protection of intellectual property rights,

·   Alignment with trade policy instruments (such as anti-dumping, subsidies, surveillance measures), and

·   Integration of market surveillance and conformity assessment systems.

With this decision, Türkiye:

·   Eliminated customs duties and quantitative restrictions in trade with the EU,
·
·   Aligned itself with the EU's Common Customs Tariff (CCT) against third countries and adjusted its own tariffs accordingly,

·   Became obligated to implement the EU's Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with third countries in parallel.

In essence, the Customs Union between Türkiye and the EU established a framework of relations that goes far beyond the traditional definition of a customs union—which merely involves the elimination of customs duties and quantitative restrictions and the harmonization of tariffs with respect to third countries.[13] Because the system envisioned, also included Türkiye's alignment with the EU acquis in areas such as trade, competition, and technical legislation.

Marking its 30th anniversary in 2025, the Customs Union stands as one of the few institutional pillars in EU–Türkiye relations that has remained robust and functional.[14]

The Impact of the Customs Union and Structural Problems

With the entry into force of the Customs Union, Türkiye's foreign trade volume increased dramatically.[15] In 1996, total exports amounted to USD 23.2 billion, rising to USD 31.3 billion by 2001; 56% of these exports were directed to the EU. By 2024, Türkiye's total exports reached USD 261.85 billion, of which USD 108.5 billion (41.4%) were to EU countries.[16] [17]In a study conducted by Aytuğ, Mavuş Kütük, Oduncu, and Togan using 2013 data, the effects of the Customs Union between Türkiye and the European Union (EU) on the Turkish economy were analyzed through a comparative scenario.[18] The authors sought to estimate how Türkiye's exports to the EU and its real per capita gross domestic product (GDP) would have evolved had the Customs Union not been implemented. Türkiye's exports to the EU in 2013 amounted to USD 63.6 billion and in a hypothetical scenario without the Customs Union, this figure was projected to be only USD 39.4 billion. This suggests that the Customs Union had approximately a 38% positive impact on exports. Similarly, while real per capita GDP in 2013 was calculated as USD 8.540, it was estimated that this figure would have remained at USD 7.418 without the Customs Union. This indicates that the Customs Union contributed to a 13% increase in welfare.

Following the Customs Union, the industrial sector in Türkiye underwent a transformation

[14]Akman, M. S., & Çekin, S. E. (2021). The EU as an Anchor for Turkey's Macroeconomic and Trade Policy. In W. Reiners & E. Turhan (Eds.), EU–Turkey Relations (pp. 305–332). Springer.
[15]Felbermayr, G., & Yalçın, E. (2021). The EU–Turkey Customs Union and Trade Relations: What Options for the Future? In-Depth Analysis requested by the INTA Committee, Policy Department for External Relations, European Parliament, p. 8.
[16]Turkish Exporters Assembly. (n.d.). İhracatın 100 yıllık serüveni [100 years of Turkish exports]. https://tim.org.tr/tr/ihracatin-100-yillik-seruveni
[17]Turkish Statistical Institute (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, 2001)
[18]Aytuğ, H., Mavuş Kütük, M., Oduncu, A., & Togan, S. (2017). Twenty Years of the EU–Turkey Customs Union: A Synthetic Control Method Analysis. Journal of Common Market Studies, 55(3), 419–431

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through increased investment in technology, productivity, and quality. The Customs Union forced Turkish industry to invest in technology and improve production processes, resulting in increased efficiency. In terms of Türkiye's export composition, there was a shift from low-tech to medium-tech products, particularly in sectors such as automotive, electrical machinery, and durable consumer goods (Akman, 2012: 220–221).[19] Türkiye adopted EU legislation in many areas including competition law, intellectual property, public procurement, and product safety; this contributed to the development of institutional capacity. In this context, institutions such as the Turkish Competition Authority and the Turkish Patent Institute were established. The capabilities of the Turkish Standards Institution (TSE) were enhanced, and systems for CE marking and quality inspection were developed.[20]

The Customs Union's requirement for compliance with EU norms turned Türkiye into a more predictable and attractive investment environment; the EU has become the largest source of foreign direct investment in Türkiye.[21] Additionally, the Union has led to the establishment of institutional mechanisms such as the Association Council and the Customs Union Joint Committee between Türkiye and the EU.

In any case, a much deeper partnership has been established compared to an ordinary trade agreement. In a 2020 study[22] by Larch, Schmeißer, and Wanner, it was observed that Türkiye's exports to the EU increased by 74% due to the Customs Union, while EU exports to Türkiye increased by 49%. These figures correspond to nearly double the average trade

increase (about 28%) typically prov+ided by standard free trade agreements. One of the main reasons for this strong effect is clearly the structural features of the Union, which enabled a deep industrial integration.

However, this integration has also brought with it certain foreign trade and structural balance issues for Türkiye. For example, while Türkiye's trade deficit with the EU was approximately USD 5.8 billion in 1995, it rose to USD 11.3 billion by 2008. Although exports increased with the Customs Union, the export structure has largely been dependent on imported inputs (sectors such as automotive, textiles, and white goods—leaders in exports—import a significant portion of the raw materials and intermediate goods used in production).[23]Additionally, Türkiye's dependence on external sources for energy has caused imports to rise as well, resulting in a persistent foreign trade deficit. Even more striking is that Türkiye's trade deficit with non-EU countries increased nearly sevenfold during the same period—from USD 8.2 billion to USD 58.7 billion[24]. The situations

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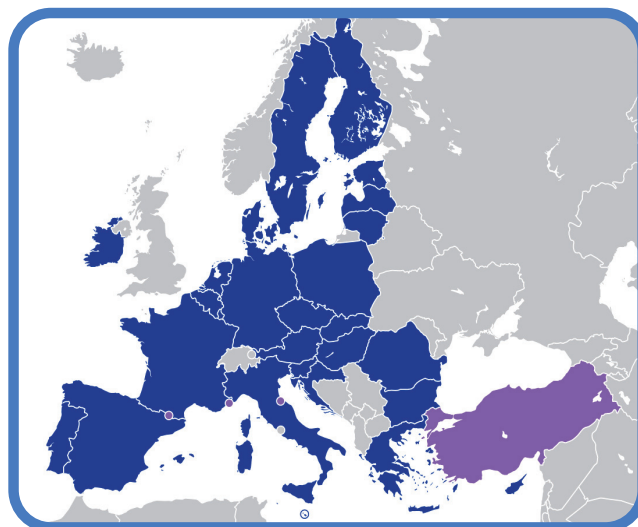
[19]Nas, Ç., & Özer, Y. (2017). Turkey and EU integration: Achievements and obstacles (p. 34). Routledge. "The share of low-technology sectors in Turkey's total exports decreased from 57 per cent in 1996 to 32 per cent in 2009, while the share of medium-technology sectors increased from 40 per cent in 1996 to 66 per cent in 2009 (Akman 2012: 220).

[20]World Bank. (2014). Evaluation of the EU–Turkey Customs Union (Report No. 85830-TR). Washington, DC: World Bank Group.
World Bank. (2014). Evaluation of the EU–Turkey Customs Union (Report No. 85830-TR). Washington, DC: World Bank Group. "The EU, led by the Netherlands, Austria, UK, Luxembourg, Germany and Spain, was the most important source of FDI to Turkey during the post-Customs Union period."

[21]Larch, M., Schmeißer, T., & Wanner, J. (2020). A Tale of (almost) 1001 Coefficients: The Deep and Heterogeneous Effects of the EU–Turkey Customs Union. Journal of Common Market Studies, 58(4), 941–961. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13008

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[23]Analysis. Journal of Common Market Studies, 55(3), 419–438.
[24]Ibıd

Structural Problems of the Customs Union and Modernization Efforts

Although the positive effects of the Customs Union on the Turkish economy are undeniable, its current operation has produced numerous ong-term structural weaknesses and asymmetries. Failure to address the problems outlined below raises concerns about the sustainability and equity of the integration process.Türkiye is obliged to align with the EU's Common Commercial Policy but has no decision-making power in shaping these policies. This situation causes free trade agreements (FTAs) that affect Türkiye's external trade to be negotiated without Türkiye's involvement, and their outcomes are directly reflected onto Türkiye.

For instance, consider a hypothetical scenario in which the EU signs a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with a third country—such as Vietnam. Goods from Vietnam may enter the EU with zero or reduced tariffs. Under the Customs Union, Türkiye also applies the EU's Common Customs Tariff (CCT), which means that Vietnamese goods may enter the Turkish market at the same preferential rates. However, if Türkiye cannot simultaneously conclude an equivalent FTA with that country, Turkish goods remain subject to Vietnam's high tariffs. This creates a serious disadvantage for Turkish exporters. Türkiye can only negotiate its own FTAs separately, and time lags between agreements can lead to trade diversion, meaning Turkish goods enter third-country markets either later or under unfavorable conditions. Ultimately, while the Turkish market opens to third countries duty-free, Turkish producers are unable to enjoy the same benefits.

In response to this asymmetry, the European Commission proposed the "Turkey Clause" in the 2000s, which consisted of the EU encouraging the third party in any FTA to simultaneously sign an agreement with Türkiye. This non-binding mechanism was assessed in the World Bank's 2014 report "Evaluation of the EU–Turkey Customs Union" as an ineffective and insufficiently functioning system. The report emphasized its limited enforceability and the inconsistent way in which the Turkey Clause has been applied in the EU's external trade negotiations. Instead, the World Bank proposed a binding, institutional, and automatic "Revised Türkiye Clause," whereby Türkiye would be included in the negotiation process concurrently and similar agreements would be enacted with Türkiye before the EU's agreement with the third country enters into force.[25]

Another problem with the Customs Union is the limited scope of its coverage. As previously mentioned, unprocessed agricultural products, the services sector, and public procurement remain outside the scope of the Customs Union. As a result, Türkiye has continued to face non-tariff barriers from the EU in these sectors. Including especially the agriculture and services sectors could help shift Türkiye's export structure from low value-added to high value-added services and technology products. This transition could contribute to a more sustainable and competitive export base. The World Bank considers the inclusion of these sectors in a modernization process as the step with the highest potential to increase welfare.[26]

One important point regarding the operation of the Customs Union is the possibility of tariff arbitrage. As noted above, under the Customs Union, Türkiye is required to apply the EU's Common Customs Tariff (CCT) to third countries. This may result in some products entering Türkiye through the EU at lower tariffs than if they were imported directly from a third

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[25]World Bank. (2014). Evaluation of the EU–Turkey Customs Union. Report No. 85830-TR. Washington, DC: World Bank Group. P.65
[26]Ibid. According to the World Bank, Türkiye's GDP could increase by 1% if these areas were added to Customs Union.

country, creating trade distortions and inefficiencies.

In addition, the dispute settlement mechanism of the Türkiye–EU Customs Union is considered both inadequate and ineffective. This makes it difficult to systematically resolve trade disputes between the parties, leading to a buildup of "trade irritants" that damage relations. According to the current mechanism based on the Ankara Agreement, the resolution of a dispute depends on the mutual approval of both parties (Türkiye and the EU states). In practice, this means that most disputes are never formally addressed. According to analyses by the World Bank and the European Parliament, a comprehensive dispute resolution system should be established where either party can unilaterally bring a case.[27] [28] This system should be binding and impartial—like those found in NAFTA or the EU's modern FTAs.

Existing mechanisms such as the Customs Union Joint Committee and consultation frameworks between Türkiye and the EU have also been ineffective in allowing Türkiye to protect its position. A modernized system should not only establish legal mechanisms but also provide for the formulation of trade policies through prior mutual consultation.

Policies such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), introduced under the European Green Deal, will also significantly affect Türkiye. Carbon-intensive sectors (e.g., cement, steel, aluminium) may face new taxes. However, Türkiye has been slow to adapt to these regulations. Modernizing the Customs Union must also include Türkiye's alignment with new EU environmental legislation, such as

leakage and preserve the competitiveness of energy-intensive industries in Türkiye within the EU market.

The Current Context
The modernization of the Customs Union has become even more critical amid growing global economic uncertainties and rising geopolitical risks. Developments such as the U.S.–China trade wars, Brexit, and the COVID-19 pandemic have disrupted global supply chains and increased protectionist tendencies. In such an environment, strengthening Türkiye's trade relations with the EU and updating the Customs Union is a vital strategy for economic stability and resilience. Modernization can enable Türkiye to become more resistant to global uncertainties, and by fostering a more integrated economic structure with the EU, it can enhance the competitiveness of both parties.

In this context, the general tariff decisions of U.S. President Donald Trump, which entered into force on April 9, 2025, represent a timely and striking example of growing protectionist trends in global trade. Although these decisions did not directly target Türkiye, the country's economic proximity to the EU and its position within the Customs Union indicate a high potential for indirect impact. Losses experienced by the EU –Türkiye's largest trading partner–in its trade with the United States, and a subsequent reorientation toward its internal market, could lead to reduced imports from third countries such as Türkiye. Furthermore, if EU-based firms attempt to circumvent tariffs by investing directly in the United States, Türkiye may lose priority among potential investment alternatives.

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[27]Ibid, p. xi
[28]European Commission. (2016). Study of the EU-Turkey Bilateral Preferential Trade Framework, including the Customs Union, and an Assessment of its Possible Enhancement, p. 130.

In general, as noted earlier, any contraction in the EU market poses a serious threat to Türkiye, whose largest trading partner is the EU. That said, such a situation may also make Türkiye a prioritized alternative in terms of investment diversification in certain sectors. However, Türkiye's limited competitiveness in high-technology sectors could restrict this potential advantage to a few specific industries.

The current landscape also presents some opportunities for improving relations. Thanks to its geographic proximity, industrial infrastructure, and integration with the EU, Türkiye may be considered by EU-based firms as a near-shoring hub. In particular, for the EU—which aims to integrate competitiveness and decarbonization through the Green Industrial Deal and to establish global clean trade and investment partnerships—Türkiye stands out as one of the closest and most strategic production bases, offering significant opportunities. Moreover, the ongoing trade wars and global uncertainty can be seen as both a temporal and geopolitical opportunity to modernize the Customs Union.

Considering all of this historical, institutional, and economic framework, the Customs Union between Türkiye and the European Union has until now generated significant benefits for both parties—not only as an economic but also as a strategic and institutional partnership. However, changing global dynamics and internal limitations over time have created a pressing need for its modernization. Existing asymmetries, the limited scope of regulatory alignment, deficiencies in governance, and exclusionary decision-making mechanisms have undermined the sustainability and functionality of this integration. In today's world -where global supply chains are being restructured and new norms such as green transition and digitalization are redefining the rules of trade- the continuation of the Customs Union in its current form would mean missed opportunities for both sides. In contrast, a modernized Customs Union with expanded scope and strengthened institutional representation would allow both parties to benefit from a more resilient, competitive, and predictable trade and investment environment.

In this context, as the Customs Union reaches its 30th anniversary, the performance of its current structure -measured against both historical legacy and contemporary challenges- will continue to be one of the key determinants shaping the future of Türkiye–EU relations.

Gümrük Birliği'nin imzalanmasından bu yana AB'ye ihracat (milyar $)

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[27] Ibid, p. xi
[28] European Commission. (2016). Study of the EU-Turkey Bilateral Preferential Trade Framework, including the Customs Union, and an Assessment of its Possible Enhancement, p. 130.

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Strategic Inclusion: SEPA as a Tool for Strengthening EU–Türkiye Ties

Sude Evkuran

The European Union (EU) remains the world's one of important functioning supranational entities. Despite a growing emphasis on national sovereignty among member states, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU continues to deepen integration under its founding principle of "unity in diversity". This integration is not only legal or political but also digital, economic, and infrastructural. From the Common Agricultural Policy to technological standardization initiatives such as the mandatory USB-C charging ports for all portable devices by the end of 2024, the EU has taken several harmonizing steps to reduce fragmentation.

Efforts to eliminate internal borders have also **been extended** to neighboring non-EU countries, such as through the Schengen area[1] or financial mechanisms like Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA). In response to Russia's aggression since 90's and its invasion of Ukraine, the EU has actively pursued deeper ties with countries like Moldova and Georgia, fast-tracking aspects of integration. Yet, in contrast, Türkiye, an EU candidate country since 1999, has not seen equivalent progress. While the digital and economic integration of the European Union is deepening, Türkiye's exclusion from SEPA, a **crucial** pillar of this process, **highlights** a strategic contradiction.
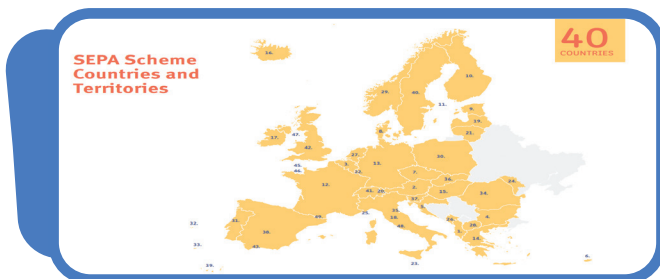

Figure 1. SEPA countries and territories (European Payments Council, 2025).

Türkiye's Exclusion from SEPA: A Symbol of Fragile Relations

SEPA allows individuals and businesses to make euro-denominated transfers and direct debits across participating countries as easily and inexpensively as domestic transfers (European Central Bank, n.d.).

To join SEPA, countries must meet several criteria, including:

· Strong economic ties with the EU,

· Legal frameworks aligned with EU payment regulations,

· No unfair competitive advantages (European Payments Council, 2020).

Türkiye–EU relations have long been marked by mutual interdependence but also chronic political tension. One indicator of this fragile relationship is Türkiye's absence from SEPA, despite the inclusion of countries such as Moldova, Serbia, Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia. Türkiye, as the EU's fifth-largest trading partner with a total trade volume exceeding €206 billion in 2023, far surpasses Moldova and North Macedonia in economic weight. Moldova, by comparison, ranked only 58th among EU trade partners with a mere €7.5 billion in total turnover (Directorate-General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood, 2025), and North Macedonia recorded €13.1 billion (Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, 2025). Despite this, both countries were included in SEPA as of March 2024.

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[1] The Schengen Area includes some non-EU countries such as Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, and Liechtenstein.

Why Türkiye Meets the SEPA Criteria

Türkiye has fulfilled or has the capacity to fulfil the core SEPA participation requirements:

· It has long-standing economic and legal ties with the EU through the 1996 Customs Union.

· Its legal and regulatory framework, particularly in the banking and financial sectors, has undergone significant reforms to approximate EU standards (Steinherr, Tukel, & Ucer, 2004).

· Türkiye is not blacklisted by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), şt also supports Türkiye's eligibility for SEPA membership.

Given these realities, the exclusion appears more political than technical, highlighting a deeper dissonance in EU–Türkiye relations.

Strategic Benefits for the EU

1. Reducing Transaction Costs for EU Businesses

EU businesses trading with Türkiye currently rely on the costly and slower SWIFT system for euro transfers. Inclusion in SEPA would eliminate these fees, which amount to hundreds of millions of euros annually, thereby improving the EU's trade competitiveness. According to recent statements, Moldova's integration into SEPA is expected to generate substantial savings of around €12 million annually, benefiting local businesses and strengthening the economy (EU for Digital, 2025).

2. Consistency with the Customs Union

It is contradictory for Türkiye to be part of the Customs Union, facilitating free movement of goods, yet excluded from a system designed to enable free movement of money. SEPA inclusion would resolve this inconsistency and enhance the functionality of the Single Market

EU's Trade Volume: Türkiye and Smaller SEPA Counties (2023)

Annual SWIFT and SEPA Cost Comparison for a German SME (10,000 €/Month Transfer)

SWIFT
90 €
1,080 €

SEPA
1 €
12 €

Türkiye's full inclusion in the European Union's Single Market would go beyond the current Customs Union, granting access not only to the free movement of goods but also to services, capital, and people. Such integration would allow Turkish individuals and businesses to invest, open accounts, and trade financial assets freely across EU member states. It would also facilitate fintech-based financial integration and enable participation in systems like SEPA, reducing dependency on SWIFT and enhancing economic interoperability.

On 31 March 2023, Türkiye signed the Participation Agreement for the 2021–2027 Single Market Programme, aiming to improve businesses' access to markets, encourage entrepreneurship and skill development, support industrial modernization, and enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of enterprises -including those in the tourism sector- while addressing global and societal challenges (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Directorate for EU Affairs, 2023).

Despite these steps, there remains a prevailing belief within EU institutions that Türkiye's economy is not yet sufficiently "mature" for full participation in the Single Market, particularly due to structural inefficiencies and regulatory gaps (Ulchenko, 1998). This perception continues to hinder progress, even as Türkiye strengthens its alignment with EU standards and expands its cooperation in various policy areas.

3. Strengthening the EU's Strategic Autonomy

SWIFT is a U.S.-dominated system. Continuing to channel EU–Türkiye transactions through SWIFT subjects the EU to potential U.S. surveillance and geopolitical leverage. Expanding SEPA to Türkiye would reinforce Europe's financial sovereignty.

4. Expanding the Euro's Geopolitical Reach

Türkiye is a regional hub with deep economic ties to the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Balkans. SEPA integration would amplify the euro's influence in these regions and serve as a tool for exporting EU standards.
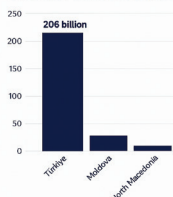
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5. Efficiency in Development Assistance

Türkiye hosts over 3 million refugees, many of whom are supported by EU funds (UNHCR, 2025). SEPA integration would improve the efficiency, transparency, and accountability of fund transfers related to humanitarian and development aid.

Missed Opportunities and Policy-Blind Spots

While high-level EU-Türkiye dialogues have resumed, and progress has been made in removing some technical trade barriers (Haberler, 2024), SEPA is notably absent from these discussions. This is a missed opportunity to institutionalize economic cooperation in a politically neutral domain. Moreover, Türkiye's SEPA exclusion despite fulfilling core eligibility requirements undermines the EU's credibility in promoting a rule-based, inclusive neighborhood policy.

Currently, all non-SEPA transactions between the EU and Türkiye are routed through the U.S.-controlled SWIFT system. This not only imposes financial costs but also exposes the EU's economic activities to American regulatory reach and surveillance. As the U.S. struggles to maintain dominance over global trade routes and digital payment infrastructures, especially with the rise of BRICS-aligned mechanisms and blockchain-based alternatives (e.g. Havala, crypto-based remittances), expanding SEPA emerges not just as an economic tool but as a shield of European financial sovereignty.

SWIFT's global role has long been a backbone of U.S. dollar hegemony, enabling Washington to weaponize interbank communication systems via sanctions or monitoring. The EU's reluctance to provide SEPA access to a major partner like Türkiye, despite its Customs Union and alignment with EU banking norms — thus ironically perpetuates its own dependency on U.S. oversight.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendation

Türkiye's inclusion in SEPA would not only benefit Turkish citizens and businesses but would also serve the EU's strategic, economic, and normative interests. The cases of Moldova and North Macedonia demonstrate that political will can override economic size or technical readiness. In parallel with the European Commission's 2025 enlargement report, technical negotiations for SEPA integration with Türkiye should be initiated, and a temporary membership status should be established by the end of 2026.

Ultimately, Türkiye's SEPA membership is not only a matter of trade efficiency but a strategic realignment. At a time when financial infrastructures are increasingly being used as tools of geopolitical influence, the EU must decide whether it will continue to rely on U.S.-centric systems or chart its own path toward financial sovereignty, starting with the inclusion of its largest non-member trading partner in SEPA.

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How will the EU address the question of strategic autonomy: The oncoming new formulation of the European grand strategy and its wider implications

Emir Can Aydınoğlu

Introduction

In June 2025, at the NATO Summit in The Hague, NATO members reaffirmed their 'ironclad commitment' to the Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, but more importantly, they unanimously agreed to raise their respective defense spending to 5% of their respective GDPs by 2035, with 3.5% being spent on 'core defense' and the remaining 1.5% on 'defense related costs', achieving a major goal that was previously thought politically unrealistic.

According to the 2024 data, EU Member States spend about 324 billion Euros in defense, with defense investment making up 102 billion, more than 30% of the total defense spending. That 324 billion in 2024 meant that on average, a Member State was spending 1.9% of its GDP in defense. Judging by this data, we can assume that within a decade, total European defense spending will exceed one trillion Euros.

This commitment is a groundbreaking development and will gradually reshape how the EU is perceived on the global stage, as well as the EU itself. The question this article will focus on is how so.

Defining the role of the EU in geopolitical stage

The EU was not meant to be a military union during its foundation. Thus, it lacked a military objective. After the Cold War, Member States were not in conflict with each other and the main threat against them, the USSR and its proxies, had collapsed. So, the Union grew content with the secondary geopolitical role it had under the American security umbrella and Member States diverted their efforts towards improving their economies and welfare systems. Centuries old bureaucracies of Member States, combined with the bureaucracy of the Union itself, granted Europe institutional and normative power. Thus, the EU became the de-facto global regulator of economic affairs.

This role, being the global regulator, granted the Union a secondary role in the global economy as well. Although representing a remarkable portion of the global economy, the Union started to significantly shift towards the services industry and failed in creating innovation, or notable productivity growth in Member States with developed nation status (this is not the case for ex-Warsaw Pact countries).

The share of Europe within the World economy has been steadily diminishing for decades. Although the reasons are up for debate, slow-paced population growth, overregulation, and almost zealous risk-aversion all contributed towards the Union's stagnation and falling behind the USA and China.
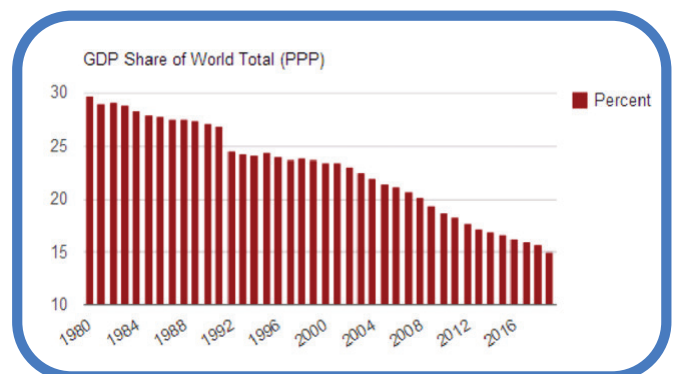
What this meant is that Member States, also have fallen behind in military technology as well, resulting in the Union lacking power projection capabilities and increasingly getting sidelined in the geopolitical arena. *"Other international actors outclass MS when it comes to investments for defence R&D. In 2023, the United States of America allocated around €129 billion to Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation (RDT&E).6 This category saw the*

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Ever since the start of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, the EU faces an existential threat that it had overlooked up until that point. A conflict the scale of which has not been seen since the Second World War has exposed European military weakness. Observing American and European military aid towards Ukraine gives us quite the picture. "Malcolm Chalmers, the deputy director-general of the Royal United Services Institute think tank in the U.K., told that recent estimates indicate the U.S. share of all military hardware sent to the front has fallen to around 20%, with 25% coming from Europe and 55% domestically produced in Ukraine. But the 20% accounted for by the U.S. is the most lethal and important." The USA provided Ukraine with cutting-edge weaponry such as Patriots, HIMARS and MANPADS which are proving increasingly effective on the battlefield and, has threatened Russia with providing more aid.

The USA also undoubtedly possesses the ability to provide much more aid. At the same time, Member States provided Ukraine with older defense equipment from their own military inventories – generally, in the form of armored personnel carriers, or main battle tanks and howitzers such as Leopard 1 or PzH 2000.

The fact which seems more concerning than the age of the equipment sent is the military production capabilities of the Union. "Increasing production, even of relatively simple systems like artillery rounds, is also proving challenging, with chemicals for explosives and propellants, as well as metals and plastics for fuses and casings, reportedly in short supply." (Pfeifer and Nilsson, Ammunition Supply Chain Crisis) There are many more reports on the EU's military production problems, even concerning something relatively simple to produce in this age of warfare, hardened specialized steel required for tanks. The EU's struggle in producing even ammunition and hardened steel has brought its ability to provide more aid as well as its ability to sustain actual conflict into serious question.

The military-industrial complex requires much more than factories and shipyards. It is an interconnected complex web of supply and production chains that takes raw metals and plastic and turns them into a stealth fighter jet. Another often overlooked aspect of the military-industrial complex is the infrastructure that allows the end-product to function and repairs it in case of damage. The operating systems and helping software, the production of maintenance tools, producing spare parts in case a part of a weapon gets damaged, not to mention that these are all specialized production chains that focus on producing one type of product. The supply and production chains of MBTs and fighter jets are entirely different.

Formulating the European Grand Strategy
EU lacks a grand strategy like the American or Chinese ones not only due to the reasons mentioned above, but also it is inherently difficult for an organization involving multiple states to formulate a coherent grand strategy. Although the institutional framework of the EU makes efforts to minimize friction between foreign policy ambitions of the Member States and their perceived interests, the situation is far from having a common grand strategy and there are still differences remaining. However, both the geopolitical and economic situations of the Union are grim.

Soon, Member States will have to take decisive action. In order to formulate a common grand strategy, the Union must realistically acknowledge the threats it faces, correctly evaluate resources it has under its disposal and clearly define its interests and end goals.

The military-industrial situation
If the commitment to budget increase is

honored, the military situation can be reversed to the advantage of the EU. The Union may start to act as an ecosystem for supplying the various armies it possesses. Each European country has its own comparative advantages in certain types of military production.

For example, Germany, with companies such as Rheinmetall and Kraus-Maffei Wegmann, already has the required infrastructure to produce MBT's, self-propelled artillery and ammunition. France has a significant aerospace industry with flagship companies such as Dassault, Safran and Thales. The existence of these companies and capabilities they possess might significantly reduce costs for the EU in developing 5th or 6th generation fighter jets. And Italy has the Leonardo, which is currently partnering up with the Turkish BAYKAR to jointly produce MALE (medium-altitude long-endurance) drones. Drones are becoming increasingly dominant in modern warfare and can change the tide of a battle if used en masse. The EU is not entirely resource-poor, Europe possesses a good chunk of raw materials that are required in military production and can easily source the ones it lacks from nearby third-party countries.

However, the notoriously energy-dependent EU will have to invest heavily in nuclear energy. This move will serve a dual purpose, as new reactors will substantially contribute to reducing energy dependency, but also will increase the Union's nuclear deterrence. A side effect of these investments will be reducing the reliance on the USA for nuclear capabilities.

For these efforts to be successful, significant changes are required in the economic system as well. The EU should focus on increasing its internal production capabilities. This will naturally lead the EU into looking for ways to improve its productivity and competitiveness.

The Union should strive to create an innovation-friendly environment that focuses on innovating first, regulating second.

The European banks should extend their available funds towards R&D endeavors and ease lending restrictions that are currently in effect, especially in R&D and defense. Governments should incentivize people and enterprises to attract the Union's highly educated workforce to work in the defense sector.

Member States specializing in their comparative advantages would not only improve their cooperation with each other but would also deepen the reliance of Member States on each other, making even deeper cooperation necessary by the passing of time. But more significantly, each Member State leveraging its own comparative advantage will result in significantly cheaper and faster modernization for the armed forces than if they were to individually develop their own industries from bottom up. Opting for this method will also lead to massive growth in the existing arms manufacturers of the EU, this means eventually the EU could build a military-industrial complex rivaling that of the USA.

The unique structure of the EU allows Member States to utilize their comparative advantages without suffering from almost none of its drawbacks. That is, if a country were to base its economy upon the areas where it had comparative advantage, it would be reliant on imports in other areas where it did not have comparative advantage thus did not develop. However, the Union acts almost as if it's a singular entity in international trade, and apart from some differences between regulations, it is a singular entity in the matters of internal trade between members. This means by investing in their comparative advantage, Member States would be making the Union more competitive in global economy. So, Member States may safely opt to modernize their 'core military' with equipment bought from within the Union.

One may even argue, stimulating the economy with this much investment into productive assets and the following quantitative easing might prove to be the solution to the EU's sluggish growth.

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The political situation

There is one central problem with this article that is yet to be answered. There are possible explanations for the future of the EU but where will the funding come from for the said investments? It is clear that Member States will have to increase government spending to increase defense spending, so they will have to borrow money. Most members of the EU have credit scores below AAA, Countries like Greece and Italy have credit scores of BBB and BBB+.
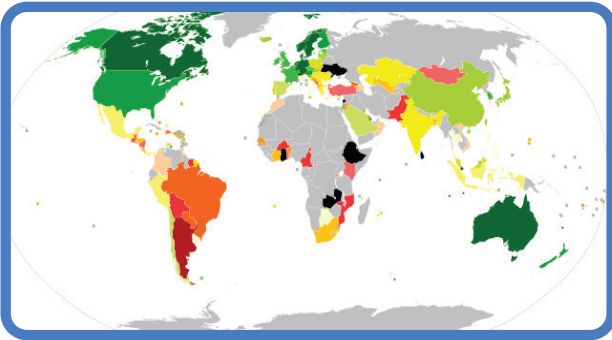
However, the EU itself has AAA credit rating, and the European Central Bank is the sole issuer of the Euro, the second most used currency in the world. This means, the EU is able to borrow money much cheaper than most Member States.

The Union may act as a lender of last resort for Member States, the Union already has an initiative in acting as a lender of last resort for Member States. The SAFE (Security Action for Europe) is a program that aims to borrow 150 billion Euro and lend that to Member States, significantly reducing the borrowing cost of most Member States. Being a lender of last resort has historically been one of the most significant steps towards political union. Especially in the cases of the Thirteen States-Federal Government during the American Independence war and the German Empire with the various princedoms it had within it during WW1. Most notably, Bavaria.

Astronomically expensive sectors that the Union currently lacks or is significantly behind its

competitors such as R&D; air defense systems, ICBM's and ballistic missiles, electronic warfare, cybersecurity, aerospace equipment, intelligence satellites, foreign military aid etc. may also be made Union-wide projects with Union-wide control with initiatives similar to SAFE.

Initiatives like these will not only significantly enhance its strategic autonomy and operational capabilities, as it is mostly dependent on the USA in sourcing these products and intelligence gathering, but also it will naturally address the question of a central command within the Union. Having a joint missile force or a joint space force will pave the way and provide invaluable experience in how to centrally manage armies of almost three dozen states.

However, one key weakness will remain in the foreseeable future. Europe has one of the oldest populations in the World, the median age in the EU is about 44.7, and the Union, although having a combined population of about 450 million, lacks manpower. In the world of military affairs, quantity eventually beats quality. So, in order to assert itself as one of the dominant actors in the global arena, the Union not only must look for alliances with populous and strong countries, notably the UK (an ex-member of the EU) (68 million people, 40.1 median age) and Türkiye (a NATO ally) (85 million people, 34.4 median age), but also, must invest heavily in unmanned combat vehicles in order not to deplete its scarce manpower reserve. Which brings the Union again closer towards the UK and notably, Türkiye. These alliances will also secure the northwestern and southeastern flanks of the Union and in the case of Türkiye could prove to be especially useful in containing migration inflows.

Overall, the European grand strategy is likely to be formulated around achieving European security by Europeans and safeguarding its interests on its own initiatives, through increasing unity within the EU and establishing autonomy within NATO, by utilizing its massive financial
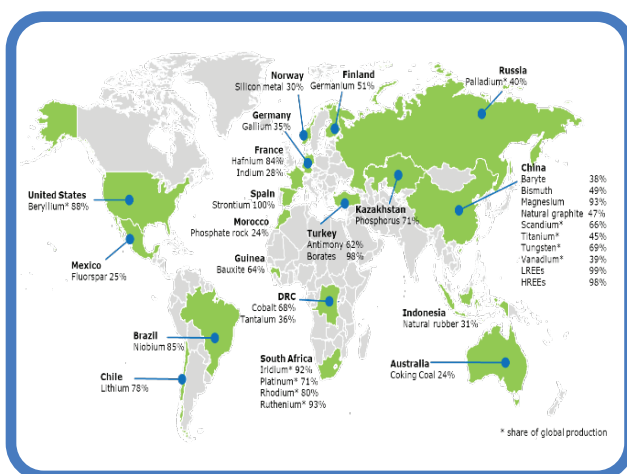
resources, significantly enhancing its operational capabilities and deepening existing cooperation both within and without the Union. The resulting breath of fresh air, stimulation, investment and revived production efforts might prove to be what the European economies need to start regrowing as well.

The establishment of the European grand strategy will be the next logical step in the EU's development. Not only are there historical examples of common lending policies enhancing political unity, but there are incentives and tendencies to do so within the EU itself. Ever since its foundation, the Union had always answered the threats and crises it faced with deepening cooperation, regardless of whether the problem is economic or political.

Almost all leaders within the EU are now recognizing the problems in the geopolitical situation of the EU and demonstrating the long-awaited political will towards greater internal integration and external autonomy in the face of the threats they encounter, with the help of central borrowing and establishing joint commands in certain forces, the prospect of deeper unity or even a political union doesn't seem far-fetched, but a natural path. This paper tries to understand what might happen in the future and why, in doing so, it tries to provide a rational pathway towards a better and more secure future for the entire region, as peace is most often achieved through deterrence.

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The Crimea Crisis: A Turning Point in Europe's Security Perception

Aybüke Özmen

The year 2014 marked a pivotal turning point in the European security system, leaving lasting effects on the security perception of the European Union (EU). Russia's annexation of Crimea tested the long-standing hypothetical security guarantees of the post-Cold War security architecture and revealed their inadequacy. Europe's security structure entered a new phase, where the strategic visions and decision-making mechanisms that had been shaped and reinforced for years were tested, solutions were sought, and serious security threats were redefined. During this period, the EU's role in global security was tested not only in military terms but also at political and normative levels.

The Crimea crisis emphasized the necessity for the EU to redefine its geopolitical identity and underlined how crucial the vision of strategic autonomy had become, as highlighted by numerous important analyses (Arslan, 2005). The repercussions of this transformation are notably seen within the framework of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which was shaped by the Lisbon Treaty. This policy marked a critical step towards the EU becoming a more active military actor. However, scholars like Kocamaz (2010) have pointed out the political and structural barriers to implementing this goal, revealing that the EU's collective security structure often faces difficulties in balancing the national interests of its member states with the common interests of the Union.

The EU, with its multi-layered governance structure, often faces challenges in its practical application, leading to a complex and fragmented decision-making process. This greatly complicates the ability to make rapid and effective decisions in times of crisis.

Additionally, the leadership of the United States within NATO has sometimes conflicted with the security interests of the EU. This situation has further emphasized the EU's need for an independent strategy (Van den Brande and Theunissen, 2010). After the annexation of Crimea, the EU not only started to feel the need for strategic autonomy more concretely but also realized that its security ties with the US needed to be re-evaluated. Especially the countries of Eastern Europe, faced with Russia's growing military activities, demanded stronger deterrence mechanisms, clearly demonstrating the EU's failure to meet these demands.

NATO members such as the Baltic States, Poland, and Romania called for NATO to adopt a stronger deterrent stance against Russia, while also advocating for the strengthening of the EU's military capabilities in this regard. This situation led to questions regarding the EU's strategic autonomy in the military field and raised significant issues about the future of the EU's security strategies. Trust in NATO's leadership further revealed the necessity for the EU to develop an independent security strategy, reinforcing the importance of the EU gaining autonomy not only in military terms but also diplomatically and economically (Ghiasy and Zhou, 2017).

The European Union, in the past, sought to balance its dependency under the US-led global security umbrella. However, in the aftermath of crises like Crimea, the EU is taking steps toward gaining strategic autonomy. These steps are necessitating the EU to become not only a military actor but also a more independent one in diplomatic terms. The EU has started reassessing its defense industry dependence to reduce external reliance, and new mechanisms such as PESCO (Permanent Structured

In general, as noted earlier, any contraction in the EU market poses a serious threat to Türkiye, whose largest trading partner is the EU. That said, such a situation may also make Türkiye a prioritized alternative in terms of investment diversification in certain sectors. However, Türkiye's limited competitiveness in high-technology sectors could restrict this potential advantage to a few specific industries.

The current landscape also presents some opportunities for improving relations. Thanks to its geographic proximity, industrial infrastructure, and integration with the EU, Türkiye may be considered by EU-based firms as a near-shoring hub. In particular, for the EU—which aims to integrate competitiveness and decarbonization through the Green Industrial Deal and to establish global clean trade and investment partnerships—Türkiye stands out as one of the closest and most strategic production bases, offering significant opportunities. Moreover, the ongoing trade wars and global uncertainty can be seen as both a temporal and geopolitical opportunity to modernize the Customs Union.

Considering all of this historical, institutional, and economic framework, the Customs Union between Türkiye and the European Union has until now generated significant benefits for both parties—not only as an economic but also as a strategic and institutional partnership. However, changing global dynamics and internal limitations over time have created a pressing need for its modernization. Existing asymmetries, the limited scope of regulatory alignment, deficiencies in governance, and exclusionary decision-making mechanisms have undermined the sustainability and functionality of this integration. In today's world -where global supply chains are being restructured and new norms such as green transition and digitalization are redefining the rules of trade- the continuation of the Customs Union in its current form would mean missed opportunities for both sides. In contrast, a umbrellas, maintaining its secondary actor position, or develop its economic, diplomatic,

and military capacities in a strategic and integrated manner to construct its own security paradigm. This paradigm should not only be based on military deterrence but also on pre-crisis diplomacy, foreign policies centered on human rights, and sustainable cooperation mechanisms. Europe's new security architecture will be crucial not only for the future of the continent but also for the preservation of the global democratic and multipolar order.

In light of all these developments, the future of the European Union will depend not only on its military and technical capacity but also on its political will, strategic vision, and the level of cohesion within the Union. The Crimea crisis, which began in 2014, has not only been a security threat for the EU but also a process of geopolitical awakening. Europe is no longer a passive regional actor; it must become an active, global power capable of protecting its interests and values. In this context, "strategic autonomy" is not limited to the defense sector but also encompasses the EU's need to establish its identity in the economy, foreign policy, and normative values.

Within the EU, different political actors are demonstrating diverse approaches to this issue. These political differences directly affect the speed and scope of the EU's steps toward strategic autonomy. For example, the Renew Europe (Renewed Europe) group advocates for the creation of an "independent European security" by strengthening its military and political capabilities, without completely severing ties with NATO. This group argues that, for Europe to maintain peace, it must be prepared for the threat of war, stressing that the classical Roman saying, "Si vis pacem, para bellum" (If you want peace, prepare for war) can no longer be ignored. Renew Europe's approach aligns closely with France's vision of strategic autonomy.

On the other hand, center-right political groups such as the European People's Party (EPP) support increased defense investment but insist that the primary priority should be NATO ties.

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According to this group, the EU should strengthen its defense but should remain complementary to, rather than replace, NATO. The EPP's approach is particularly supported by Central and Eastern European countries, as they feel the Russian threat more directly and see NATO's deterrence as their primary security guarantee.

The Socialists and Democrats (S&D) group, however, views the concept of strategic autonomy not just from a military but from a social, economic, and normative perspective. It places human rights, development aid, and crisis prevention at the center of foreign policy. The S&D advocates for the EU to strengthen its diplomatic capacities and stresses that any increase in military spending must be subject to democratic oversight. This approach is supported by Scandinavian countries and some Western European democracies.

The European United Left-Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) opposes the militarization of the EU, arguing that strategic autonomy should not be turned into an imperialist tool. This group proposes that security be reconsidered along the axes of social justice, peace diplomacy, and disarmament. It particularly opposes investments in the arms industry at the expense of social spending, advocating for Europe's security to be ensured by reducing economic inequalities and through peaceful foreign policies.

The Greens (Greens/EFA) group takes an environmental, humanitarian, and ethical approach to security. While supporting the idea of strategic autonomy, they argue that this autonomy should not only be built in military terms but also in areas such as energy policy, climate security, cyber defense, and democratic foreign policy. The Greens are cautious about increasing military capacity, insisting that it must be limited to peaceful objectives.

Despite these political differences, a growing consensus within the EU is emerging: Europe can no longer entrust its security to others. The

changing threat perceptions of the 21st century -cyberattacks, energy crises, regional wars, disinformation campaigns- demand strategies far more comprehensive than traditional military security. This means that Europe must build a multidimensional security architecture that not only protects its military power but also defends its normative values, democratic systems, and economic resilience.

Thus, Europe's strategic autonomy is not merely a security issue. It is about Europe's ability to make its own decisions, protect its values, and assert its voice in the global order. Although transatlantic relations remain historically and structurally strong, full dependence on the transatlantic alliance relegates Europe's own interests and regional priorities to a secondary position. Especially with the rise of China, instability in the Middle East, and growing Russian influence in Africa, Europe has been forced to question the adequacy of its policies and intervention tools.

Therefore, the EU must not only increase defense spending but ensure that these funds are directed toward new-generation security areas such as civil protection, crisis prevention, migration management, digital defense, and AI-based threat detection. Education, public awareness, and media literacy should also be fundamental components of this strategic autonomy. In today's world, security is ensured not only by weapons but also through information, collaboration, and resilience.

In conclusion, the geopolitical future of the European Union is directly related to how effectively it can implement its strategic autonomy. This autonomy must be formulated within a holistic framework that includes military, diplomatic, economic, environmental, and normative elements. Europe's capacity to determine its own destiny will be shaped not only during times of crisis but also in periods of peace, with long-term vision and shared political will. While political differences may slow this process, the geopolitical transformation initiated by the Crimea crisis has set Europe on an

inevitable path toward becoming an active and principled global power rather than a passive continent.

In this context, two primary options lie before Europe: either continue unwavering loyalty to transatlantic ties and maintain a secondary role in global decision-making or build an independent and integrated security architecture aligned with its own norms, strategy, and vision, becoming one of the key actors of the new century.

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Migrant Integration In The EU: Sweden, France And The Netherlands

Fatma Sena Özkan

Introduction

"Migration is the movement of people away from their usual place of residence to a new place of residence, either across an international border or within a State." (International Organization for Migration, n.d.). Looking at the definition of migration, it is clear that it is categorized as international or internal migration depending on the conditions. No matter which condition would be at hand, migration has been a hot topic for the EU encouraging it to take different measures every day in order to have an integrated society. On the other hand, migrant integration is a process by which migrants become accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups and it should be referred to as a two-way process of adaptation by both migrants and host societies while considering the rights and obligations (Migrant Integration, 2020). Given these definitions, migration and integration are broad concepts which involve areas such as employment, education, housing, and social cohesion and economic, social, and cultural inclusion. But what are the implementations of EU countries regarding this issue? This article aims to do a comparative analysis between Sweden, France and Netherlands and examine their results.

Sweden: The Welfare-State Approach

To encourage the inclusion of migrants, Swedish governments have been setting up different integration strategies since the 1970s and in 2007, the government established a new Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality (Governance of Migrant Integration in Sweden, 2020). The strategy includes free language courses (SFI – Swedish for Immigrants), Employment support through fast-track programs for skilled migrants and government-funded housing with financial aid for asylum seekers. In addition, Sweden also included another act to its agenda in December 2010 with the title of Establishment Act. The aim of this reform was to facilitate and accelerate integration into the labor market and society while centralizing the integration measures in one place (Bolvig & Liljeberg, 2022).

It is clear that Sweden is focused on the labor market and welfare-state approach towards the immigrants. Despite long-term economic costs, segregation, social tensions, and political backlash, Sweden was eager to change its approach to migrant policies. In 2024, Sweden experienced a shift from being a country with open immigration policies to having negative net immigration, with more people leaving than entering for the first time in 50 years (Bryant, 2024). This demonstrates Sweden's transition to stricter policies, making it one of the Scandinavian countries to adopt such measures.

France: The Secular Integration Model

France is one of the main asylum host countries in Europe. After the 2015 European migrant crisis, France has taken in many migrants from Islamic countries, including Afghanistan, Sudan, and Syria, approximately 5.7 million Muslims (Pew Research Center, 2017). With the growing numbers of Muslim immigrants in France, the debate between secularism and Islam, or multiculturalism, is rising within the society and the government. Moreover, France has faced multiple terrorist attacks by religious extremist groups, leading to the adoption of stricter secular policies and rising anti-Islam sentiments. In order to maintain the national French identity and secular republic values, the government enforces strict secularism policies including banning religious symbols in public schools with the mandatory civic integration program (language & French values course).

On the other hand, a recent report published by

France Stratégie says that promoting the integration of refugees within each company is an essential "HR" (Human Resources) initiative for all organizations. (*France: Recruter Une Personne Réfugiée,* n.d.). It is a significant marker for all companies committed to a "CSR" (Corporate Social Responsibility) policy. It seems that the French government sees the labor market and its strategies as a way to integrate the migrants into the society. However, in 2019-2020, a quarter of immigrants and their descendants reported unequal treatment or discrimination over the past five years. Immigrants born outside Europe are more likely to report such treatment (26%) than those born in Europe (19%) (*France: Sentiments De Discrimination,* n.d.-b). This situation highlights the alarming atmosphere in France, which is slowly becoming a much more multicultural country and environment.

The Netherlands: The Multicultural Model

The Netherlands has historically embraced a multicultural model of integration, allowing migrants to maintain their cultural identities while promoting social cohesion. Similar to other European countries, the government of the Netherlands has historically funded ethnic based organizations, language programs, and media for migrant communities, along with state-funded housing upon arrival. It focuses mainly on employment-focused integration, and since November 2023, asylum seekers in the Netherlands are allowed to work for more than 24 weeks per year, which helps to reduce the labor market shortages. As a result, companies are increasingly hiring asylum seekers (Netherlands: Numbers of TCN Workers Increasing in Dutch Companies, 2024). However, this approach has evolved over time due to challenges such as segregation, labor market difficulties, and political backlash. In May 2024, after months of negotiation, 4 political parties in the Netherlands agreed to make a coalition agreement.

The agreement includes a policy proposal comprising 10 key chapters with the title of "hope, courage, and pride" (NOS, 2024). It was

also partly focused on strict asylum reforms and integration requirements, with an instigation of a temporary 'Asylum Crisis Law' allowing the government to take far-reaching actions on migration. This shows a policy shift towards stricter integration measures, which receives some criticism. For example, in December 2024, protests started to occur after the motion from the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD). They said that "the data about norms and values can offer insights into the cultural integration" of ethnic minorities and called on the government "to keep details" of the migrants (Boztas, 2024). One of the members of the parliament from Democrats 66 Party opposed by saying that "It assumes there is a 'them and us'; that ethnic minorities are problematic and must change to our norms and values."

1998 (n=2.620.400; 16,7%)
2018 (n=3.971.861; 23,1%)
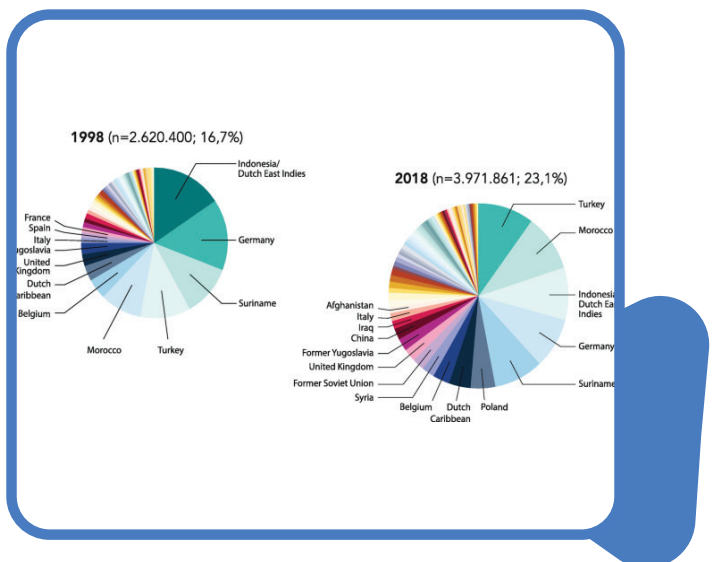
Conclusion

Migration has long been on the agenda of EU countries, and there have been different and unique approaches to create policies on migration depending on the countries' social and economic backgrounds. Sweden's Establishment Act, France's secular approach and the Netherlands' coalition agreement shows us the similarities and differences of each country mentioned in the article. They share the same focus on encouraging integration with mandatory integration courses, free language courses, and employment-focused integration

processes. Although it is clear that over time, and in response to internal and international political dynamics, they have shifted their policies to become stricter in order to prevent more asylum seekers reaching their borders. Their concerns were primarily about religious extremism and the potential loss of national identity due to the high number of migrants in their societies. It is suggested to keep the balance between multiculturalism and national identity, which can be beneficial to create shared national values, promoting a common civic identity while respecting cultural differences.

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Forced Migration from Past to Present and Europe's Approach

Zeynep Artuker

Forced migration is a complex phenomenon that has been on the agenda throughout history, where individuals are forced to leave their hometowns against their will. "Migration" is a broad perception, and in order to understand it, it is important to first distinguish between some basic concepts. Individuals who are outside their country of citizenship due to a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, membership in a particular social group, or political views, and who, because of this fear, do not wish to benefit from the protection of that country are called *refugees*[1]. People who want to be accepted as refugees to a country and are waiting for the result of their application for this status are called *asylum seekers*[2].

The phenomenon of migration has been at the top of the EU agenda since the Amsterdam Treaty. Although migration stands out with its security and political dimensions, it is a multidimensional phenomenon that also affects social, economic and cultural policy areas[3].

The process that began with the arrest of 250 Armenians in the capital of the Ottoman Empire on April 24, 1915 and later became known as the "Armenian genocide" or "Armenian deportation" can be considered the beginning of the modern forced migration process[4].

Due to the political and military conditions at the time, Armenians were considered a "suspicious community" in the Ottoman Empire. For this reason, Armenians were sent to regions such as Syria, and there were serious casualties during this journey. Although Turkey accepts these deaths, it rejects the definition of "genocide", saying that they occurred due to war. Although Turkey says that this was merely a forced deportation caused by war conditions, the European Union wants Turkey to accept the term genocide[5].

Europe showed almost no reaction to this issue during the war, and little reaction afterwards. However, although far-right parties in Europe did not play a decisive role in the process of recognizing and seeing this Armenian issue, they frequently used this issue for their own ideological goals. They positioned themselves as the "real" representatives of Europe with the rhetoric of victimization nationalism, and built their claims of being anti-multicultural, Islamophobic, and defending Europe's Christian identity on this issue.

After the end of World War II, European countries encouraged the acceptance of migrant workers to fill the labor shortage caused by the war and to support economic development and reconstruction processes. During this period, unskilled workers were accepted into European countries to revitalize European industry. These workers were considered "guest workers", meaning they were temporary and it was assumed that their return would be easy[6]. The internal market goal, which aimed for the free movement of people, services and capital between countries, was set forth in the Treaty of Rome in 1957. However, during this period, the establishment of an immigration policy for Third World country citizens was not on the agenda.

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https://www.goc.gov.tr/Kurumlar/Goc.Gov.Tr/Files/Goc_Terimleri_Sozlugu(1).Pdf
[2]Ibid. (syf. 49)
[3]Göç olgusu ve Türkiye'de iç göç. Uluslararası İnsan Bilimleri Dergisi, 7(1), 1227–1241. (syf. 269)
https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/464912
[4]Avrupa'nın göç hafızasında kimler var, kimler yok? BBC Türkçe. https://www.bbc.com/turkce/articles/creq2e2r90po
[5]Collective memory and the Armenian question: The politics of silence. Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi, 10(39), 27–50. (syf.
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[6]Cansu GÜLEÇ, "Avrupa Birliği'nin Göç Politikaları ve Türkiye'ye Yansımaları," Tesam Akademi Dergisi (Turkish Journal of
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With the economic recession caused by the oil crisis in 1973, European countries stopped hiring workers. During this period, immigration control policies began to come to the fore as unemployment increased and new labor was needed with the developing technology. During this period, immigration began to be seen not only as an economic but also as a socio-cultural threat. Immigrants were perceived as elements that abused social services or threatened the order[7]. The Trevi Group was established in 1975, and security cooperation was established at the level of the ministries of interior and justice. In 1985, with the Schengen Agreement, internal borders were abolished and external border security was increased.

This agreement symbolized the shift of immigration control to external borders. The Dublin Convention, signed in 1990, stipulated that asylum applications would be processed by only one member state – the aim was to prevent abuse of the asylum system[8]. With the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, the European Community was renamed the European Union (EU) and migration, asylum and visa issues were defined as areas of common interest under the title of "Justice and Home Affairs". The Amsterdam Treaty, which entered into force in 1999, was a turning point in migration. With this treaty, migration and asylum were removed from the intergovernmental area and moved to the community's jurisdiction. It ensured that the EU would now be institutionally involved in migration policy within the framework of the goal of creating an "area of freedom, security and justice".

The Schengen system was incorporated into the EU acquis and new laws were envisaged against racial and ethnic discrimination. In addition, with the Tampere Summit held in 1999, cooperation with source countries, consideration of asylum-reason relations and a balanced approach towards the distinction between legal and illegal migration were adopted and common asylum and asylum procedures were aimed to be established. With the Hague Program between 2004 and 2009, border security and the FRONTEX agency were established, and policies to combat illegal immigration and return were developed. In addition, with the Lisbon Treaty of 2009, decision-making authorities in the field of immigration and asylum began to be established by qualified majority instead of unanimity. Migration management has become a priority within the EU and has begun to be addressed in a multi-layered manner as part of both internal and external security[9].

Some of the important migrations in the history of migration were the migrations that occurred as a result of the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s. After the high-intensity conflicts in Croatia between 1991 and 1995, 300 thousand Serbs and 220 thousand Croats migrated. During the Bosnia-Herzegovina wars between 1992 and 1995, Bosnians were subjected to great massacres and were forced to migrate[10]. In 1995, 8,372 Bosnian men and boys were systematically murdered in Srebrenica, which the United Nations (UN) declared a "safe zone." The fact that Dutch UN soldiers surrendered the region to Serb forces during this massacre showed the West's negligence. The massacre was recognized as genocide by the International Court of Justice, but Serbia was not directly blamed. During this process, Muslim countries, especially Turkey, welcomed the Bosnians. Western states generally remained passive, and Bosnian Muslims in particular were not given sufficient support.

Another important and more recent migration crisis is the migration crisis that occurred due to

[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Serdar Çakmak, "Yugoslavya İç Savaşı Döneminde Yaşanan Çatışmalar, Katliamlar ve Göçler: Bosnalı Müslümanlar," Danisname, Cilt 9, Eylül 2024, ss. 59–79. Erişim: https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/4233459.

the war in Syria in 2015.The 2015 refugee crisis has made the impact of migration on EU integration controversial. In 2015, especially due to the effects of the Syrian civil war, there was a heavy flow of refugees from Turkey to Greece. The refugees mostly crossed from the Aegean coast of Turkey to the Greek islands by naval vessels, primarily the boats. This situation created a serious humanitarian and political crisis for both Turkey and Greece. In order to control this migration, the EU signed an agreement with Turkey in March 2016. According to this agreement, Syrian refugees who reached Greece would be sent back to Türkiye, and in return, the EU would accept refugees from among Syrians in Türkiye on a one-to-one basis. This agreement resulted in a significant decrease in illegal crossings. However, in February 2020, Turkey reopened its border gates to refugees, citing the risk of a new wave of migration from Syria. Although the number of crossings did not reach the 2015 level, the instability of the situation brought migration routes back to the agenda. The Aegean islands became the first stop for refugees reaching Europe. However, the number of refugees in these camps quickly exceeded their capacity and the infrastructure deficiencies in the camps exploded. The Greek government said that the support it received from the EU was insufficient. There was a significant change in the Mediterranean route in 2020. Tunisia rose to the top in the flow of migrants. Most of the migrants were young males, and the reasons for their flight were generally unemployment, economic poverty and political instability in their own countries. Tunisia has also become a transit point for migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, boats leaving Tunisia carry both locals and those coming from other African countries. The docking of these boats in Italian ports is often a subject of debate. In 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel opened Germany's doors to refugees, declaring "Wir schaffen das" ("We'll get through it"). More than 1 million people reached Germany thanks to this policy, which led to a backlash within Merkel's party and the public, resulting in the rise of the anti-refugee far-right.

These events show that Europe has a long history of migration. These events show that forced migration is not only a humanitarian issue but also a political issue. It is directly linked to balances of power, border policies and foreign policy goals. The EU treats migration as a border security issue and transfers the migration burden to neighboring countries such as Turkey and Tunisia. This approach contradicts Europe's democratic and human rights values. Today, forced migration is caused not only by wars but also by environmental factors such as climate crisis and water scarcity. The EU should prepare for these crises with collective and equality-based policies. The EU should prepare new migration policies that see migrants not only as a "burden" but also as individuals who can contribute to society, and develop longer-term and comprehensive strategies.

[11]Yıldız, G. (2024). 2015 mülteci krizi sonrası Almanya ve Macaristan'ın uluslararası göç politikaları: Realist gelenek çerçevesinde bir analiz. Bölge Çalışmaları Dergisi, 3(1), 89–115. https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/3899589
[12]BBC Türkçe. (2020, Eylül 2). 2015 mülteci krizinin üzerinden beş yıl geçti ama Akdeniz'de hala her yıl yüzlerce insan ölüyor. BBC News Türkçe. https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-53988039
[13]Ibid.

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Migration as a Diplomatic Tool in Greece-Türkiye Relations

İpek İnci Öge

Introduction

As a relatively contemporary diplomatic tool, migration has been a contended issue, especially in Southeastern Europe, mainly for Greece and Türkiye. The goal of this article is to examine the impact of migration policies on the diplomatic ties between these two Aegean countries, which have differing perspectives on migration, yet both seek to utilize it to serve their interests in a broader context and in relation to the European Union. The article focuses on key developments starting from the 2015 refugee crisis, which left both Greece and Türkiye unprepared as they were preoccupied with domestic challenges, followed by the 2016 EU-Türkiye deal, where migration is viewed not only as a humanitarian issue but also as a tool for political negotiation, the 2020 border crisis, and contemporary dynamics.

Domestic Crises and the 2015 Refugee Influx

Although a migration flow was anticipated, its scale was not: The European refugee crisis began when the flow of migrants increased dramatically from 153,000 in 2008 to more than 1 million in 2015, (Altai Consulting, 2015) almost 900,000 coming through Türkiye (Taşkın, 2019).

During this period, Greece, as a key entry point to the EU, was unprepared, dealing with a financial crisis as well, nearly leading to its exit from the Eurozone. The Greek government at the time had rejected creditor demands and held a referendum on July 5, in which 61% of voters opposed the proposed bailout terms. Meanwhile, Greece defaulted on a €1.5 billion loan from the International Monetary Fund, prompting the European Central Bank to cut off emergency funding, leading to the closure of banks and capital controls. In response, Minister of Finance, Yanis Varoufakis resigned as Greece entered urgent negotiations for a new bailout (Daniel Harari, 2015). Although the financial crisis officially ended in 2018, it still had lasting effects, like high unemployment, worsened by the ongoing refugee crisis. Hence, being in a weak negotiating position, by framing the migration as a European, not only Greek, problem, Greece lobbied the EU for support (Harari, 2020).

Türkiye, on the other hand, was experiencing a series of terrorist attacks, including the bombing in Ankara, the deadliest in Türkiye's history. (Sarica, 2024) Economically, while Türkiye was not in a financial crisis unlike Greece, it faced rising unemployment and the weakening of the lira. Furthermore, as the Syrian Civil War was taking place near Türkiye's borders, the country faced growing security threats, leading to military operations, while also hosting millions of refugees, one of the largest refugee populations in the world. Another challenge took place in the same year, when Türkiye shot down a Russian jet, worsening relations with Russia.

The 2016 EU-Türkiye Deal

These challenges ultimately pressured Türkiye's negotiations with the EU, making it necessary for both parties to reach an agreement on controlling refugee flows, border security, and migration restrictions.

Between November 2015 and March 2016, the EU and Türkiye held meetings to manage the migration crisis. After further discussions, they reached an agreement on 18 March 2016. Under this deal, all irregular migrants arriving in Greece from Türkiye after 20 March would be sent back, and for every Syrian returned, another would be resettled in the EU, while the EU promised to speed up the visa liberalization process for Turkish citizens and provide €3 billion in refugee aid, with the possibility of another €3 billion by 2018 (European Parliament, 2025).

The EU-Türkiye Statement of March 18th, 2016 is

the culmination of both the Germanand EU efforts in addressing the influx at the Greek-Turkish border. It is an effort that starts in the late 2000s, throughout which both sides utilized migration as a bargaining tool over and during the membership negotiation process between the EU and Türkiye (Dimitriadi et al, 2018). Despite the European Parliament's support and the deal significantly reducing refugee flows, it raised concerns from Greece about relying on Türkiye to handle refugees and called for more solidarity from EU states and Türkiye periodically used the threat of opening its borders as a bargaining tool, frequently warning the EU and Greece that they would allow refugees to cross if European support was insufficient. Additionally, from late 2019, it has started to emphatically demand the assistance of international community to create a "safe zone" in order to accommodate the 2 million refugees that fled Syrian civil war in a more permanent and viable basis, while it tried to counter-play Russia and USA in the issue of Syrian crisis (Stasinakis, 2021).

Border Crises and the Militarization of Migration Policy

The frailty of the EU-Türkiye Agreement became evident in 2020 when President Erdoğan announced that Türkiye would no longer prevent refugees from crossing into Europe. This decision was mainly caused by Türkiye's dissatisfaction with the EU's failure to deliver on the promises mentioned in the 2016 agreement, regarding increased financial aid and visa liberalization. As a result, thousands of migrants gathered at the border, particularly at the Pazarkule crossing attempting to enter Greece in February 2020. Greece framed it as an act of hybrid warfare meant to weaken its sovereignty (Kotoulas, 2020) and the Council of the EU criticized Türkiye for allegedly using migration as a political tool to pressure the Union. In response, Turkish officials accused the EU of being hypocritical — arguing that while the EU frequently criticizes Türkiye for not respecting human rights, it is itself violating these same rights in its handling of migration (Kirişçi, 2021).

In response to the crisis, on March 1, 2020,

Greece raised its border deterrence measures to the highest level and suspended the right of third-country nationals to apply for asylum for a month. Additionally, the government announced plans to extend the Evros border fence to 40 kilometers and enhance operational readiness on both land and sea. Although Greek officials have denied allegations of illegal pushbacks, human rights organizations and EU officials have expressed serious concerns over reports of forced expulsions at Greece's borders, in 2025, Michael O'Flaherty, the commissioner for human rights at the Council of Europe, emphasized that such actions violate international law (Rankin, 2025) and the European Court of Human Rights has ruled that Greece has engaged in "systematic" pushbacks of asylum seekers (Smith, 2025). Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who became the Prime Minister of Greece in 2019, struggled to fulfill his promises of faster asylum processes. Then, the fire in the Moria camp on Lesvos, which displaced thousands of asylum seekers, marked a significant setback for his administration. The government's attempts to relocate asylum seekers from the islands to the mainland faced resistance from both local communities and European Union members, with limited support for relocation (Hernàndez, 2020).

Despite these controversies, Greece continues to advocate for greater EU support, including increased financial assistance and a fairer asylum distribution system across EU member states, stemming from the principle of solidarity, mentioned in the Treaty of Lisbon, although the Dublin Regulation requires asylum seekers to apply for protection in the first EU country they enter (European Commission, n.d.) disproportionately affecting Greece, resulting in asymmetrical burden-sharing (Kotoulas, 2020).

Since 2021, there has been no significant change to the status quo between Türkiye and Greece. While diplomatic engagements have continued, tensions over maritime disputes, airspace violations, and the militarization of islands remain. In 2021, exploratory talks resumed after a five-year hiatus, failing to yield substantial progress (Psaropoulos, 2021). The 2022 NATO Summit included efforts to ease tensions, but

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disagreements over military activities in the Aegean persisted (Lampas and Filis, 2023), and President Erdoğan stated the Greece-Türkiye cooperation council could meet in early 2025 (Kathimerini, 2024).

Conclusion

As of 2025, while the EU has shifted its focus to other migration routes, Greece continues to rely heavily on Türkiye for migration management. This relationship is characterized by both cooperation and tension. Militarization of migration policies in the Aegean region is likely to remain a significant cause of concern and disagreement. Moreover, Türkiye's role in managing migration is seen as strengthening its strategic influence within European policy, which in turn makes Greece more cautious in its approach to further collaboration. The EU, meanwhile, finds itself in a delicate balancing act, attempting to ensure security and cooperation, requiring continuous negotiation and adaptation.

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From Neoliberal Homogenization to Nationalist Exclusion: The EU's Migration Paradox

Eren Anter

Introduction

The European Union, once a champion of neoliberal homogenization in migration policies, has shifted towards nationalist exclusion and sovereigntist rhetoric since 2015. As established in the 1957 Treaty of Rome, the free movement of goods, services, capital, and labor was a pillar of the "one Europe" vision, reinforcing integration and economic utility over national identity. Neoliberal EU policies once prioritized market efficiency and inclusivity, treating migration as an economic necessity rather than a cultural or political issue. However, this framework has been actively dismantled. As Hayek suggested, neoliberalism should ensure the rule of law, property protection, accessible basic rights, and societal regulation to some degree against xenophobia, particularly for the "Xenos." Yet, today's Europe has turned away from these principles, with multi-partisan support for anti-immigration sentiment, where migration is increasingly framed as a threat to national identity, security, and sovereignty.

Once guided by a growth-driven economic rationale, migration policy served market needs; today, it has become a political tool for reinforcing national boundaries, legitimizing populist anti-immigration rhetoric, and consolidating external control over migration policies in non-EU states. This shift has created a dilemma of internal de-Europeanization and external Europeanization. While nationalist forces within the EU reject collective burden-sharing and advocate for sovereign border control, the EU imposes its migration laws on non-member states such as Albania, Turkey, and Niger, pressuring them to enforce stricter border controls and, even, criminalize movement. This externalization occurs through both formal agreements and informal pressures, effectively limiting the sovereignty of non-EU states while reclaiming it for itself.

Moreover, those policies will most likely fail; given the rising security needs of the European Union, Turkey and EU relations will strengthen in the short future, which might result in population mobility of immigrants to core European countries.

Is the EU Neoliberal?

Henry Sidgwick, a classical utilitarian from the Victorian era, distinguished between a 'cosmopolitan' and a 'national' approach to political organization. He believed the 'cosmopolitan ideal' might become 'the ideal of the future,' which he favored, but observed that the 'national ideal' currently dominated (Sidgwick, 1981; Joppke, 2024). The European Union pursued the neoliberal, cosmopolitan ideal of political and economic life from its foundation until the recent migration crisis. This approach was codified, particularly in the 1957 Treaty of Rome, which established "the free movement of goods, services, capital, and persons" as a base (Varma & Roehse, 2024). By prioritizing economic utility, the EU promoted a form of post-national citizenship based on market participation, a "consumer" or market citizen ideal. Ultimately, the difference between citizens and immigrants is insignificant, as the fundamental unit in neoliberalism is the ethnically neutral 'labor' (Bridget Anderson, 2015).

The same neoliberal EU policies treated migration as labor growth contributing to economic expansion. Aligning with Friedrich Hayek's perspective that a liberal -now, a neoliberal- society must "concede to the stranger and even the foreigner the same protection of rules of just conduct that apply to the relationships with the known members of

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one's own small group" (Hayek, 1982, p. 88), EU neoliberalism has long insured the foundations of the cosmopolitan ideal: rule of law, property rights, equal treatment under legal frameworks, non-discrimination principles, social inclusion mechanisms, labor mobility, and institutional safeguards for due process — all of which extended, at least in theory, to the "Xenos," today's immigrants.

A successful portrayal of the European Union before the recent migration crisis is the term "neoliberal nationalism", coined by Christian Joppke (2024). Neoliberal nationalism refers to the concept of an ethnic-neutral community of the "thrifty", including immigrants while excluding only those who do not work or contribute, regardless of their legal status or ethnicity. Migrants are welcomed and rewarded with citizenship (Joppke, 2021) if and only if they are productive, reinforcing a homogenized labor-driven middle class that is integrated through economic contribution, not through the transformation of identity.

Under neoliberal nationalism, citizenship is no longer a social contract based on nationhood, but a reward for potential or realized economic contribution. "It includes everyone who can contribute and is proven worthy—what warrants calling this nationalism neoliberal itself." Unlike a modern nation (Benedict Anderson, 2016), neoliberal nationalism replaces the sense of ethnic homogeneity with economic homogeneity in a neoliberal "society". However, this story is over. Today's Europe has embraced sovereigntist rhetoric, stricter independent border controls, and national identity politics.

Process of De-Europeanization
The European Union, once a grand experiment in neoliberal cosmopolitanism, or neoliberal nationalism, is now systematically dismantling the very foundations of itself, abandoning its own ideals under the weight of the migration crisis. That is, what we call, the de-Europeanization of Europe. Rejection of supra nationalism and the increasing demand

for sovereignty within EU countries, which was championed by Viktor Orban, the current

Hungarian Prime Minister who has served for more than 15 years continuously, resulted in a new political group in the European Parliament: Patriots for Europe (PfE). The Patriotic Forces of Europe claim in their joint manifesto (Patriots.eu, 2025), "We pledge to return the future of our continent to the European people by taking back our institutions and redirecting European politics to serve the nations and our people."

The specific language used here is revealing and deliberate. Who, specifically, constitutes the "European people"? Who is being safeguarded, and who is being marginalized? The EU's founding principle of "ever closer union" implies a progressive shift toward deeper integration among EU countries and shared sovereignty, to the extent that it has voiced in the form of a quasi-state status after the signing of the Treaty of Lisbon, 2007 (European Parliament, 2025).

The project of European integration was built on many assumptions: that supranational governance would gradually eclipse nationalism, that cosmopolitan neoliberal idealism and migration inflow would gradually turn into steady growth, and that European identity would be insignificant where everyone is a "worker citizen" (Bridget Anderson, 2015). Those assumptions are now in crisis. "[A Europe] which respects the right of veto of nations which recognizes diplomacy as an essential element of the sovereignty of member states and as a matter for each nation to decide freely without binding others to the same course of action."

The EU's policymaking mechanism emphasizes collective decision-making processes, especially regarding foreign policy and security, where power-sharing mechanisms are designed in a way that one country does not have "excessive" powers. However, the manifesto implies that individual states should have total veto power over collective decisions and full independence in diplomatic matters, undermining the EU's capacity to function as a unified political bloc. In a Frontex-funded study (Ariely et al., 2011), scholars argue that the gradual dissolution of the Schengen zone and the reinforcement of national borders is one of the possible scenarios regarding European border security, aligning with the group's manifesto. However, as national border security was deprived of human and financial resources during the Schengen zone's implementation, its immediate effect would likely be costly and result in rapid increases in irregular migration statistics, further damaging the continent's overall border security.

Notwithstanding this, the de-Europeanist stance should not be assumed to be exclusive to PfE members or national parties within it. In Germany, the previous ruling party, the SPD, also challenged Schengen. *"The government has drastically shifted its tone on combating irregular migration and enhancing domestic security [...] defying the Schengen regulation"* (Varma & Roehse, 2024).

Hungary and Poland consistently reject EU migration policies due to cultural and security concerns. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán views migration as an existential threat, invoking fears of a Muslim 'invasion' and labeling Hungary as the 'last Christian-conservative bastion of the Western world' (Varma & Roehse, 2024). He depicts the EU as an imperial force imposing foreign values on resistant nations, especially in migration governance. In 2016, resistance to the EU's collective decision-making was evident as Orban's government rejected an EU directive to accept 1,294 asylum seekers through a "burden-sharing" program and instead held a

national referendum on the EU's power to mandate relocation of non-Hungarian citizens to Hungary. Although the referendum opposed the EU's migration policy, it was not legally binding due to low turnout, and it has since been used politically against EU migration policies.

One of the biggest shifts was in public opinion among EU countries, especially in Hungary.

Under the old neoliberal cosmopolitan model, migration was an economic toolbox to match the supply and demand of labor. Migrants were seen as workers first, citizens second, and people third. Now, migration is not a question of economics, it is a question of terrorism, social and religious/cultural fears, and internal sovereignty, a struggle against the European Union, as Orban portrays (Bíró-Nagy, 2021). By taking an unconditional negative position against migration, he managed to recover his party's votes during a decreasing trajectory, consolidating domestic support, and at the same time influencing broader European anti-migrationist parties. In Hungary, xenophobia reached a record 53% in 25 years, while pro-immigrant sentiment fell from 8-10% to just 1% by 2016 (Sík et al., 2016).

These shifts are not accidental. They are the product of deliberate political takes against immigration, fueling identity politics to reach a positive trajectory in polls for Orban, resulting in a major shift against immigration in EU countries. De-Europeanization is not about states taking back control over the Union as the manifesto suggested, it is about a fundamental ideological transformation. The EU is no longer a champion of neoliberal, cosmopolitan integration; rather, it is being consistently transformed into a battleground where authoritarian sentiments and battle cries echo throughout the continent. This situation threatens the solidarity of all nations, which could eventually lead to the collapse of the Schengen zone (Ariely et al., 2011), particularly regarding border security given the vulnerability of national border agencies.

Process of Europeanization

European policymakers speak in a language of values that they, now, fail to uphold—human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. They claim to protect the domestic security of the Union, and to manage migration "effectively" yet "inhumanely", as human rights groups including Amnesty, Oxfam, Caritas, and Save the Children suggest (Henley, 2023). They constructed a system to shift responsibility onto weaker states that lacked resources, infrastructure, or political stability to effectively enforce Europe's policies. Stricter migration policies by external actors like the EU often diminish mobility rights in origin countries, especially those with strong ties to the West and authoritarian tendencies. Niger, an EU partner, has a history of instability and military rule. The 2015 expansion of the EU's EUCAP Sahel Niger mission led to a law criminalizing migration, effectively restricting Nigeriens' and ECOWAS citizens' previously enjoyed rights (Niemann & Zaun, 2023). External control efforts threaten internal sovereignty, damaging Western links of authoritarian origin countries and further straining border security cooperation.

Moreover, since the states on which the EU imposes its migration policies have weaker state capacity, Europeanization policies further destabilize these regions and their domestic political landscapes. The EU's EUBAM (EU Border Assistance Mission in Libya) mission in Libya exemplifies this: EU's Libyan border forces, frequently intercept migrant boats violently, engaging in human rights abuses such as torture and human trafficking (Niemann & Zaun, 2023). Instead of resolving the issue, the EU's externalized control policies transform these "transit" countries into crisis zones. European leaders externalize crises, destabilize regions, and then condemn the very instability they create—all while maintaining the illusion of championing core European values, the same values they fail to uphold in Europe on a consensus basis.

The EU-Turkey Deal of 2016 was seen as a milestone in migration management. Though widely referred to as the EU-Turkey Statement, the deal had insufficient legal status under EU law; it was an intergovernmental agreement between EU member states and Turkey, purposely bypassing the European Parliament and the European Court of Justice. The agreement took place in a transactional manner, a payment to Ankara in exchange for turning Turkey into Europe's international safe-zone areas. Just like Libya and Niger, EU-backed migration policies were applied in Turkey, in which it was practically to prevent migrants from crossing into Europe, detain those who attempted, and take back those who had already made it across. In return, the EU pledged six billion euros to support migrants in Turkey (European Council, 2016).

This is how the Europeanization of migration control takes place: not by addressing it, but by externalizing it, transforming a problem into another problem. The system is simple. Refugees and migrants must not enter Europe. Now, Frontex is a fully-fledged agency with a mandate to enforce EU borders, even against member states' wishes (Niemann and Speyer 2018). Frontex, the European Border Agency, was established in 2005, with a supportive role and a budget of six million Euros. By 2021, its budget surged to 544 million Euros. Previously that relied on member states' national border guards, it will employ 10,000 EU border and coast guard officers by 2027 (Niemann & Zaun, 2023).

Conclusion

Europe's crisis is not migration. It is itself. The EU tears itself apart. The championship of human rights, democracy, and solidarity is over, replaced by exporting policies of exclusion, and manufactured fear. De-Europeanization strips the Union of its foundations, while external Europeanization pushes others to uphold the same values Europe abandons. What remains is a continent that could easily be devoured by ethnic grievance, populist demagoguery, and the call for sovereignty. Europe is collapsing

under the very values it once promoted. What is tearing down its foundations is not migration, but its own internal dynamics and contradictions. Europe must look for the problem not outside, but within itself. As a continent facing security challenges after the U.S. abandonment of Ukraine, it must abandon dictatorial diplomacy and rejection of cooperation. Instead, as Merkel once said, it may rise again by believing: *"We can do it"*.

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