

*FEUTURE Voices***ALLIES AT ODDS WITH INTERLINKED FATES: PREDICTING THE  
TURKEY-EU SECURITY PARTNERSHIP FOR 2019****SINAN ÜLGEN (EDAM)***on behalf of all FEUTURE researchers contributing to  
the analysis within the security dimension*

The FEUTURE project sets out to achieve an ambitious goal: to scrutinize the past of EU-Turkey relations in an attempt to shed light into the state of affairs today, and even more boldly, to predict its future. The analysis follows six streams of drivers that feed into the EU-Turkey relationship, namely, drivers related to politics, economy, energy & climate, migration, identity & culture, and security. At first glance, the latter of these six streams could perhaps seem like the most straightforward one. After all, security has been one of the primary driving forces of relations between Turkey and Europe for decades (and centuries for those that prefer to dial further back to the times of empires) and has been one of geostrategic imperative. Especially with the beginning of the Cold War, the destinies of Turkey and Western Europe (and gradually that of the rest of the continent) were merged under the rubric of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) – with both the alliance and the broader security cooperation between the EU and Turkey managing to stand the test of time.

Yet the conclusions of the FEUTURE Security Work Package Team, which consisted of researchers from EDAM (Istanbul), CIDOB (Barcelona), CRRG (Tbilisi), DIIS (Copenhagen), ELIAMEP (Athens), IAI (Rome), and MERI (Erbil), suggest that security plays a not-so-impactful and not-so-straightforward role in the EU-Turkey relationship. For one, the authors note that due to the critical space that NATO occupies in transatlantic security, and in the absence of a parallel security institution between the EU and Turkey to play a similar role, security has not been one of the primary drivers of Turkey and EU relations (although it certainly has been one for Turkey's relations with the West in general). While there is an added interest in Brussels to reduce its dependency on NATO in light of the Trump administration's shifting stance towards the alliance and the Brexit vote, it remains unclear whether PESCO will evolve to play a similar role, shedding the legacy of previous unsuccessful attempts, or whether Turkey will ever be a full-fledged partner of PESCO. Instead, the researchers argue, other drivers, notably political and economic ones have been more at the forefront in determining the trajectory of the EU-Turkey relationship.

<sup>1</sup> This article was originally published by El País on July 17, 2017 as part of this newspaper contribution to LENA, an alliance of European newspapers including Die Welt (Germany), El País (Spain), La Repubblica (Italy), Le Figaro (France), Le Soir (Belgium), Tages-Anzeiger and Tribune de Genève (both from Switzerland).



Secondly, beyond an issue of salience, is one of overlap. The authors inspecting the evolution of [Security Interests, Threat Perceptions and Discourses of Turkey and the EU](#), the role of the drivers emanating from the [Middle East](#), and [Eastern Europe and Caucasus](#), as well as [across the globe](#), and [Greek-Turkish relations and the Cyprus dispute](#), highlight a growing gap in European and Turkish security policy. This gap increasingly extends beyond the more objective differences (for example the weight of issues concerning Eastern Europe for European security vs. the weight of issues concerning the Middle East for Turkish security, purely from a perspective of geographical proximity, if nothing else), into more subjective ones interlinked with perceptions, foreign policy aspirations, political, economic, geostrategic, and security interests, among others. A quick example is Moscow’s transformation from a centripetal force for EU-Turkey security relations throughout the Cold War and the two decades that followed it into a centrifugal force over the last decade.

In our paper ‘A Dissonant Harmony: Threats, Perceptions, and the Role of Security in EU-Turkey Relations’ (to be published within FEUTURE’s edited volume) that synthesizes the findings of the aforementioned papers, we note that the cases where both sides have perceived core national security threats have unsurprisingly been the biggest drivers of cooperation (such as the threat al-Qaeda posed in the first half of the 2000s). In turn, the main sources of tension present themselves as cases where one side perceives hard security threats while the other does not share this perception or does not agree on the prioritization and response mechanisms – the more internal the source of dispute, the more damaging it has been for the relationship, the Cyprus dispute and the Kurdish issue being two main examples.

Overall, the authors conclude, as with the majority of FEUTURE authors working in other work streams, that the EU-Turkey relationship is increasingly characterized with a ‘conflictual cooperation’ scenario, a setup where the parties cooperate out of need and try to benefit from existing arrangements, but do not share a common vision for the future and lack a desire to improve and deepen their relationship. The papers, available on the [FEUTURE website](#), offer a detailed account of the relevance, weight and impact of a few dozen metrics on the EU-Turkey security relationship, while making projections for the future. The security dimension of migration, non-proliferation, defense industry cooperation, conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction, establishing a security infrastructure beyond NATO, and emerging threats such as cyber security are noted as potential venues for sustained collaboration. Terrorism is a notable source of both cooperation and friction, the latter of which apparent in cases where the sides do not agree on the threat (or the lack of one) a non-state actor poses and how to respond to it – an issue that was exacerbated considerably after the Syrian civil war. The authors note that the Kurdish issue will likely be a major source of friction between the EU and Turkey, feeding from differences of opinion relating to both the domestic Kurdish issue in Turkey as well as the issues relating to Kurdish non-state actors in Syria, notably the PYD.

Russia presents another complex variable in the relationship. Some authors highlight the increasing strategic nature and prominence of the Turkey-Russia relationship, hypothesizing this



is more than a passing trend but presents a rather strategic divergence between the EU and Turkey, whereas others underline the many competitive undercurrents of the Turkey-Russia relations, noting that Turkey and the EU may find a common interest to counter increasing Russian influence in the future. Finally, the Cyprus dispute continues to present a fault line, producing tensions for EU-Turkey relations against the monumental potential for cooperation it could present should the impasse be broken in favor of a political solution.

The developments since this analysis was first penned in Spring 2018 largely correspond to the findings reflected above. Looking at these events and how they impacted EU-Turkey relations with the guideline provided above could help predict how the EU-Turkey security relationship will fare in 2019 in the absence of any ‘wild cards’ – breakthroughs or major calamities that are highly unlikely but yet could severely push the relationship in one direction or the other.

The Turkish decision to purchase S-400 missile defense systems from Russia continues to be one of the main thorns in Turkey’s relations with its NATO allies, notably with the United States. Critics argue that Turkey’s prospective purchase of the S-400 system would allow Russia to gain an intimate understanding of NATO systems, notably that of the F-35 warplanes, while also serving as a long-term strategic anchor for Turkey-Russia relations. Ankara has noted that it will take precautions such as developing its own software to run the S400s to ensure that NATO systems will not be impacted from the purchase but has so far failed to assuage its allies. Washington’s assertion that Turkey cannot operate the F35s alongside the S-400 and its latest offer to Ankara regarding the purchase of Patriot missile defense systems instead of the S-400s have not swayed Ankara thus far, which argues that the procurement of S-400s should not be linked to any other defense procurement.

The S-400 debate comes at the backdrop of another deal between Turkish defense organizations and French-Italian EUROSAM on the joint development and purchase of missile defense systems. The current agreement envisions the preparation of the Concept Assessment Study until the end of 2019, aimed towards identifying joint needs and priorities to lay the groundwork for the potential joint-development of the missile defense systems. Should it materialize, the joint-development of missile defense systems would serve as a source of long-term security cooperation between the EU and Turkey, while at the same time satisfying the Turkish aspiration of enhancing its domestic technical know-how and defense engineering capacity through technology transfers. The sides have also voiced the potential to export the system to third party markets, creating another venue for mutual interest. However, against the early promise that the French-Italian Eurosam and Turkish Roketsan and Aselsan agreement holds, Ankara’s potential purchase of the S-400s would likely undermine the EU-Turkey security relationship.

In Syria, Turkey and EU Member States continue to lead separate tracks in attempts to bring stability to the country and shape its post-conflict future, but this discrepancy has not produced cooperative or competitive dynamics for the most part. The main caveat to this has been the polar opposite views of key EU Member States, notably France and Germany, and Turkey on the PYD



and its armed wing YPG, which Turkey equates with the PKK. Previous escalations between Turkey and the PYD has produced results beyond straining the relationship between EU members and Turkey, such as the 2018 German decision to halt a tank modernization project with Turkey. Washington’s announcement to withdraw from Syria once its operation against ISIL is concluded flamed the issue once more. Turkey’s renewed rhetoric on a potential military incursion in Syria to erode PYD presence along the Turkish border was followed by vocal support from Paris for the PYD against a potential Turkish offensive. Any escalation – let alone a confrontation that involves Turkish forces and that of a European nation – has the potential to negatively impact EU-Turkey security cooperation. Furthermore, Washington’s tentative withdrawal may further alter the power dynamics in the Syrian civil war, as displayed by the political maneuvering of Russia, Iran, and the Assad regime vis a vis the PYD following the US announcement. The mismatch between the Turkish and European stances on PYD, as well as Turkey’s domestic Kurdish issue, will continue to be thorns in the EU-Turkey relationship in 2019, and may have tangible negative impacts for their bilateral security cooperation.

Another trend to watch for 2019 will undoubtedly be the relations between Turkey and Greece and the trajectory of the Cyprus dispute. The failure to find a breakthrough in the diplomatic negotiations between the two sides of the island in 2018 has once again seen a return to the uneasy status quo. Hydrocarbon resources continue to be a source of friction and a potential for naval escalation off the shores of the island, as Ankara objects Nicosia to explore and drill resources without including the Turkish North, and by proxy Turkey, and has asserted that it will conduct its own exploration activities in response. Any naval escalation in the Eastern Mediterranean would undoubtedly be to the detriment of EU-Turkey security relationship. In turn, relations between Athens and Ankara have also followed a rough patch, with recent muscle flexing over the Aegean Sea – though a recent visit by the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras to Turkey may clear the air and reduce tensions between the two neighbors. The decades long disputes plaguing the two seas will likely continue in 2019 in the absence of a concerted effort on all sides, thus presenting potential sources of friction for the EU-Turkey relationship.

Overall, the EU and Turkey share numerous security challenges, culminating from transnational terrorism, state fragility, a return to geopolitical competition in the international stage, emerging threats on cyber security and critical infrastructure, peaceful non-proliferation in the Middle East, and risks to the cohesion of their alliance. However, it seems that the security relationship between Ankara and Brussels will continue to be characterized by the “conflictual cooperation” scenario, with numerous sources of tension on the surface impacting the ongoing collaboration in the background and limiting the prospects for deepened and more meaningful security cooperation between the two sides.



# ABOUT FEUTURE

FEUTURE sets out to explore fully different options for further EU-Turkey cooperation in the next decade, including analysis of the challenges and opportunities connected with further integration of Turkey with the EU.

To do so, FEUTURE applies a comprehensive research approach with the following three main objectives:

1. Mapping the dynamics of the EU-Turkey relationship in terms of their underlying historical narratives and thematic key drivers.
2. Testing and substantiating the most likely scenario(s) for the future and assessing the implications (challenges and opportunities) these may have on the EU and Turkey, as well as the neighbourhood and the global scene.
3. Drawing policy recommendations for the EU and Turkey on the basis of a strong evidence-based foundation in the future trajectory of EU-Turkey relations.

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