



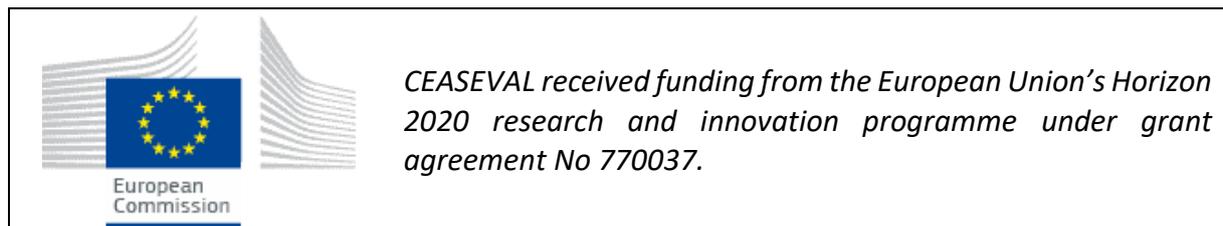
**National Report on Turkey:  
Patterns of Politicization on Refugees and Policy Responses**

**Damla B. Aksel & Ahmet İçduygu**

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## National Report on Turkey: Patterns of Politicization on Refugees and Policy Responses

### Abstract

*Over the past few years, Turkey has become a major country of transit and destination for refugees and migrants, positioned as the largest host of refugees in the world, with more than 3.5 million Syrian citizens living in the country. Although the sharp increase in the number of refugees in the country has started in the aftermath of Syrian civil war in 2011, the politicization of this issue in the country has taken place at a later period, intersecting with the mass exodus of asylum seekers and migrants towards the European Union (EU) in the summer of 2015. This report analyses the politicization on the issue of the management of refugees (the so-called refugee crisis) by specifically focusing on the relations between Turkey and the EU. It looks into two periods, or “episodes of contention”, during which “responsibility sharing” was discussed. These periods were chosen due to the major events that have shaped the overall politicization of the management of migration and asylum in the context of the EU-Turkey relations: (a) May 2015 to March 2016, when the mass influx asylum seekers and irregular migrants of Syrian and other origins from Turkey to the EU has taken place, which was directly followed by the negotiations and the signing of a Statement between Turkey and the EU; and (b) March 2017 to September 2017, when Turkey’s bilateral relations with the EU and some of its member states has been strained, triggering renegotiations on Turkey’s candidacy in the Union as well as its involvement in the Custom’s Union. The report suggests that the salience of the politicization reached its peak point during the December 2015-March 2016 period, when the negotiations between Turkey and the EU have been very active, leading up to the March 2016 Statement. The analysis also illustrates that although there has been a consensus among the public opinion and representatives of the different political parties on the unequal sharing of responsibility between Turkey and the EU, there have been the emergence of a criticizing discourse by the opposition parties and human rights activists about how the AKP government managed the negotiations with the Union.*

**Keywords:** Turkey, EU-Turkey relations, management of migration, politicization, responsibility

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## **1. Introduction**

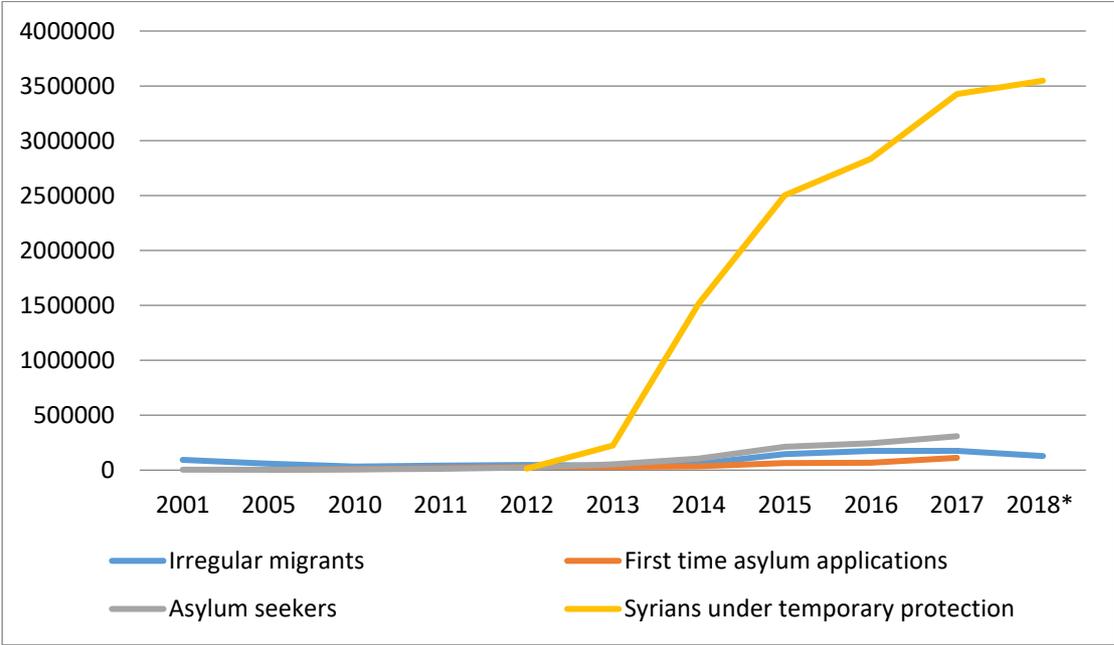
A candidate of the European Union since the Helsinki Summit of 1999, Turkey has been strongly affected by the harmonization process to the EU, which acted as an anchor to many administrative, institutional and legal changes since the early 2000s. One of the main areas significantly affected by this harmonization process has been the management of international migration and asylum, which has been undergoing through transformation since the National Action Plan in 2004 and had eventually resulted in the entry into force of a new Law on Foreigners and International Protection in 2014. While the harmonization processes within the policy area of migration and asylum has been creating discussions over the balance of power between Turkey and the EU, the emergence of the Syrian mass influx beginning with 2011 and its mass spill-over to the European Union especially in the summer of 2015 has resulted in a new area of politicization on the management of migration and asylum, especially in terms of how the responsibility sharing needed to take place between the two actors. Recently, Turkey's alienation from the EU agenda and the straining of the bilateral relations between Turkey and some of the member states (especially Germany, Austria and the Netherlands) has been affecting how this issue is being framed in the public opinion, media and political debates. This report analyses the politicization on the issue of the management of refugees (the so-called refugee crisis) by specifically focusing on the relations between Turkey and the European Union. It looks into two periods, or "episodes of contention", during which "responsibility sharing" was discussed. These periods were chosen due to the major events that have shaped the overall politicization of the management of migration and asylum in the context of the EU-Turkey relations: (a) May 2015 to March 2016, when the mass influx asylum seekers and irregular migrants of Syrian and other origins from Turkey to the European Union has taken place, which was directly followed by the negotiations and the signing of a Statement between Turkey and the EU; and (b) March 2017 to September 2017, when Turkey's bilateral relations with the European Union and some of its member states has been strained, triggering renegotiations on Turkey's candidacy in the Union as well as its involvement in the Custom's Union. After providing a brief overview of the refugee movements to Turkey since 2000 and the key historical moments in the relations between Turkey and the EU in the context of migration management prior to 2015, the report discusses the main debates of politicization of the management of asylum in the context of Turkey-EU relations and delivers a detailed assessment of salience and polarization during the two selected episodes of contention, by looking at public opinion, parliamentary and presidential debates, party politics and media.

### **1.1 Overview of the Refugee Movements to Turkey Since 2000**

Although Turkey has become a major country of asylum since the early 1980s, the politicization of the issue of the management of migration and asylum is new, in comparison to many countries in the European Union. Regime change in Iran in 1979, followed by the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War of 1990-91, the subsequent political turmoil in Iraq and the US invasion contributed to asylum flows to Turkey. Ongoing political and humanitarian crises in neighbouring regions and countries, especially in Syria and Iraq, are contributing to the inflow of asylum seekers to Turkey. Officially, Turkey has not yet lifted the 'geographical limitation' to the implementation of the 1951 Geneva Convention. Therefore, asylum applications of non-Europeans to Turkey are processed on a de facto basis if not de jure. As a pragmatic solution, the Turkish authorities agreed to handle all applications together with the UNHCR Office in Ankara, then the UNHCR would find a re-settlement country outside Turkey for those accepted non-

European cases. For many years, this situation has led to the ambiguities regarding the asylum seekers and refugees waiting for their status determination processes to finalize and to be resettled, as their conditions remained similar to other irregular migrants with limited social rights in the country. Moreover, many individuals who are motivated in applying for asylum within the European Union opt not to be registered in Turkey and remain under irregular status. From the late 1990s to the early 2000s, Turkey received approximately 5,000 to 6,000 asylum applications a year. These numbers started to increase in the late 2000s as a result of the prevailing civil insecurity that spurred displacement of many and recognition of this insecurity in the international arena, whereas the number of asylum seekers reached nearly 11,000 in 2011, 52,000 in 2013, 212,000 in 2015 and finally to 308,000 in 2017 (See Figure 1).

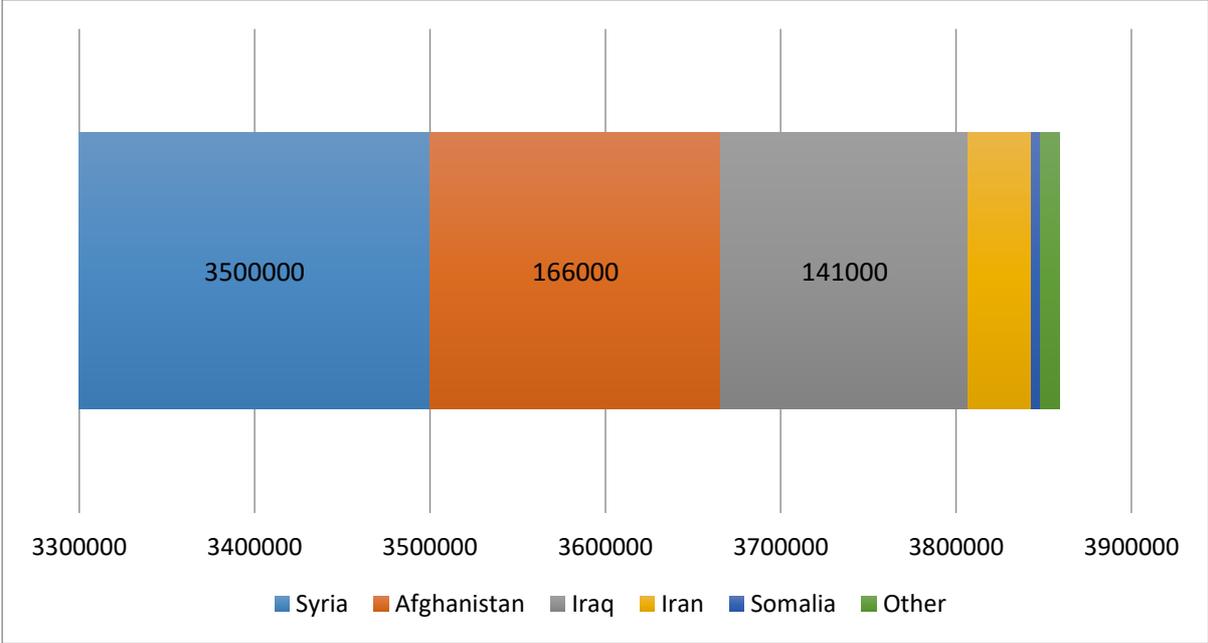
**Figure 1:** Irregular migrants, first time asylum applications, asylum seekers and Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey in 2001-June 2018



Source: Data for irregular migrants, first time applications and Syrians under temporary protection have been retrieved from Directorate General for Migration Management of Turkey; data for asylum seekers was obtained from UNHCR Population Statistics Database.

Triggered by the Arab Spring in Northern Africa that led to the exodus of thousands of people to Southern Europe, the political crisis in Syria eventually led to the emergence of an immigration crisis in Turkey, especially in the nearest border crossing points in Hatay province. The initial reaction of the Turkish state has been to provide refugees, referred to as “guests” with accommodation in camp and container sites near cities bordering Syria. In 2014, the state granted Syrian nationals with Temporary Protection status, which allowed them to reside in Turkey until the conditions in Syria were stabilized. As a result of their Temporary Protection status, Syrian nationals are not considered as refugees in the sense used by the international community. As of mid-2018, Turkey is the largest host of refugees in the world, with more than 3.5 million Syrian citizens living in Turkey (See Figure 1 and Figure 2). Among this large population, some 240,000 people are living in camps and the significant majority live outside of the camps, particularly in the urban areas in Istanbul, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa and Hatay.

**Figure 2:** Populations of concern to UNHCR Turkey based on country of origin in June 2018



Source: Data obtained from UNHCR Turkey Stats, <http://www.unhcr.org/tr/en/unhcr-turkey-stats>

While the constant increase in the number of Syrian refugees has been occupying the agenda of the Turkish policy makers and moulding the public opinion since 2013 and 2014, the humanitarian crisis following the mass influx of migrants and asylum seekers from Turkey to Greece in the summer of 2015 has prompted a greater politicization of this issue in the country. The attempts by the European Union and the member states to halt this mass influx has resulted in the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement and Action Plan in March 2016. The settlement had an impact on the average daily/monthly arrivals on Greek islands from Turkey, whereas in comparison to almost 850,000 migrants crossing the Aegean Sea in 2015, only 173,000 people were reported in 2016 (Karaçay 2017). Shadowing the main groups of concern for international protection within Turkey, Syria was the main country of origin for irregular migrants detected during crossing Turkey-Greek land and sea borders, followed by Iraq and Afghanistan in 2016 and the first three quarters of 2017 (Frontex 2017a and 2017b).

**1.2 Turkey-EU Relations in the Area of Migration Management Prior to 2015**

This section provides a brief overview of the crucial milestones in the history of Turkey-EU relations in the area of migration management prior to 2015, in order to provide a background to the politicization of the issue over the last three years.

**Table 1:** Selected Milestones Prior to 2015

Date	Milestone
1987	Turkey submits application for full membership
1996	The Customs Union between Turkey and the EU takes effect
1999	Helsinki Summit and Turkey's candidacy to the EU
2001	Readmission Protocol between Greece and Turkey
2003	Turkey accepts the EC's draft text on Readmission Agreement sent in 2002
2005	National Action Plan for the Adoption of the EU <i>Acquis</i> in the Field of Asylum and Immigration
2011	Beginning of Syrian influx towards Turkey
2013	Signing of Readmission Agreement and launch of the visa liberalization dialogue
2014	Turkey enacts Law on Foreigners and International Protection and establishes Directorate General for Migration Management

Following its official recognition as a candidate for full membership at the Helsinki Summit of the European Council in December 1999, Turkey has rapidly begun to follow a process for harmonizing its administrative, institutional and legal structure in line with the *acquis communautaire*, which, according to the scholars working in the field of Turkey-EU Relations, has taken place through rapid Europeanization until mid-2000s (Yılmaz 2016; Tolay 2014). One of the main areas that was affected by the harmonization process was on the management of migration and asylum, which, until this period has been managed without a comprehensive and legally binding text in Turkey.

During the decade that followed 2005, two milestones set the conditions of the developments that would take place over the next decade in this area: (1) The Action Plan on Asylum and Management, adopted by the Turkish government in March 2005, which laid out the necessary tasks and timetable that Turkey intended to follow to prepare itself for the development of a migration and asylum management system in general, and (2) the beginning of the official talks on a Readmission Agreement between Turkey and the European Union in 2004, which mainly aimed the acceptance of Turkish nationals and third country nationals who would be readmitted from the EU to Turkey due to irregular border passages (İçduygu and Aksel 2014). While the Action Plan determined the conditions for further development and harmonization in the area of migration, it foresaw certain transformations in the country, including the enactment of a new law on migration and asylum, transfer of the management from the National Police and Turkish Security Forces to civilian institutions, lifting up of Turkey's geographical limitation for refugees based on the 1951 Geneva Convention, the establishment of reception centers and the formation of the Country of Origin system<sup>1</sup>. It should be argued that Turkey's harmonization process to the European Union in the area of the management of asylum and migration has taken place during a period when the Union buttressed more liberal policies towards this area, despite the materialization of the Fortress Europe since early 2000s. As a result of this fact, the Law on

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Metin Çorabatır, August 13, 2018.

Foreigners and International Protection was enacted and the Directorate General for Migration Management have been established in 2014. According to the scholars working in this field, the law is considered as in line with the international norms and values that safeguard the protection of the rights and dignity of all individuals, except for the maintenance of the geographical limitation.

The signing of a Readmission Agreement took place in a thornier manner, especially due to certain political tensions caused during the accession process, as well as Turkey's reluctance for accepting third country nationals. In the end, the negotiations were relaunched as Turkey juxtaposed the initiation of the visa liberalization process for Turkish citizens as a *quid pro quo* the readmission of third country nationals, and the agreement was finalized in 2013. According to its text, the readmission of third country nationals would take into force three years after the signature, therefore in 2016, and the visa liberalization dialogue would be finalized as Turkey fulfilled certain requirements, including: implementing the Readmission Agreement in full and effective manner, managing the borders and the visa policy so as to prevent irregular migration and establishing migration and asylum systems in line with international standards (İçduygu and Aksel 2014). Criticized strongly by human rights supporters and the civil society for potential violations of rights, the Readmission Agreement is a crucial milestone, which acted as a precursor to the EU-Turkey Statement of 2016.

### **1.3 Key Research Questions & Methodology**

This report analyses the relations between Turkey and the European Union, by focusing specifically on the topic of migration management, and questioning "to what extent and how responsibility vis-à-vis refugees in the context of Turkish-EU relations has become an issue of politicization?" The research will address further questions by reflecting the point of view from the Turkish side, by discussing "what triggered the debates on politicization in the area of migration management and responsibility sharing with regards to refugees in Turkish-EU relations", as well as "whether and to what extent has the politicization of the responsibility has led to policy change?"

In order to reply to these questions, the Turkish case examines two moments or "episodes of contention" as suggested by (Tilly & Tarrow 2007, in Wilde, 2011: 563): In this report, the first period (May 2015-March 2016) was selected to represent the peak point in the relations between Turkey and the EU on the issue of the management of migration and asylum. This period covers May-November 2015, when the mass influx of migrants of Syrian and other nationalities from Turkey to the European Union has taken place; and December 2015-March 2016 period when lively negotiation process has taken place between the two sides in an attempt to decrease the existing and future flows. This first period is expected to be one when both the polarization and salience on the issue of responsibility sharing is high in all areas examined in this study (public opinion, media, political discourses). The second period was selected to represent the straining of the relations between Turkey and the EU triggered by the tensions in the country's bilateral relations with a number of member states. During this second period, we expect the salience to be low, since other issues of concern may be higher on the agenda; however, the polarization is expected to be high, especially in the area of political discourses.

*(1) The period covering May 2015 to March 2016*

While the mass influx of Syrian refugees to Turkey has started as early as 2011, the spill-over of this influx towards the Fortress Europe has taken place in the Summer of 2015, marking the relations between Turkey and the European Union. In the aftermath of the summer period, when nearly one million people of Syrian and other nationalities were estimated to have passed from Turkish land and sea borders to Europe, Turkey and the EU have started negotiating on the terms of agreement to halt the future flows and control the ongoing exodus. The EU-Turkey Statement was finally signed in March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016. As indicated in the press release of the Statement<sup>2</sup>, the agreed text projected a scheme that is formally referred to as “one-to-one policy” within the Turkish official discourse. Accordingly, the scheme specified that for every irregular migrant apprehended and returned to Turkey from the Greek islands, another Syrian determined as a vulnerable case by the UN Vulnerability Criteria would be resettled from Turkey to the EU. In addition to the one-to-one policy, the Statement set the conditions for further collaboration on the topics of Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme, the disbursement of an initially allocated 6 billion euros in two rounds (agreed-upon 3 billion euros and further 3 billion euros to be allocated following the finalization of the first round) and the joint endeavour to improve humanitarian conditions inside Syria. Moreover, it also determined that some of the existing negotiation areas in the context of Turkey’s accession talks with the EU were to be reactivated or expanded to “re-energize the accession process”, such as the prevention of new sea and land routes for illegal migration (as a part of the Integrated Border Management under the harmonization to the EU *acquis*), fulfilment of the visa liberalization roadmap (as a part of the Turkey-EU Readmission Agreement) and the upgrading of the Customs Union (as a part of the harmonization to the EU *acquis*).

*(2) The period covering March 2017 to September 2017*

The second moment covers a period of seven months, from March 2017 to September 2017. This period has been selected to represent the straining of the relations between Turkey and the European Union, triggered by the tensions in the country’s bilateral relations with Germany, the Netherlands and Austria, which had a drastic impact on many areas of negotiation. Although the crisis in the relations in March 2017 created an abrupt rupture in the relations between Turkey and the EU, it can be considered a continuation of Turkey’s already existing shift from the EU agenda, as referred to by Yılmaz (2016: 87) from the progressing Europeanization in 1999-2004 (“domestic change in line with the EU demands for accession”) towards selective Europeanization in 2005-2010 (“domestic change in line with the EU demands for accession cherry-picked by the ruling government through domestic considerations leaving behind the EU priorities that were not helpful for promoting their own agenda”) and finally to de-Europeanization beginning with 2011 (“domestic change in contrast to the EU demands for accession”). The period that followed the crisis of March 2017 was followed by the deterioration of the ongoing talks to certain areas including the re-evaluation of the possibility of Turkey’s accession to the Union, visa liberalization process, modernization of the customs union, refugee cooperation and high level dialogue mechanisms (Nas et al. 2017). As it will be discussed further in the analysis sections, the management of irregular migration and asylum has remained as

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<sup>2</sup> European Council, Council of the European Union, EU-Turkey statement, 18 March 2016, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/>.

the only area of negotiation between the two sides even though the relations oftentimes came to a near halt.

For the analysis of the data, the report assesses the salience and polarization of the issue in the analysis of the media, and polarization in the analysis of the public opinion and political content. The report provides a broader analysis by identifying the triggers (e.g. policy changes, particular events, discussions at the EU and EU-Turkish level) and the main outcomes (e.g. the acceptance of the EU-Turkey Statement). In order to assess the politicization of responsibility sharing vis-à-vis refugees (and irregular migrants) in the context of Turkey-EU relations, this report benefits from an extensive desk research to collect data from three sources:

**1. Public opinion:** In order to assess the salience within the public opinion, the report analyses the results of the polls conducted at the European level and Turkish national level. In addition to the main EU opinion polls which provide a comparative analysis across all cases that are analysed for politicization in the Union, this report also looks further to the existing public opinion research by various sources that analyse: Turkish citizens' perceptions towards Turkey-EU relations, mass refugee influx, harmonization (integration) of refugees in the Turkish society and overall analysis of public opinion perceptions.

**2. Parliamentary debates and political discussions:** The research analyses the politicization of the issue in the political sphere by qualitatively analysing the parliamentary debates at the Turkish Grand National Assembly and the discourses of the leaders of the four main parties (Justice and Development Party (AKP), Republican People's Party (CHP), People's Democratic Party (HDP), Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and the Turkish president that were in power during the periods covered in the research, as well as other available content, such as parliamentary and party reports focusing specifically on the management of refugees and irregular migrants.

**3. Media:** The report assesses the reflection of the politicization on the media as it reflects on the news by using quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The report uses the online portal of the daily *Hürriyet* as its data source for the media analysis. Other possible data sources had either limited accessibility or doubtful validity and reliability problems. According to Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017 (Yanatma 2017), *Hürriyet* was among the online top 20 brands in Turkey in 2017, with a high weekly use and a regular group of followers visiting the website more than 3 days per week, which also was among the only two newspapers that was in the top ten list of TV and print brands during this period. Among the major dailies and online news channels in Turkey, *Hürriyet* had a liberal-conservative political orientation, which until its handover to a pro-government conglomerate in 2018 had oftentimes-critical position vis-à-vis the governing party in Turkey. *Hürriyet* was chosen as the representative media positioned in a relatively central position in terms of its ideology. To be able to select the articles that were relevant to the topic, the researchers have first filtered all the news that have appeared on *Hürriyet* online for the selected period with the keyword of "*Avrupa Birliği*" (European Union), and then went over by each article to determine whether it referred to the relations between Turkey and the European Union on the responsibility sharing vis-à-vis refugees and irregular migrants.

## 2. First Episode of Contention (May 2015 to March 2016)

### 2.1 Public Opinion

Based on the study of Glorius (2018) on the European public opinion polls on immigration and refugees and patterns of politicization conducted for CEASEVAL project, the development of salience of “immigration” can be traced by whether it is considered as an important issue in comparison to other issues at the personal, national and the EU levels. According to the Eurobarometer survey, when asked about the two most important issues that Turkey faced, Turkish citizens were mostly concerned with terrorism and unemployment in 2015 and 2016, despite the large number of refugees living in the country for the past years. The survey illustrated that these response patterns did not change when asked at the individual level, whereas terrorism continued to be among the two most important issues in 2015 and 2016 followed by rising prices in 2015 and unemployment in 2016 (Glorius 2018).

**Question:** What is the most important topic in Turkey-EU relations? (%)

Topic	%
Refugee crisis	56.1
Visa liberalization	23.6
Accession process	13.9
Customs Union	4.6
Other	1.8

Source: Economic Development Foundation, “EU Support and EU Perception in Turkish public opinion”, July 2016

**Question:** How do you evaluate the Turkey-EU Refugee Deal? (%)

Response	%
Very positive	4.8
Positive	13.7
Neither positive nor negative	13.7
Negative	34
Very negative	16.8
I do not have an opinion	8.1

Source: Economic Development Foundation, “EU Support and EU Perception in Turkish public opinion”, July 2016

National surveys conducted by research institutions provide further data on Turkish nationals’ perceptions on salience of refugee management in the relations between Turkey and the European Union. Regrettably, the fieldworks for the available surveys on this topic have been conducted outside of the time frame of the first episode of contention, but still at a very close to the period of May 2015-March 2016, as they took place in April 2016. According to a survey by the Economic Development Foundation by a representative sample of 1,254 respondents aged more than 18 in 18 cities of Turkey

in 23-24 April 2016, the most important topic in Turkey-EU relations was reported as the refugee crisis at 56%, followed by the visa liberalization process reported at 23.6%.

Assuming that the fieldwork for this research was conducted in April 2016, it may be argued that the March 2016 Refugee Deal between Turkey and the European Union that aimed for a joint action to manage refugee influx had a direct impact on the public opinion’s perceptions on the most important issue affecting the relations between the two sides. With that said, the Refugee Deal is not evaluated positively by the respondents of this research, whereas 50.8% of the respondents reported to have “negative” (34%) or “very negative” (16.8%) evaluation of the Refugee Deal, in comparison to 18.5% who reported “positive” (13.7%) or “very positive” (4.8%). This result illustrates that the Turkey-EU Refugee Deal is not supported by the Turkish public opinion and that there is not a high polarization among the public opinion on this issue.

Another survey by Kadir Has University on the public opinion regarding Turkish foreign policy provides insights on the reason why Turkey-EU Refugee Statement, referred as the “Turkey-EU Refugee Deal” is not supported by the public opinion. According to the research which has a representative sample of 1,000 respondents from 26 cities aged 18 and above in April 2016, similar responses were provided to the question of “How do you evaluate the Turkey-EU refugee deal?”, whereas 57% of the respondents reported negative in comparison to 21.7% positive to the question. Again, the results illustrate that the public opinion is not highly polarized on the support for the Refugee Statement.

**Question:** In which ways the Turkey-EU deal positive? (% , multiple answers)

<b>Response</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>It will provide funding to Turkey</b>	57.6
<b>It will stop illegal migration</b>	47.9
<b>It will improve Syrian migrants’ living conditions</b>	31.3
<b>It will revitalize Turkey’s membership process to the EU</b>	15.7
<b>It will allow Turkish citizens to visit the European Union with visa liberalization</b>	10.6

Source: Kadir Has University, “Public opinion regarding Turkish foreign policy”, May 2016

**Question:** In which ways the Turkey-EU deal negative? (% , multiple answers)

<b>Response</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>It will increase the number of migrants coming to Turkey</b>	58.2
<b>The huge number of migrants will create economic problems</b>	48.8
<b>The EU will not hold its promise on resettling migrants from Turkey</b>	31.9
<b>This kind of deal on migrants is not humane and ethical</b>	20.2
<b>It will violate international human rights</b>	5.8

Source: Kadir Has University, “Public opinion regarding Turkish foreign policy”, May 2016

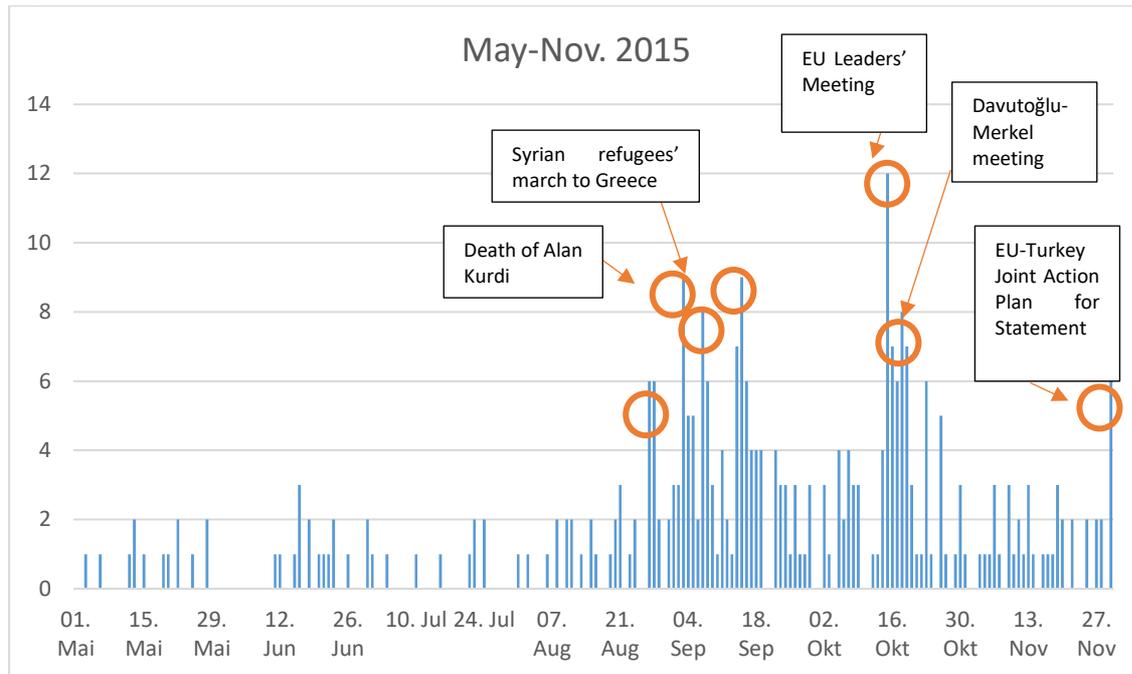
In the survey conducted by Kadir Has University, the respondents were asked by a multiple answer question on “How do you evaluate the Turkey-EU Refugee Deal?” to evaluate the positive and negative aspects perceived on the Turkey-EU Refugee Deal. While the majority of the respondents replied that it was positive as it would provide funding to Turkey (57.6%), followed by the perception that it would stop illegal migration (47.9%), the respondents had higher negative perceptions about the assumptions that it would increase the number of migrants coming to Turkey (58.2%) and that the higher number of migrants would create problems for the Turkish economy (48.8%). While 45.2% reported that the acceptance of new refugees should be stopped, 28.5% indicated there should be a quota for the newly arrivals; in comparison to 17.7% who argued that they should be accepted no matter what, and 4.5% reported Turkey should take back those who went to Greece based on the deal with the EU.

The results of the public opinion analysis demonstrate that despite the high number of Syrian refugees residing in Turkey, immigration was not considered among the main issues of concern for the Turkish citizens in the period of 2015-2016. However, according to the perceptions of the public opinion, this issue has occupied a very central position in the relations between Turkey and the European Union, especially due to the EU-Turkey Refugee Statement, which was enacted in March 2016. The public opinion polls illustrate that there was no high polarization on this negotiation, as the negative perception appear significantly higher in comparison to its positive perception by the Turkish citizens. Following this analysis on the public opinion poll results, the next section focuses on how the politicization of the responsibility sharing vis-à-vis refugees and migrants has reflected on Turkish media.

## **2.2 Media**

This section provides quantitative and qualitative media analysis for the first period of contention, considering that the mass media plays a crucial role in the politicization process, either as a significant setting of democratic politics or as a data source for the analysis more generally (De Wilde 2016: 9). To provide an overview of the overall reflection of the refugee issue in the Turkish media, it should be noted that although Turkey has witnessed the influx of Syrian refugees since 2011, the migration issue did not occupy a substantial place in the national media at least until 2015. As discussed by a media analysis by Erdoğan et al. (2017) on the media representation of Syrian refugees in Turkey, the issue of refugees has been largely neglected by the Turkish media in comparison to the recurrent news in many of the European media channels. According to the authors of the study, while the most common discourse from 2012 to September 2015 was shaped around the “irregularity/illegality” of the migrants and their border passages, following the death of Syrian toddler Alan Kurdi in September 2015 the media started using the expressions such as “influx”, “masses” and “flows” to refer to refugees, which had not existed before. This was also followed by a frequent condemnation of Europe while reporting the news of shipwrecks and drowning on the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas.

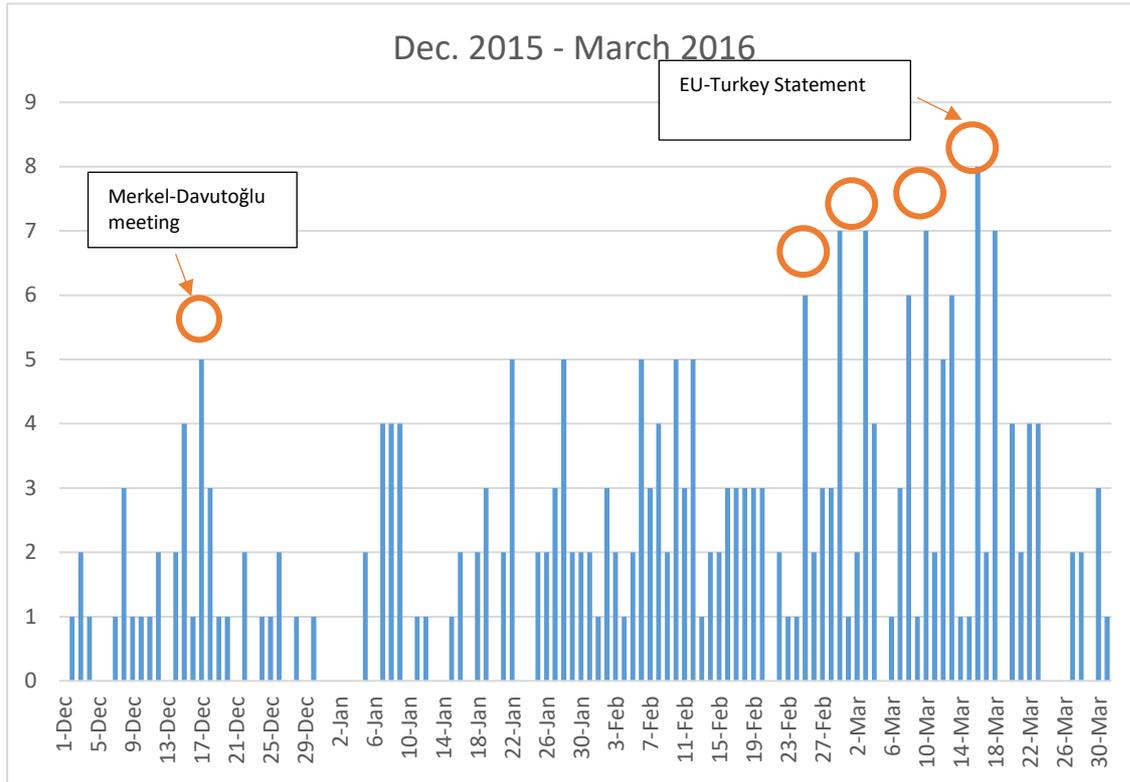
**Figure 3.** Saliency of responsibility sharing in May – November 2015



Based on the news analysis, in the period of May 2015 to March 2016, a number of crucial milestones have taken place in relation with the mass influx and its management (See Table 2). Despite the relatively low numbers of migrants and refugees who used the Turkish-Greek route to access the European Union, the EU and Turkey had already started working on this issue in May 2015, when a working dinner has taken place on migration and refugees. Despite this early meeting and the EU Member States' decisions on committing on resettlement of refugees and relocations within the EU, it has taken until October 2015 for the increasing number of meetings and the prioritization of the issue in the Turkey-EU relations.

The media analysis illustrates that the prioritization of the issue in the Turkey-EU relations at a later period was due to a number of incidents that have taken place during September. Although the influx of refugees and migrants had taken place throughout the summer period, the reflection of the topic of responsibility sharing emerged at a later period, beginning with September 2015. The number of news that appeared on *Hürriyet* online increased significantly after the incident of Alan Kurdi, a Syrian toddler of Kurdish ethnicity, whose dead body was found on the shores of Turkey after the boat that carried him, his family and other migrants that aimed to go to Greece was capsized. The rising saliency with this incident was followed by the only mass protest by Syrian nationals in Turkey. During the protest, which took place in September 2015, Syrian refugees protested the closed European borders by walking from Istanbul Central Bus Terminal to Edirne, a bordering city of Turkey to Greece. The Syrian protesters criticized the European Union's policies towards the potential refugees and demanded to enter the EU not via irregular means but via land border where safe entry would be provided for them. The protest by finalized after the meetings of the representatives by Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and the Delegation of the EU in Turkey.

**Figure 4.** Saliency of responsibility sharing in December 2015 – March 2016



The saliency of the responsibility sharing issue reached a peak point in October 2015, when a number of diplomatic events have taken place, including the EU Leaders’ Meeting on migration and refugees’ issues and the meeting between Turkish Prime Minister Davutoğlu and German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Istanbul. The EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan and the preparations for the EU-Turkey Statement occupied a crucial place in the politicization of the issue in the period of December 2015 to March 2016, until a common agreement was reached on March 18, 2016. The number of articles on this issue incline relatively more in the period of February-March 2016, especially as a result of the criticisms of certain EU Member States, such as Italy, Austria and Hungary on the number of border passages from Turkey to Greece which is expected to be reduced to zero, as well as Italy’s refusal to accept the 3+3 billion euros to be allocated by the EU and the Member States to Turkey, to be used for the integration of Syrian refugees in this country.

**Table 2.** Key Milestones from May 2015 to March 2016

<b>Date</b>	<b>Milestone</b>
<b>May 17, 2015</b>	EU-Turkey working dinner on migration and refugees
<b>June 7, 2015</b>	Turkish general election and ruling party loses majority
<b>July 20, 2015</b>	Representatives of the Governments of the EU Member States commit for resettlement
<b>Sept. 2, 2015</b>	Death of Alan Kurdi
<b>Sept. 15-22, 2015</b>	Syrian refugees' protest in Istanbul and march to Greece
<b>Oct. 15, 2015</b>	EU Leaders' Meeting on migration and refugee crisis in Europe and decision on EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan
<b>Oct. 18, 2015</b>	Turkish PM Davutoğlu and German Chancellor Merkel's meeting in Istanbul
<b>Nov. 2, 2015</b>	Turkish general election, ruling AKP regains majority
<b>Nov. 24, 2015</b>	EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan for Statement
<b>February 8, 2016</b>	Circulation of the meeting minutes between President Erdoğan and the EU officials Jean Claude Juncker and Donald Tusk
<b>March 18, 2016</b>	EU-Turkey Statement
<b>March 20, 2016</b>	Starting date for the return of all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into Greek islands

This study is limited with the fact that only one media source was used as representative of the Turkish media to analyse the salience and polarization of politicization of the responsibility sharing. Therefore the polarization within the Turkish media cannot be fully captured by the sole analysis of *Hürriyet* online. Nevertheless, the analysis may provide insights on the alternative views that appear by different journalists who may reflect the issue or the polarizations that may appear within the society via events and manifestations. As previously discussed by Erdoğan et al. (2017) there is a common trend during the targeted period in *Hürriyet* online to condemn the European Union and its member states on the lack of “necessary commitments” and a common “responsibility sharing”, especially in the aftermath of incidents that have taken place in September 2015. The two articles below are representative of the overall reflection of the issue on this media channel:

While Turkey alone has been hosting nearly 50 times the number of people determined by the EU Commission, 28 EU countries could not reach the number 40 thousand despite the many meetings they have been organizing. The previous day, the Ministries of Interior and Justice of the EU had a meeting in Luxembourg and after intense negotiations they reached a commitment of 32,256 people. The rest 8 thousand people will be negotiated during the meeting in December. Despite the decision caused by nearly the half of the objection of the member states that has changed the Commission's suggestions of June from “obligatory” sharing to “voluntary” sharing, the lack of necessary steps are especially criticized by the human rights organizations (“They have no place for 40 thousand people”, *Hurriyet*, 22 July 2015).

As we know the EU is based on a European ideal of solidarity. It is based on liberty and equality. Viktor Orbán has turned this ideal upside down with the fences he has put on Europe's borders. [...] The most recent example of vote hunting from refugees' shoulders has been experienced in Austria. There was an explosion of votes to the extreme right FPÖ during the State Parliament elections held in the State of Upper Austria. [...] The concerns about the rising votes for the extreme right and populist parties due to their party campaigns focusing on asylum seekers has also been seen in the other European Union countries ("No to Muslim asylum seekers", Ahmet Külahçı, Hurriyet, 2 October 2015).

As it appears in the first vignette, the Union members are criticized for a number of reasons, including the inability to commit on a certain number of people for the relocations and taking other steps in order to facilitate the mobility of refugees. Moreover, there is a recurring theme of numerically comparing certain figures that are considered to represent the responsibility that Turkey has taken over in comparison with the EU member states. Mostly, this is viewed with the comparison of the existing number of Syrian nationals in Turkey with the number of asylum seekers or relocation quotas of the EU member states. Oftentimes this is coupled by the comparison of the Gross National Income of Turkey with the EU member states and the number of refugees that they are hosting. Another recurrent comparison, which is repeatedly declared by the Turkish policy makers, especially President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, is between the funding that was provided by the EU and the international community with what Turkey has allocated up to date. As can be followed from the second vignette, an alternative criticism is regarding the shift within the EU from values that are based on solidarity towards nationalism and populism.

While there seems to be consensus in the overall perception towards the EU's management of asylum and migration as inadequate, the media analysis illustrates that there has been polarization among the policy makers and within the society on the topic of the EU-Turkey Statement. This polarization is witnessed mainly between the Justice and Development Party and a part of their supporters on the one hand and the opposition parties and human rights advocates on the other. The support to the negotiations between the EU and Turkey are attributed to joint efforts and cooperation between the two sides, by references to "alliance against smugglers" (*kaçakçılara karşı ittifak*), "partnership" (*ortaklık*), "a settlement that will reinforce visa liberalization process" (*vize serbestleştirmesini güçlendirecek mutabakat*) and "the updating of the Turkey's accession process" (*Türkiye'nin katılım sürecinin güncellenmesi*). The negative perceptions towards the negotiations are discussed within the framework of human rights violations and the laying the burden on Turkey by the attributions such as "dirty bargain" (*kirli pazarlık*), "bribe" (*rüşvet*), "human rights issue" (*insan hakları meselesi*), "laying the burden on Turkey" (*sorunları Türkiye'nin üzerine yıkmak*), "making Turkey a buffer zone" (*Türkiye'yi tampon bölge yapmak*).

A brief analysis of the reflection of the issue in the wider Turkish press demonstrates that the negative perceptions towards the negotiations between Turkey and the EU were reinforced after February 2016, when the meeting minutes between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the EU officials Jean Claude Juncker and Donald Tusk that took place in October 2015 were circulated. As it reflected on the media, according to the meeting minutes President Erdoğan urged the EU officials to allocate more than the initially settled three billion euros, and argued that Turkey "[could] open the borders of Greece and Bulgaria and fill the refugees on busses". Erdoğan criticized the EU for misusing the funds, since he argued that some of the 400 million euros allocated to Greece could have been used to "establish[ed] a safe zone in Syria with some of this money and [have] solve[d] the refugee problem

entirely<sup>3</sup>". Following the spreading of the minutes, some of the opposition parties and human right supporters have condemned the AKP government and the President, for seeking leverage from the EU for greater financial support and the speeding up the visa liberalization talks, by threatening to open up the borders and "send away" the refugees by "putting them on busses".

### 2.3 Parliamentary Debates and Political Discourses

It is a challenging task to capture the salience and politicization with regards to politicization from the parliamentary debates during the first half of this episode of contention in Turkey. This is mainly since the period was marked by the two national elections (in June 2015 and November 2015), since the first elections resulted in a hung parliament and the parties failed to come to a coalition agreement during the summer of 2015. Moreover, as it can also be followed from the Eurobarometer results, despite the increasing number of refugees in Turkey and their mass outward influx towards the EU, the greatest concerns of the Turkish citizens and the policy makers appear as other issues (terrorism, unemployment, inability to form a coalition) during this period. Consequently, during the first half of this period (May-November 2015), the issue of responsibility sharing vis-à-vis refugees and migrants was discussed only in two of the 17 sessions. During these two sessions, the issue occupied only limited place in the parliamentary sessions, and they reflected the position of the incumbent AKP, through the statements of the Parliamentary Speaker and the President:

Dear deputies, despite the problems in the region that has become a circle of fire, Turkey stands strong as an island of tranquillity with its strong democracy and strong economy. While the 28 members of the European Union are discussing how to share 120 thousand asylum seekers, and England has announced to accept 20 thousand asylum seekers within a period of five years, Turkey is the country that accepts more than two million asylum seekers and performs an expenditure of over \$7.5 billion. Turkey is the country supporting the greatest number of asylum seekers per national income. (The Speaker of the TGNA İsmet Yılmaz, addresses the parliament on the new legislative year on October 1, 2015).

As Turkey, we will continue to keep our hearts and our doors open at all times to our brothers in Syria and Iraq, as we have been doing for our brothers in the Balkans, in Central Asia, Northern Africa and other regions in Africa and Asia. [...] We do not have any right to leave these brothers to die in the Mediterranean, to persecute them in the border regions or train stations, as some European countries do. [...] While some of the European countries with stronger opportunities are panicked against some hundred thousand refugees on their borders, we have been our millions of brothers as guests for years. (President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's address to the parliament on the new legislative year on October 1, 2015).

The speeches of the Speaker of the TGNA and President Erdoğan within the context of the new legislative year in October 2015, represent the stance of the AKP that will endure throughout the May 2015-March 2016 period, which criticizes the EU for lack of adequate responsibility sharing. The discourses frequently provide comparisons between the number of Syrian nationals hosted by the EU member states and Turkey, the funding allocated for the Syrian nationals in the EU context and in Turkey, as well as between the open doors policy of Turkey versus the strengthening of the Fortress Europe. Additionally, Erdoğan's address to the parliament includes references to certain notions such

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<sup>3</sup> T24, "Erdoğan'dan AB'ye: 2 yıl için 3 milyar Euro verecekseniz hiç konuşmayalım; mültecileri otobüslerle göndeririz", <http://t24.com.tr/haber/erdogandan-abye-2-yil-icin-3-milyar-euro-verecekseniz-hic-konusmayalim-multecileri-otobuslerle-gondeririz,327383>.

as “brotherhood”, “shared values”, “cultural proximity” and “Turkish hospitality” that are often repeated throughout his discourses to the general public and the parliament as a way to legitimize the party’s open doors policy. These notions are also placed in comparison with the EU and its member states’ positions, described with negative connotations such as “leaving [refugees] to die at sea”, “inability to determine relocation quotas” and “panicking”.

As mentioned before, the period of May 2015-November 2016 was a politically active period in Turkey, especially due to the two national elections. While the governance of migration and asylum has taken a limited place in the pre-election manifestos of the political parties for the election in June 2015, they had occupied greater space during the election in November 2015. The relations with the EU on this matter have also been a part of the declarations by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and People’s Democratic Party (HDP) especially during the second election:

In fact our country has not seen the expected support from the developed countries and international institutions in terms of the refugees that the whole international community should take responsibility for (Justice and Development Party Manifesto for June 2015 and November 2015 elections).

The party will continue its stance against the neoliberal capital policies of the EU, which has become more evident especially during the Greek crisis and the massacre of migrants, as well as its common struggle together with the oppressed people of Europe. The negotiations and full membership work with the EU will be addressed within the framework of our principles (People’s Democratic Party Manifesto for November 2015 elections).

According to the party manifestos, both parties have approached to the issue of how the responsibility was shared with the EU and the wider international community in a critical manner. However, based on their ideological position, the two parties criticized the issue on different fronts: while the AKP’s criticism underscored the scarcity of support that Turkey received, the HDP tackled the issue from a more leftist perspective, arguing that the relations between Turkey and the EU needed to be addressed in line against their principles which fought against neoliberal policies of the EU.

During the second half of this episode of contention (December 2015-March 2016), the issue had become more salient within the Turkish Grand National Assembly, and it was addressed in 12 of the 57 parliamentary sessions. As discussed in the previous section on media analysis, this period marked the initiation (meeting on the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan in October 2015) and the finalization (EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016) of the joint plan between Turkey and the EU. The negotiations between Turkey and the EU that had begun in October 2015 was discussed with a lag within the Turkish parliament. The analysis of the parliamentary debates show that during the second period, the standpoint of all parties vis-à-vis the European Union and the wider international community continued to be critical. The parties shared the argument that the management of refugees as a global issue that needed to be addressed by the international community, whereas the neighbouring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan were shouldering the responsibility.

Despite the common assessment towards the EU, during the second half of this episode of contention the three opposition parties started to declare more diverse positions on “who was considered to be responsible”, “to whom they should be responsible for”, and “what it meant to be responsible”. On the right, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) criticized the government for the erroneous negotiations with the EU, which, according to them, relied on incoherent cost and benefits calculations, was “turning Turkey into a refugee camp” and causing the rise of terrorism in Turkey. For the party representatives, although the Turkish state had to be responsible for the Syrians under

temporary protection and other migrants who were eligible to become asylum seekers, there were others that needed more attention: the most disadvantaged within the native population and the people of Turkic origin in Syria:

Mr. Davutoğlu has a single point of concern, politically he wants to come out and shout: “I have gained the right of free movement of my citizens in Europe”. Otherwise Davutoğlu does not worry about how much these new refugees are going to have a burden on Turkey. (Nationalist Movement Party parliamentarian Mehmet Erdoğan’s address to the parliament on March 2, 2016).

What is reminiscent of the Syria [...] is our country’s turning into a gigantic refugee camp, billions of dollars spent for them and a terrorist organization. [...] Furthermore there is our ethnic kin who are dying only for being Turks and who are ought to leave their lands behind. (Nationalist Movement Party parliamentarian Atila Kaya’s address to the parliament on March 9, 2016).

The declarations of the two party representatives on the quotes above illustrate that the main criticism of the MHP focused on the economic repercussions of the negotiations.

On the left, the two parties, Republican People’s Party (CHP) and People’s Democratic Party (HDP) also criticized the government for the ongoing negotiations with the EU. It should be noted that the Republican People’s Party did not have a unified perspective on the topic, since there have been disagreements within the party between those who had a more human rights oriented perspective and others with a more nationalistic perspective. The declarations and reports published by the party announced the overall view that the Syrians needed to be sent back to Syria once the environment was stabilized. However, the party leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and some parliamentarians with a more nationalist perspective approached to the issue in relation with the burden that Turkey was shouldering, as it reflected in Kılıçdaroğlu’s declaration in April 2015: “The EU and the Middle East returned their backs. 2 million 225 thousand Syrians came to Turkey. They said we are doing the right thing. [...] During CHP rule we will restructure the Middle East policies. We will stop the bloodshed in Syria. We will bring peace to the Middle East. We will send back the 2 million 225 thousand Syrians back to their countries”<sup>4</sup>. While Kılıçdaroğlu’s declaration before the June 2015 elections were diffused by the Turkish media as the CHP party’s refusal to continue on hosting the Syrian refugees, according to anecdotal evidence it created tensions amongst the refugee population who were concerned about the results of the elections. This perspective endured in the period that followed December 2015, as it can be followed from CHP parliamentarian Veli Ağbaba’s remarks in the Turkish parliament:

Just as we say “We have a shared history” with Europe and just as the European Union says “We have a common future”, we should remind Europe that we have a common responsibility. Europe cannot escape and should not escape from this problem. [...] Turkey has become the refugee camp of the European Union in return of these three billion euros, unfortunately it has become a guard of the European Union in return of three billion euros. This is not acceptable, this responsibility is not only ours, this is a responsibility of the whole world. (Republican People’s Party parliamentarian Veli Ağbaba’s address to the parliament on January 7, 2016).

On the other hand, there was another group of parliamentarians among the CHP with a stronger attachment to the human rights perspective, who argued that supporting the refugees was a responsibility that the Turkish state (and the international community) needed to bear against the

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<sup>4</sup> İHA, Kılıçdaroğlu: ‘Suriyelileri ülkelerine geri göndereceğiz’, <http://www.ihacom.tr/haber-kilicdaroglu-suriyelileri-ulkelerine-geri-gonderecegiz-500735/>.

humanitarian crisis that was taking place. As declared in Özcan Purçu's address to the parliament in January 2016, all members of the Turkish Grand National Assembly were held accountable for the humanitarian crisis that was taking place in the Aegean Sea. In order to provide an assessment of the ongoing situation, these members of the CHP formed a research commission meeting with the members of the civil society and academia and published a report in June 2016, where they defined the areas that needed to be addressed in relation with who had to take responsibility on the management of refugees and migrants:

The focus of contacts on migration with the European Union should be burden sharing. [...] The European Union's short term policies towards jettison and the AKP government's unfruitful approach that is trapped in material expectations are unacceptable. (Republican People's Party report by the Commission for Investigating Migration and Migrant Problems published in June 2016).

The report provided a particular section on how the future relations with the EU had to be carried out. As can be followed from the section provided above, the main point of concerns were indicated as "sustainable and coordinated cooperation" that relied on "burden sharing", especially in four areas: (1) organizing a more operational resettlement process with higher quotas, (2) providing safe routes for refugees, (3) improving asylum acceptance conditions, and (4) restructuring the border management in line with the human rights perspective.

The most critical against the policies of the AKP government on the management of migration in general and more specifically on the negotiations with the EU among the opposition parties with representation in the TGNA was People's Democratic Party (HDP), as can be followed from Garo Paylan's discourse below:

I was in Europe last week with a few deputy colleagues; [...] I can summarize their perspective towards us: Turkey is a country where human rights are downtrodden, press and freedom of expression are no longer existing, a country running rapidly towards authoritarianism. But anyone we meet in the European Union, from the right and left wing parties accepted this: "Yes, there are violations, but Recep Tayyip Erdoğan played very well and gave way to the refugees. Yes, the European Union had been very unfair by not looking at it here [...] However, it was a big game that he let all the refugees go and the fact that Europe was faced with one million refugees all of a sudden and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan played the game well and he defeated us. [...] Unfortunately we have made some meetings that I am feeling embarrassed for my country. (People's Democratic Party parliamentarian Garo Paylan's address to the parliament on February 9, 2016).

The HDP parliamentarians appraised the ongoing relations with the EU, where the concerns over violations of human rights, freedom of press and expression were not voiced out by the EU officials and member states, due to the fact that the negotiations were heavily concentrated on the issue of migration management.

The analysis of the parliamentary debates in the period of May 2015-March 2016 demonstrate that all parties shared the argument that the responsibility vis-à-vis refugees and migrants had to be undertaken not only by certain countries but also by the wider international community and the European Union. However there were differences on their understanding of the population of concern and on how they defined responsibility. While for the incumbent party, the responsibility was considered as something that can be negotiated through diplomatic means, the opposition parties criticized these negotiations on different grounds based on their ideological positions.

### 3. Second Episode of Contention (March 2017 to September 2017)

#### 3.1 Public Opinion

According to the Eurobarometer survey, despite the large number of refugees residing in Turkey in the period of 2014-2017, immigration has not been named as the most important issues; Turkish citizens were more concerned about terrorism, followed by unemployment at the national level during this period. This response changed slightly when asked at the personal level, as terrorism and unemployment were replaced with unemployment and other issues as the most important issues for the Turkish public opinion, affecting them at personal level. The survey results illustrate that the recurrent theme of unemployment, and the emerging terror attacks during the period of 2015-2016 had a stronger impact on the perceptions of the Turkish public opinion (Glorius 2018).

The national surveys can again provide more detailed answers on the public opinion's perceptions regarding the issue of responsibility and responsibility sharing on the topic of the management of refugees and migrants. The survey on the EU support by the Economic Development Foundation was conducted once again in November 2017, with a representative sample of 1,311 respondents aged more than 18 in 18 cities of Turkey. Interestingly, while in the survey of 2016, the most important topic in Turkey-EU relations had been reported as the refugee crisis at 56%, followed by the visa liberalization process reported at 23.6%, in 2017, visa liberalization process was reported at a higher importance at 32.8%, followed by the Customs Union at 31.3% and the refugee crisis which was placed at the third position with 27.9%. This result may provide some insights on how the public opinion's perceptions have shifted with the depoliticization of the issue of the management of the refugees at the political arena, as can be followed from the analysis on parliamentary debates and political discourses.

**Question:** What is the most important topic in Turkey-EU relations? (% , multiple answers)

Topic	%
Refugee crisis	27.9
Visa liberalization	32.8
Accession process	6.1
Customs Union	31.3
A New Partnership Relation	1.4
Other	1.8

Source: Economic Development Foundation, "EU Support and EU Perception in Turkish public opinion", December 2017

The surveys by Kadir Has University on the public opinion regarding Turkish foreign policy in 2017 and 2018 again provide comparisons on the perceptions of the Turkish citizens on the negotiations between Turkey and the EU. In 2017, the survey was conducted in June with a representative sample of 1,000 Turkish nationals aged above 18 in 26 cities. The 2017 survey shows that there has been a change in the public opinion's evaluation of the Turkey-EU refugee deal, whereas those who reported as positive increased from 21.7% in 2016 to 25.3% in 2017, and as negative declined from 57% in 2016

to 45.2% in 2017. On the question of “In which ways the Turkey-EU deal positive or negative?”, the results of the survey illustrate that there has been increase in the positive evaluations of the negotiation (providing funding to Turkey, improving Syrians’ living conditions, revitalizing Turkey’s membership process) and a decline in the negative evaluations. However, the public opinion appears to continue on reporting more negatively to the topic of Turkey-EU deal.

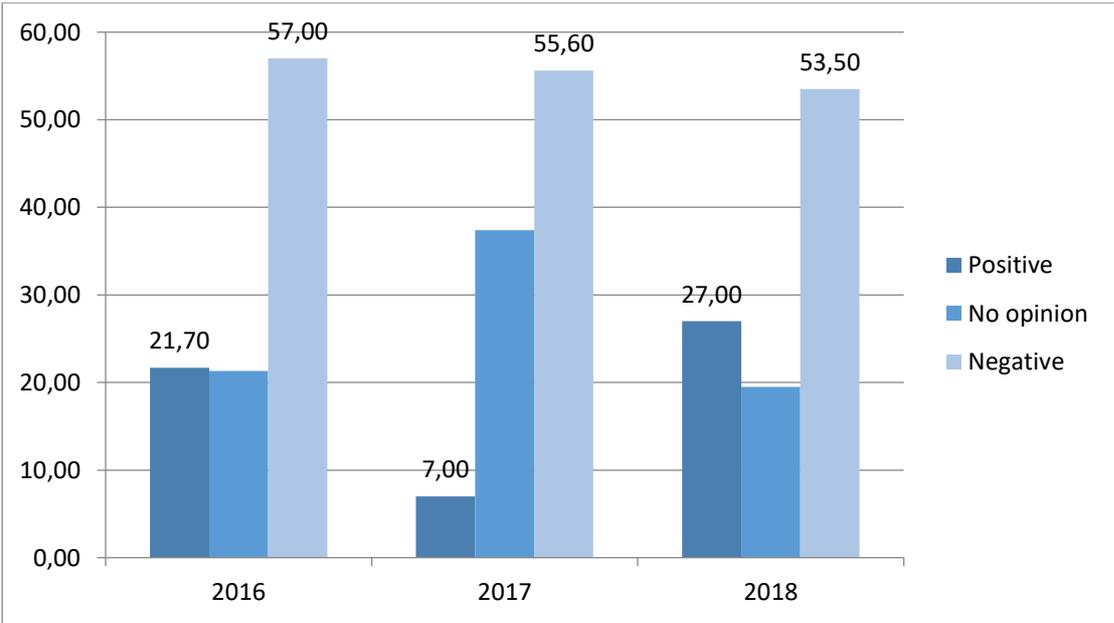
**Question:** In which ways the Turkey-EU deal positive or negative? (%)

Response	% 2017 (2016)
<b>It provides funding to Turkey</b>	18.4 (12.5)
<b>It improves Syrian refugees’ living conditions</b>	10.9 (6.8)
<b>It stops illegal migration</b>	8.8 (10.4)
<b>It revitalizes Turkey’s membership process to the EU</b>	4.3 (3.4)
<b>It increases the number of migrants coming to Turkey</b>	20.3 (33.2)
<b>The huge number of migrants created economic problems</b>	20.0 (27.8)
<b>The EU does not hold its promise on resettling migrants from Turkey</b>	17.7 (18.2)
<b>This kind of deal on migrants is not humane and ethical</b>	10.6 (11.5)

Source: Kadir Has University, “Public opinion regarding Turkish foreign policy”, July 2017

The same survey that was conducted again in May 2018 demonstrates that although the negative evaluation of the agreement between Turkey and the EU is showing a declining trend (from 57% in 2016 to 55.6% in 2017 and to 53.5% in 2018), the Turkish public opinion continues to be disapproving towards it.

**Question:** How do you evaluate the agreement between Turkey and the EU on refugees? (%)

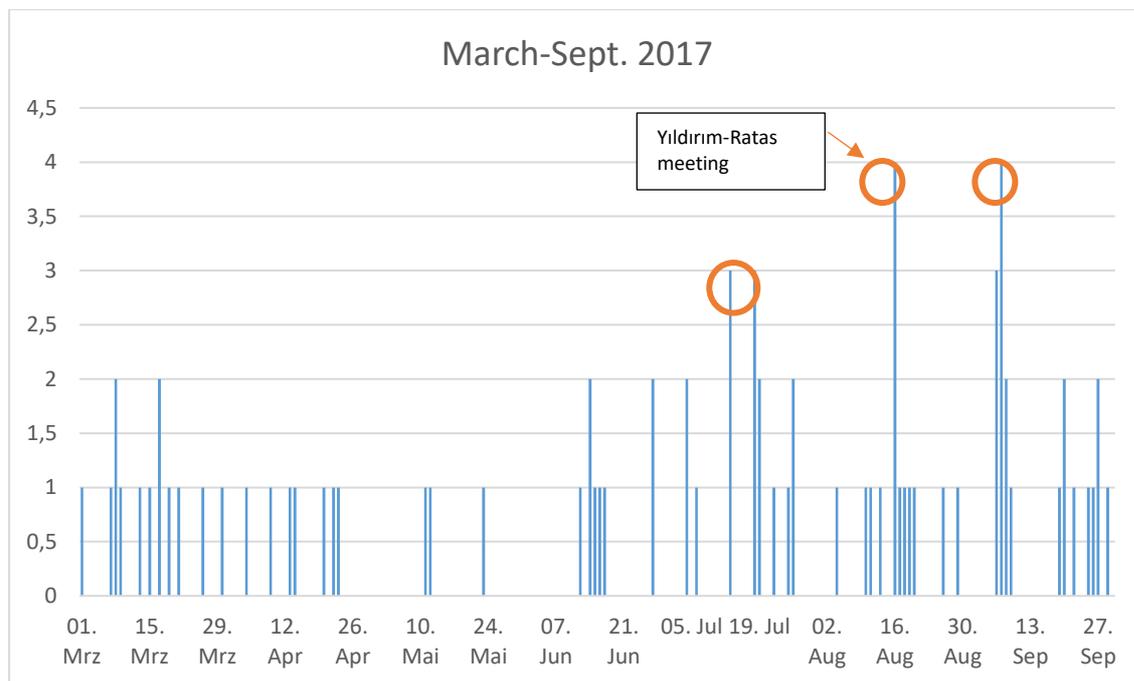


Source: Kadir Has University, “Public opinion regarding Turkish foreign policy”, June 2018

### 3.2 Media

The results of the news analysis illustrate that there has been a significant decline in the number of articles published on this topic, in comparison with the previous period. This is mainly due to the lessening of the frequency of crucial events and diplomatic meetings that have taken place between Turkey and the EU, in particular on the topic of management of refugees and migrants, but also on any other issues in general. Marked by the bilateral tensions between Turkey and some of the member states (particularly Germany, the Netherlands and Austria), the period has witnessed the stalling of the harmonization and the negotiation processes in relation with Turkey's accession process to the Union.

**Figure 5.** Saliency of responsibility sharing in March - September 2017



The already worsening relations have deteriorated more sharply in August 2017, when German Chancellor Angela Merkel declared that no new chapters in accession talks would be opened, Customs Union would not be updated and that aid to Turkey would be cut to a minimum. The declarations were responded by criticisms from the Turkish side, and with another incident that escalated the conflict even further, when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan addressed to the Turkish citizens in Germany, asking them not to vote for Christian Democratic Union and Social Democratic Party of Germany. Under this negative atmosphere, the management of migration and asylum often remained as the only topic that endured in the relations between the two sides.

**Table 3.** Key Milestones from March to September 2017

Date	Milestone
March, 2017	Dutch-Turkish diplomatic incident
August 16, 2017	Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım welcomes Estonian Prime Minister Juri Ratas in Ankara
August 16, 2017	Merkel's declaration on stopping Turkey-EU customs deal
August 18, 2017	Erdoğan's address to Turkish citizens in Germany

Based on the media analysis, in 2017, the main issues of concern with the EU were concentrated on the Turkish migrants in the EU, as well as the bilateral conflicts that escalated to the EU level due to the political involvement of the Turkish politicians in the EU countries. The deteriorating relations with Germany had a significant effect on the worsening relations with the EU in general, since the negotiations in 2015 and 2016 paving the way for the Statement were largely undertaken by the diplomatic efforts between Turkey and Germany. The analysis of the news on *Hürriyet* online demonstrates that against the discussions on furthering of the diplomatic endorsements on Turkey, countries such as France and Estonia have announced the continuation of good relations, since the country was considered a crucial partner, especially due to its role in the management of migration.

The findings also illustrate that the delays in the visa liberalization dialogue, which had been expected by Turkey as a result of the March 2016 Statement were mentioned regularly by the governing elite, as stated by Turkey's Minister on European Union Affairs, Ömer Çelik in April 2017:

Turkey has done its share on the topic of visa liberalization, it is its right. [...] If they accept it the process will finalize in a healthy way; otherwise there will be a failure. [...] We will not fulfil our obligations in the Aegean, we do not cooperate. If we had not done the refugee deal, if these refugees had gone to Europe, the right-wing extremists and racists who exploit these immigrants would rise in such a way that in the European politics, the center-right politicians would not be able to handle it and the political map of Europe would change. Turkey has saved European democracy.

As reflecting on the vignette above, the AKP government has continued on using the threatening discourse towards the EU, claiming that Turkey would not fulfil its part of the deal on the management of migrants and refugees, because the EU was also considered not to be doing its share of responsibility. In line with this perspective, the issue reflected on *Hürriyet* online with references to the lack of necessary steps from the EU side: "reproach on burden sharing" (*yük paylaşımıyla ilgili sitem*), "Will the EU keep its promise?" (*AB sözünü tutacak mı?*), "Europe failed" (*Avrupa sınıfta kaldı*), "migration of the humanity" (*insanlık göçü*), "Turkey's course on humanity" (*Türkiye'nin insanlık dersi*).

### 3.3 Parliamentary Debates and Political Discourses

This section provides a more detailed analysis on how the issue of responsibility vis-à-vis refugees and migrants in the relations between Turkey and the EU has been discussed in the political sphere during the period of March-September 2017. Looking at the salience, this topic has been mentioned only three times in the 62 parliamentary sessions at the Turkish Grand National Assembly, reflecting a significant decline in comparison with the previous episode of contention. Moreover, the mentions of the topic are only limited, as they are discussed within the framework of Turkey's foreign policy

perspective and emerging issues with the European countries. According to the analysis of the content, while the AKP parliamentarians criticized the EU for the rising securitization and Islamophobia, the opposition parties CHP and HDP were critical towards the AKP for having negotiated with the EU on the management of refugees and migrants, and for buttressing the rise of the right-wing populism in Europe, via practices for engaging with Turkish citizens living in the member states. These two perspectives can also be found in President Erdoğan's address during the 4<sup>th</sup> International Ombudsman Symposium in March 2017 and CHP's report in July 2017. According to the President, the management of migration and refugees was increasingly being dealt from the perspective of securitization:

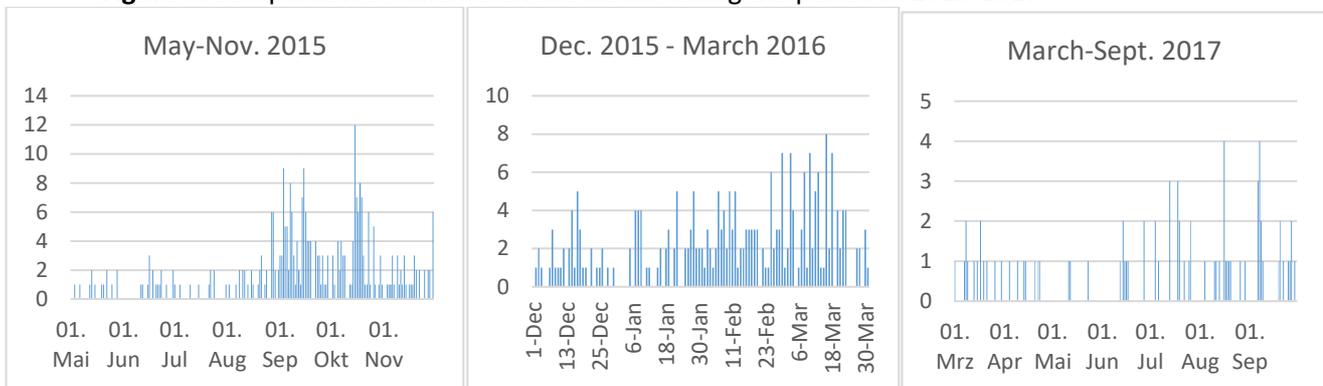
Even though the issue of migration and refugees is positioned in the first place of states and international organizations, we see that it is mainly discussed around the dimension of security. Unfortunately the humanitarian, social, legal and moral dimensions of the issue are not put on the agenda sufficiently. [...] We are hosting 3 million Syrian and Iraqi refugees in our country. And the money spent for them has reached 26 billion dollars. Unfortunately, neither the European Union nor the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees have kept their promises. Whether or not they keep their promises, we are going to continue on hosting these people who are running away from guns and barrel bombs (President Erdoğan's address during the 4<sup>th</sup> International Ombudsman Symposium on March 2, 2017).

The vignette provided above shows that Erdoğan appraised the EU and the international community for having not undertaken the commitments on sharing the responsibility on the management of migration and asylum. Reflecting the opposition's position on this issue, the report provided by the Central Management Committee of the Republican People's Party in July 2017 criticized the AKP government for the deteriorating relations with the EU, in the areas of accession negotiations, visa liberalization dialogue, migration, terrorism and bilateral relations with the EU member states.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

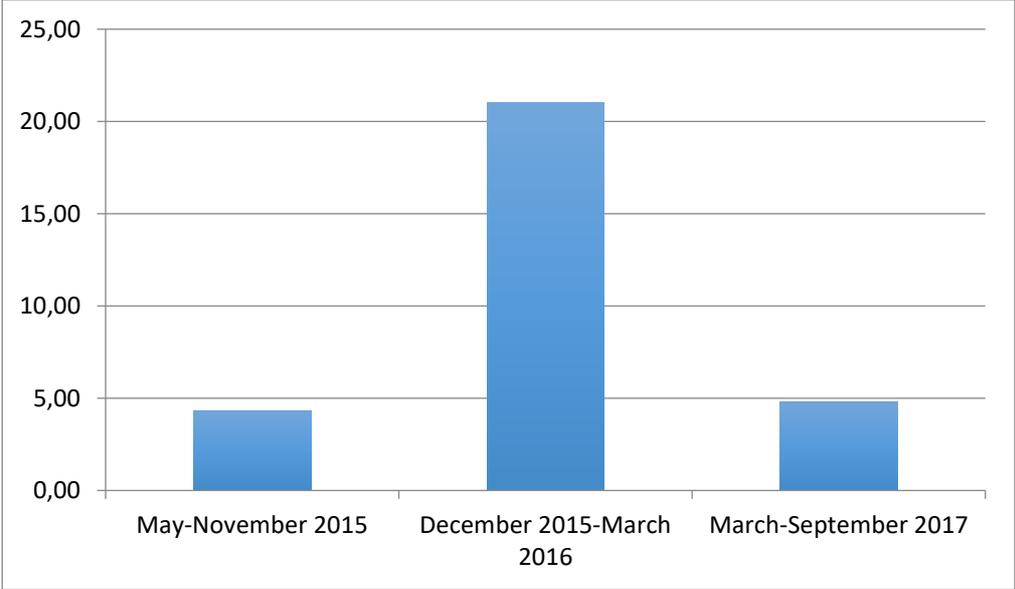
To begin with the analysis on public opinion, this report has shown that despite the large number of refugees, overall, and surprisingly, Turkish public did not consider the topic of immigration and migration management among the main issues of concern, even if there were certain periods in which there were rising attention to the issue. The low-level politicization of Syrian refugee issue in Turkey has already been documented by some studies (İçduygu, 2017). Looking more specifically on how the issue has been judged in terms of the relations with the EU, there has been a shift from the prioritization of the refugee issue towards other issues (visa liberalization process and customs union) that became more salient in the political arena and by the media in the second episode of contention. The results also illustrated that the Turkish citizens' overall reception of the negotiations with the EU on the management of refugees was negative, despite the increase in the positive perceptions from 2015 to 2017.

**Figure 6.** Comparison of salience on the media during the period of 2015-2017



Moving on to the media analysis, the findings of the analysis illustrate that the topic has been highly salient during the first episode of contention when the mass influx was taking place, which was followed by an active period of negotiations between the EU and Turkey resulting with the March 2016 Statement. The salience decreased significantly during the second episode of contention, whereas the relations with the EU were also at a low point as a result of the ongoing political tensions between Turkey and some of the member states (See Figure 6). The analysis of news on *Hürriyet* online shows that despite the changing salience of the politicization in the two periods of contention, the diverging voices were not reflected.

**Figure 7.** Salience of the issue in Turkish Grand National Assembly



Note: The figures represent the percentage of the appearance of the issue within all parliamentary sessions during the studied period

Finally, the analysis of the political discourses has demonstrated that the salience of the politicization has changed between the two episodes of contention. A further analysis shows that the issue has been highly salient only during the period of December 2015-March 2016 that marks the initiation and finalization of the negotiations on the joint plan with the EU. While the topic was not debated in a polarized manner in the period of May-November 2015, the schisms between the incumbent party and the opposition started to emerge in the period of December 2015-March 2016 and continued during the second episode of contention. Table 4 on the different definitions responsibility by the four political parties provide a brief summary of the questions of “who is considered to be responsible?”, “to whom should they be responsible?” and “what it means to be responsible?” based on the analysis of the parliamentary debates.

Overall, all parties shared the argument that the responsibility vis-à-vis refugees needed to be undertaken not by certain host countries (especially the neighboring countries) but by the wider international community and the European Union. However, parties represented diverse positions on their understandings of the populations of concern and how responsibility was defined, based on their ideological positions. On the right, the governing AKP mainly embraced the refugees as “brothers”, due to the common religion and shared history. The party seized full responsibility of the Syrian nationals living in Turkey, while at the same time using it as a bargaining tool in its relations with the EU. According to the nationalist MHP, although Turkey had to take responsibility over Syrian nationals due to shared values, the state had to be more considerate of other vulnerable populations, especially the disadvantaged of Turkey and the ethnic kin in war-torn regions. On the left, while the overall perspective of the CHP was to support Syrians until the conditions in Syria were normalized, there have been schisms within the party between the nationalist oriented and human rights oriented members. While the nationalist oriented parliamentarians and members had a more strict discourse demanding the return of Syrian refugees, the human rights oriented parliamentarians and members evaluated the issue in a broader agenda, criticizing the government for the human rights violations that were a result

of the negotiations with the EU. Finally, pro-minority HDP delivered a human-rights based discourse, arguing that the management of migration had to be done in line with basic human rights, and criticizing the government for the negotiations that were based on costs-benefits calculations.

**Table 5.** Comparison of salience and polarization in the media and political discourses during the first and second episodes of contention

	<b>Media</b>	<b>Political discourses</b>
<b>May 2015-Nov. 2015</b>	High salience, Low polarization	Low salience, Low polarization
<b>Dec. 2015-March 2016</b>	High salience, Low polarization	High salience, High polarization
<b>March-Sept. 2017</b>	Low salience, Low polarization	Low salience, High polarization

To summarize, the politicization of the management and taking of responsibility on Syrian refugees in the context of Turkey-EU relations in Turkey has been critically affected by a number of domestic and international incidents and tensions. First of all, the existing literature and the empirical data suggests that the politicization was not directly a consequence of the rising number of refugees in the country, but rather a result of the increasing border passages from Turkey to the EU. As suggested by Erdoğan et al. (2017), the naming of the issue as the “Syrian refugee crisis” was also a repercussion of the second movement of Syrians from Turkey towards the European Union. This finding demonstrates that the politicization of this issue in Europe, and its reflection on the high-level diplomatic negotiations between Turkish and European policy makers had a stronger impact on the increasing politicization of the topic in Turkey.

Second, the high salience of the issue in the public opinion and media in the 2015-2016 period suggests that the dramatic and often deathly incidents during border passages had an impact on the politicization of the issue. The politicization was reinforced by two incidents in September 2015: (1) the death of three year old Alan Kurdi and its reflection on the national and global media, and (2) the protest of Syrian refugees in Istanbul and Edirne, demanding from the EU to open its borders. These two incidents have been often repeated in the political discourse and media coverage, as representing the failure of the EU and the member states in taking the responsibility over the vulnerable populations, and for triggering the humanitarian catastrophe by not expanding the legal routes for the passage of refugees to Europe. This argument was also reinforced regularly by providing numerical comparisons between the number of asylum seekers hosted by Turkey and the EU, as well as the budget allocated by each side. The findings suggest that there is a consensus among the media, public opinion and political discourses about the EU’s and its member states’ failure to take necessary measures against the emerging humanitarian crisis.

Third, despite the overall consensus on how the EU has dealt with the management of migrants and refugees in the aftermath of 2015 Summer, there has been a high polarization among the members of the parliament representing the governing and opposition parties. This situation was mainly related to the way in which the border passages of migrants and the scale of the Syrian population in Turkey has

been used as a “bargaining tool” by the AKP government, when making demands on increased allocation of EU funding and improving Turkey’s accession status, especially in the area of visa liberalization. The polarization increased especially after the minutes of the high-level meetings between Turkey and the EU were disseminated by the media, which has demonstrated that the government pushed the EU by menacing to open the borders and letting Syrian refugees leave Turkey’s borders. The high polarization continued to exist in 2017, at a time when the relations between Turkey and the EU deteriorated due to bilateral conflicts between Turkey and some of the member states. It was often discussed by the members of the opposition parties that the problematic negotiations with the EU on the management of migration and asylum were also a reason behind the deteriorating relations.

Finally, the analysis of the news on *Hürriyet* online suggests that despite the high salience of the issue during May 2015-March 2016 period in comparison to other periods, the polarization remained low in the media throughout the analysed periods. As discussed above, the consensus in the public opinion, the media and the political discourse on the negative perception about the EU’s failure to take of responsibility on this issue has been an important factor against the polarization. Nevertheless, comparing with the political discourse, where high polarization has been witnessed between the government and opposition parties on how the EU-Turkey negotiations have taken place, there seems to be limited polarization in the media and public opinion. It should be noted that 2015-2016 period was marked by an ongoing downward trend in terms of freedom of press and expression in Turkey, as can be followed by considering the freedom ratings of the country, which declined from 3.0 in 2012 (whereas 1 represents best, 7 represents worst) to 3.5 from 2013 onwards, and by evaluating the press status scores that declined from “Partly Free” in 2013 to “Not Free” as of 2014<sup>5</sup>. Under such conditions, one might argue that there have been limited opportunities for the critical voices among the media and citizens’ activism against the political authority and the policy making.

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<sup>5</sup> Based on Freedom House reports on Turkey, accessed from <http://freedomhouse.org>.

**Table 4.** Different definitions of responsibility by four main political parties in Turkey

	<b>Who is considered to be responsible?</b>	<b>To whom should they be responsible?</b>	<b>What it means to be responsible?</b>
<b>Justice and Development Party (AKP)</b>	Management of refugee issue is a global issue. All countries should be responsible. Turkey and the neighbouring countries are shouldering the responsibility; while the developed countries and the EU and its member states are not.	Particularly Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey and other migrants who are eligible to become asylum seekers.	More equal share of the refugee population (increasing resettlement quotas for EU member states) and sharing the economic burden from Turkey and other neighbouring countries. Providing incentives (e.g. visa liberalization) to those with higher burden.
<b>Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)</b>	Management of refugee's issue is a global issue. All countries should be responsible. Turkey and the neighbouring countries are shouldering the responsibility; while the developed countries and the EU and its member states are not. <b>In the Turkish context, the government is responsible for the erroneous negotiations with the EU.</b>	Particularly Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey and other migrants who are eligible to become asylum seekers.	The rights and opportunities of own nationals and of the ethnic kin should be safeguarded while managing migration.
<b>Republican People's Party (CHP)</b>	Management of refugee issue is a global issue. All countries should be responsible. Turkey and the neighbouring countries are shouldering the responsibility; while the developed countries and the EU and its member states are not. <b>In the Turkish context, the government is responsible for the erroneous negotiations with the EU. The parliament should be responsible for correcting the wrongdoings.</b>	Particularly Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey and other migrants who are eligible to become asylum seekers.	More equal share of the refugee population (increasing resettlement quotas for EU member states), improving acceptance conditions, providing safe path for the passage of refugees, bringing border management in line with human rights. Management of migration should not become a bargaining tool.
<b>People's Democratic Party (HDP)</b>	Management of refugee issue is a global issue. All countries should be responsible. Turkey and the neighbouring countries are shouldering the responsibility; while the developed countries and the EU and its member states are not. <b>In the Turkish context, the government is responsible for the erroneous negotiations with the EU. The parliament should be responsible for correcting the wrongdoings.</b>	Migrants in general.	Management of migration should be done in line with basic human rights. It should not become a bargaining tool.

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