



The European Parliament's Perspective on EU–Turkey Relations

Michael Kaeding and Felix Schenuit

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past fifteen years, the political situation between the European Union (EU) and Turkey has experienced many ups and downs. Driven by the migration crisis, the failed *coup d'état* on 15 July 2016, and ongoing (mutual) provocations, relations between Brussels and Ankara continue to face a multitude of challenges. These challenges have also shaped the debates and decisions in the European Parliament (EP) regarding EU–Turkey relations. These, in turn, have influenced the current state of the accession negotiations. According to the EU Treaty, the EP has the right to veto future rounds of EU enlargements. During the last fifteen years, several resolutions on the general situation in Turkey, concrete calls to ‘freeze’ accession negotiations in 2016 (European Parliament, 2016) and the recommendation to ‘suspend’ negotiations in 2017 and 2019

M. Kaeding (✉)
University of Duisburg-Essen, Duisburg, Germany
e-mail: michael.kaeding@uni-due.de

F. Schenuit
University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany
e-mail: felix.schenuit@posteo.de

(European Parliament, 2017, 2019a) show that relations between the EP and Turkey have become increasingly politicized and tense. The adoption of these EP resolutions also confirms the observation that Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) more and more feel the need and responsibility to express their opinions and concerns about the situation in Turkey (Phinnemore & İçener, 2016).

The role of the EP in EU–Turkey relations has attracted some scholarly attention, with scholars having explored EP–Turkey relations from several perspectives. Scholars have analyzed the reasons why the EP’s role in promoting the EU’s fundamental values in Turkey has remained largely limited to the implications of the post-enlargement European international society for Turkey. They also focused on the discourses of the main center-right political party group (European People’s Party, EPP) in the EP concerning Turkey’s accession to the EU, uncovered what drives the EP’s discussions on a so-called ‘privileged partnership’ for Turkey, and how MEPs voted on a particular amendment proposing a special status for Turkey (Gürkan, 2018; Aydın-Düzgüt, 2015; Rumelili, 2011; Yuvacı, 2013; Türkeş-Kılıç, 2020).

This contribution will go one step further. Based on MEPs’ voting behavior on all Turkey-related files since 2005, we will show how the EP’s support for Turkey’s accession to the EU has changed over time. After having a supportive role in the first years of official negotiations, the attitude of the MEPs changed significantly over the years. In 2017, the EP called for suspending negotiations with Ankara. Twelve years after the official start of accession negotiations, the EP closed its ‘accession door’. In this chapter, we will analyze the EP’s perspective on EU–Turkey relations over the years and its role in Brussels’ institutional structures. We use VoteWatch Europe data to show why Sjursen’s (2002: 491) early observation in 2002—that ‘[...] in order to trigger a decision to enlarge, something more than instrumental calculations and something less than a selfless concern for human rights has been at play’—is an accurate description of the EU’s negotiations with Turkey. Finally, we will identify a possible key for ‘re-opening’ the EP’s ‘accession door’ and provide an outlook for the EP perspective on EU–Turkey relations.

10.2 EU–TURKEY RELATIONS AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

10.2.1 *History and Formal Competencies*

Unlike any other candidate state, Turkey is a divisive issue in political discussions surrounding EU enlargement. Back in 1959, at the dawn of European integration in the European Economic Community, Turkey applied for (associate) membership of the newly formed confederation of states. In 1963, an association agreement was drawn up with a view toward membership (see also Turhan & Reiners, Chapter 1). During this period, the European and Turkish parliaments started to cooperate in an EU–Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee. Initially, each side sent a delegation of 15 members to the committee, which aimed to meet twice a year, in venues alternating between Turkey and either Brussels or Strasbourg. In accordance with the EP's resolution of 14 May 1965, the EP is to reflect on all matters relating to Turkey's relations with the EU. For example, after the entry into force of the Customs Union on 31 December 1995, the EP also scrutinized Turkey's implementation (European Parliament, 2009). At the start of Turkey's application, both sides were aware that Turkey's EU accession would be a long-term process; the goals of European integration were, and still are, uncertain, and the cultural, political, and religious character of the states involved are very different.

Article 49 of the Treaty of the European Union states that an absolute majority of the EP must consent to the accession of a new member state. Although the European Council and the Council remain the most important institutions in the enlargement process (Turhan, 2016; see also Turhan & Wessels, Chapter 8), the EP's final approval of accession provides the MEPs with veto power. Therefore, the EP established an internal monitoring process with regard to Turkey's accession from 2005 onward. Following the European Commission's annual country reports,¹ the MEPs express their opinions on the current state of the EU's negotiations and relationship to Turkey through an annual resolution on these reports. In addition to this, the resolutions on the EU's enlargement

¹Until 2014, the reports were named 'progress reports', from 2015 onwards the published reports by the Commission are named 'Report on Turkey'. They are also commonly referred to as 'country' or 'regular' reports. See also Bürgin, Chapter 9.

strategy are part of the EP's role in the negotiations. Another, more technical, competency stems from its role in the adoption of the multi-annual financial framework. Within the adoption of this special legislative procedure, the EP has a vote on the allocation of the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) (European Parliament, 2018; for a detailed analysis on the role of IPA in Turkey, see Youngs & Küçükkeleş, 2017).² The EP is not capable of 'suspending' the accession negotiations on its own, but it can adopt critical resolutions, as it did in 2016, 2017, and 2019.

10.2.2 *Relevant Actors and Procedures in the European Parliament*

The following section identifies the relevant actors and procedures regarding EU–Turkey relations within the EP. In addition to the already mentioned resolutions on country reports by the Commission, this section will also shed light on important MEPs, the Turkey delegation, and the importance of 'resolutions on topical subjects'.

10.2.2.1 *Members of the European Parliament*

Within the EP, three MEPs are of particular importance for the EP's role in EU–Turkey relations. Firstly, the rapporteur, who is responsible for drafting resolutions on the reports on Turkey, has considerable influence on the EP's position on developments in Turkey. As the EP's rapporteur on Turkey between 2014 and 2019, Kati Piri (Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), Netherlands) coordinated these resolutions. For the 9th legislative term (from October 2019 onward) the EP appointed Nacho Sanchez Amor as the new rapporteur (S&D, Spain). The prominence of the rapporteur was exemplified in an occurrence in 2016: Shortly before the above-mentioned resolution on suspension in November 2016 and her forthcoming visit to Turkey as part of an official EP delegation, Piri was declared a *persona non grata* by the Turkish government (Baydar, 2016). The former president of the EP, Martin

²The Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance for Turkey amounted to 3.533 million EUR from 2014 to 2020 (IPA II), not including the allocation for Cross-border Cooperation. Between 2007 and 2013, the EU spent 4.799 million EUR for IPA I. For IPA II, the EU agreed on the following priority sectors for funding: democracy and governance, rule of law and fundamental rights, home affairs, environment and climate action, transport, energy, competitiveness and innovation, education, employment and social policies, agriculture and rural development, and regional and territorial cooperation.

Schulz, therefore, postponed the visit of the delegation, although he initially arranged to continue the trip in order to strengthen the dialogue between the EU and Turkey.

The president of the EP is the second MEP of individual importance. On the one hand, s/he represents the EP's viewpoint on developments in Turkey and EU–Turkey relations as well as personally deals with Turkish government officials during their visits in Brussels; therefore, s/he is in direct contact with Turkish government representatives. For example, in 2019, EP President David Sassoli declared Turkey's military incursion into Northern Syria 'an act of war' (Kennedy & Chadwick, 2019). On the other hand, the president is responsible for reacting to the criticism of EP resolutions coming from the Turkish government.

In addition to the rapporteur and the president, the chair of the foreign affairs committee (AFET) is a person of interest. As the AFET committee is responsible for relations with candidate countries and therefore prepares the EP's internal procedures and resolutions, its chair—together with the rapporteur—is responsible for coordinating and organizing a majority vote on the EP's positions on EU–Turkey relations.

10.2.2.2 *The European Parliament's Delegation to the EU–Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee*

The EP has 41 delegations to third countries. Each MEP is a full member of one delegation and a substitute member of another. Twenty-five MEPs are regular members of the Turkey delegation and, together with twenty-five parliamentarians from Turkey, they form the EU–Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC). According to its Rules of Procedures approved in 2010, 'the Committee shall, in principle, meet three times a year' with a view to 'analyse and evaluate issues related to all existing bilateral arrangements between Turkey and the EU' and strengthen 'the relations between the Turkish Grand National Assembly and the European Parliament' (European Parliament, 2010: Rule 2). According to the 2019 EP resolution, the JPC met in March 2018 'after three years of standstill in interparliamentary relations' (European Parliament, 2019a). The following section analyzes the composition of the EP delegation during the last three terms of the EP and argues that party group affiliations and nationality matter. An analysis of the EP's composition by country reveals a remarkable imbalance in both of these categories.

10.2.2.3 *Composition of the European Parliament Delegation*

As Fig. 10.1 shows, the composition of the EP delegation according to political group does not differ significantly from the party-political composition of the plenary. The relative proportions of the parties seem to have been consistent over the last four election periods.

However, taking a look at the composition of the EP delegation by nationality (Fig. 10.2), the proportions of the various nationalities of MEPs in the delegation have changed significantly over the last few years, and the proportionality by member state has not been maintained. The United Kingdom, for example, was no longer represented at all in the EP delegation in the 8th election period, despite having a relatively large number of MEPs. However, Greek and Cypriot MEPs have always been considerably overrepresented (17%). During the 8th legislative term, the number of Greek MEPs outnumbered even the German delegation, closely followed by the Cypriot MEPs, despite the clear differences in their respective absolute numbers of MEPs (Germany: 96, Greece: 21, Cyprus: 6). Today, still, 17% of MEPs sitting on the delegation are from Greece and Cyprus.

Traditionally, also, with the exception of the current (9th) election period, at least one of the vice-chairs has been a Greek MEP. Greece and Turkey are closely connected with the Cyprus conflict, which represents one of the key differences of opinion between Turkey and the EU (see also Turhan & Reiners, Chapter 1). In the 8th election period, chair and all vice-chairs have been Greek and Cypriot MEPs. The principle of ensuring that within the delegation ‘Member States [...] are fairly represented’ (European Parliament, 2020: 123), set out in the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament, is clearly not observed here.

10.2.2.4 *Resolutions*

In the EP, two different types of resolutions are especially relevant for the EU’s relations with Turkey. First, MEPs vote on incident-driven ‘resolutions on topical subjects’. They use this to express their opinions about specific developments in Turkey or EU–Turkey relations in a more general sense. Second, the EP has a more routinized procedure and formulates a resolution on the Commission’s country report on Turkey. During the last few years, so-called ‘own-initiative’ reports have been adopted more and more frequently (see Table 10.1). The most recent EP resolutions on Turkey illustrate the relevant topics discussed in the EP in this context: the Armenian ‘genocide’, the situation of journalists in Turkey, a response

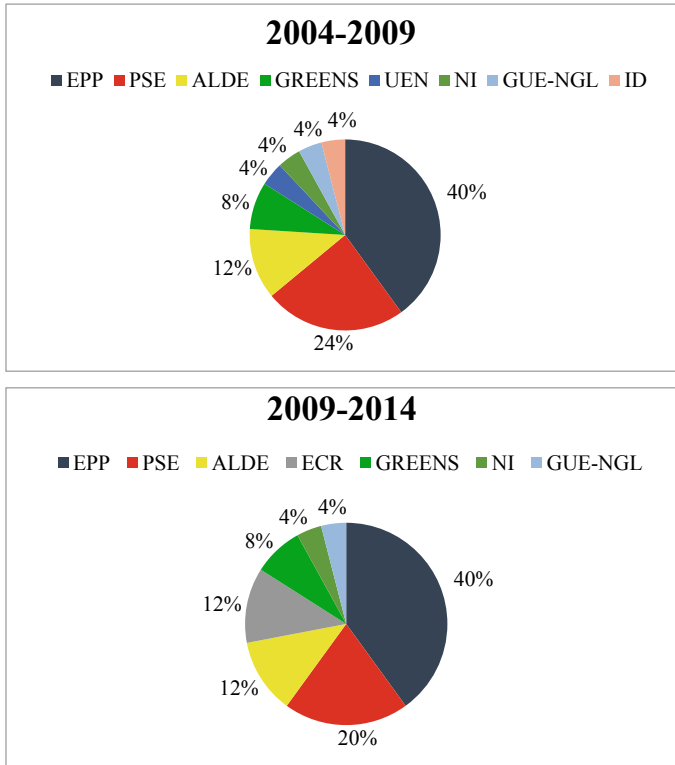


Fig. 10.1 Composition of the European Parliament's Delegation to the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee by political group in the 6th (2004–2009), 7th (2009–2014), 8th (2014–2019), and 9th (2019–2024) election period³ (*Source* Own compilation based on European Parliament [n.d.]. Delegation to the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee: Members [current term and archives])

³Abbreviations of political groups in the EP in alphabetical order: ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe—RENEW: Renew Europe since the 9th EP term; ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists; EFDD: Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy; EPP: European People's Party; GREENS: Greens—GREENS/EFA: Greens-European Free Alliance since the 9th EP term; GUE-NGL: European United Left/Nordic Green Left; ID: Identity and Democracy; NI: Non-Inscrits (MEPs not in a political group); PSE: Party of European Socialists/Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D).

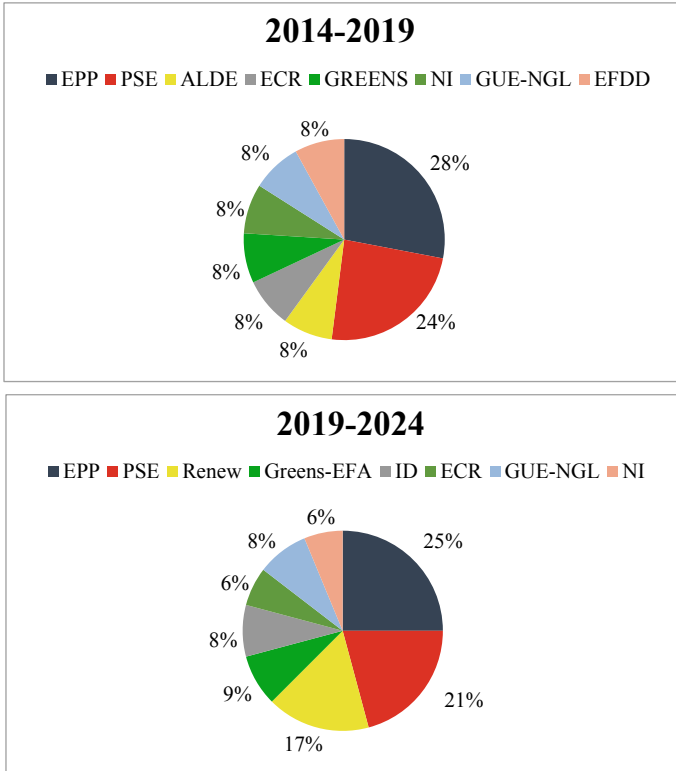


Fig. 10.1 (continued)

to police intervention in the Gezi Park demonstrations, a response to the political developments after the coup attempt, and the current human rights situation in Turkey.

The Commission’s annual country reports and the EP’s subsequent response provide deeper insight into the relationship between the EU and Turkey. Since the start of the official negotiations in 2005, these reports have acted as some kind of official barometer for accession negotiations with Turkey. The Commission drafts these reports as part of the annual ‘enlargement package’ for each candidate country and potential candidate countries. In the reports, the Commission assesses the current

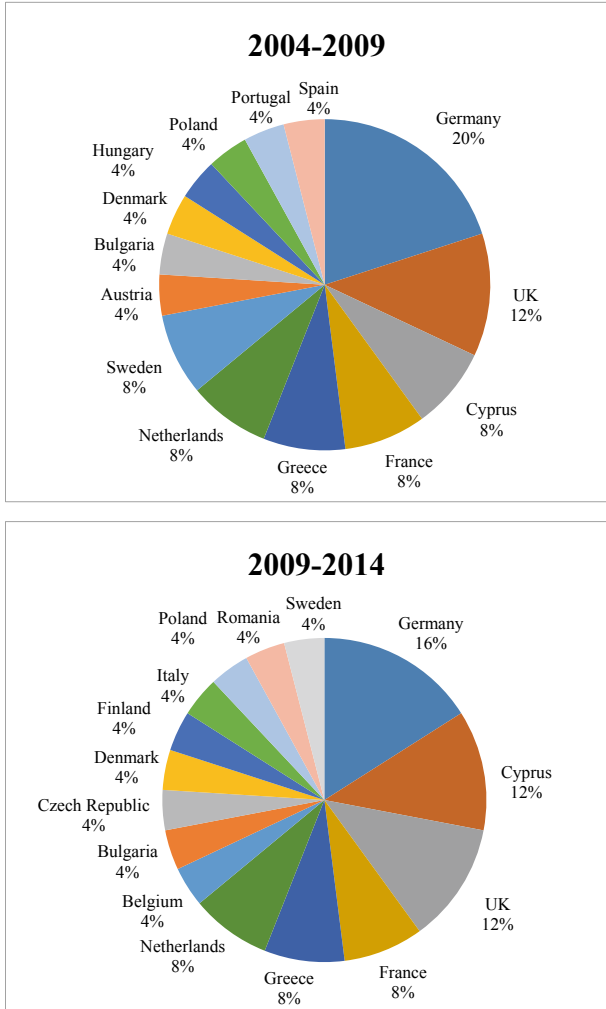


Fig. 10.2 Composition of the European Parliament's Delegation to the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee by nationality in the 6th (2004–2009), 7th (2009–2014), 8th (2014–2019), and 9th (2019–2024) election period (*Source* Own compilation based on European Parliament [n.d.]. Delegation to the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee: Members [current term and archives])

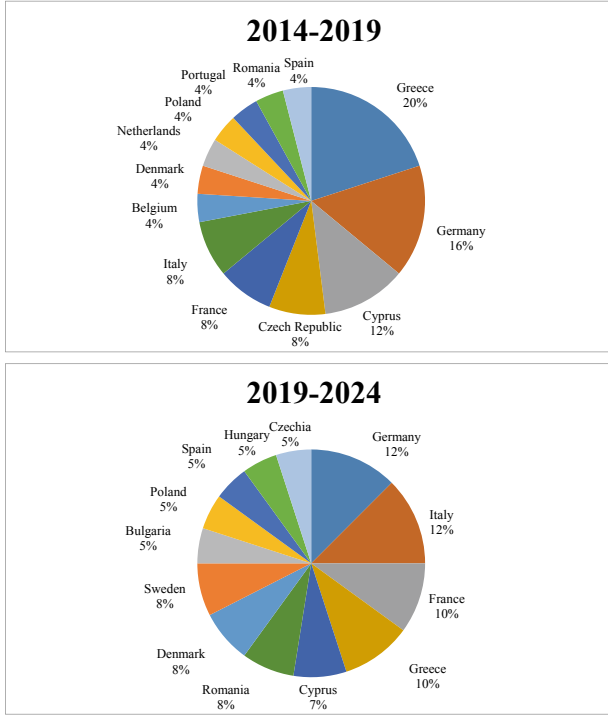


Fig. 10.2 (continued)

developments in each country on the basis of the criteria that are relevant to accession (see also Burgin, Chapter 9). In response, the EP then adopts a resolution on these reports in which it expresses an opinion on the current developments in the relevant country and the status of the negotiations. These annual EP resolutions have therefore become a routine within the Parliament. During the last fifteen years, these resolutions have covered a vast variety of topics and were always adapted to the current political situation and occurrences in Turkey and the EU. Nevertheless, some topics have been constantly debated from 2005 until today. Phinnemore and İener observe, ‘debates on the Commission’s regular reports on Turkish accession have often been heated’ and that the following issues have been debated regularly: ‘the rule of law, freedom of press, democratic backsliding, authoritarian tendencies, social media

Table 10.1 List of the European Parliament's topical resolutions on Turkey (2009–2019)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Title of resolution</i>	<i>Document file Date of the vote</i>
<i>7th Legislative Term (2009–2014)</i>		
2009	Resolution on the Commission's 2009 enlargement strategy paper concerning the Western Balkan countries, Iceland and Turkey	2009/2675(RSP) 26.11.2009
2010	Trade and economic relations with Turkey	2009/2200(INI) 21.09.2010
2012	2020 perspective for women in Turkey	2011/2066(INI) 22.05.2012
2013	Resolution on the situation in Turkey	2013/2664(RSP) 13.06.2013
<i>8th Legislative Term (2014–2019)</i>		
2014	Resolution on Turkish actions creating tensions in the exclusive economic zone of Cyprus	2014/2921(RSP) 13.11.2014
2015	Resolution on freedom of expression in Turkey: recent arrests of journalists, media executives and systematic pressure against media	2014/3011(RSP) 15.01.2015
2016	Resolution on the situation of journalists in Turkey	2016/2935(RSP) 27.10.2016
2016	Resolution on EU–Turkey relations	2016/2993(RSP) 24.11.2016
2018	Resolution on the current human rights situation in Turkey	2018/2527(RSP) 08.02.2018
2018	Resolution on the violation of human rights and the rule of law in the case of two Greek soldiers arrested and detained in Turkey	2018/2670(RSP) 19.04.2018
2018	Resolution on the extension of the facility for refugees in Turkey	2018/2072(BUD) 04.07.2018
2018	Resolution covering the cancellation of the support to Turkey from IPA II	2018/2165(BUD) 02.10.2018
<i>9th Legislative Term (2019–2024)</i>		
2019	Resolution on situation in Turkey, notably the removal of elected mayors	2019/2821(RSP) 19.09.2019
2019	Resolution on the Turkish military operation in northeast Syria	2019/2886(RSP) 24.10.2019

Source Own compilation based on the Legislative Observatory of the EP

bans, the freedoms and rights accorded to religious and ethnic minorities, Turkish Government positions on the Cyprus issue and the Armenian “genocide” (Phinnemore & İçener, 2016: 457). Furthermore, Phinnemore and İçener highlight the EP’s ‘fierce criticism’ on the handling of the Gezi Park protests. They conclude that while there is support for Turkey’s accession in the EP, it is ‘highly conditional, and it cannot mask the opposition’ (Phinnemore & İçener, 2016: 457).

10.2.3 *Methodology: VoteWatch as the Key to Assessing Power Dynamics in the European Parliament*

Focusing on the voting records of MEPs in light of the annual resolutions on the regular reports on Turkey is a useful tool to trace the state of affairs in EU–Turkey relations from the EP’s perspective. Our analysis for the adopted resolutions from 2005 to 2019 is based on data made available by VoteWatch Europe.⁴ The study of this data helps identify possible turning points and other characteristics of the EP’s perspective on EU–Turkey relations.

The VoteWatch database includes all electronic roll-call votes in the EP. It includes final votes as well as partial votes on amendments. The data can be organized by political group affiliation, nationality, and voting behavior of the individual MEPs. Besides breaking down the votes into ‘For’, ‘Against’, ‘Abstention’, ‘Absent’, and ‘Didn’t vote’, the database also classifies the MEPs as being loyal to their European political group line or deviating from it. The political line of the group is determined by the majority of the votes cast within each party. In addition to breaking down the voting results in this way, the VoteWatch portal calculates a cohesion rate within the political groups and member states for each vote.

The main weakness of the data lies in its limited availability. The VoteWatch database can collect electronic roll-call votes only. Every vote decided by so-called ‘show of hands’ is not part of the database. In this particular analysis, the data for the resolutions in 2007, 2010, 2011, and 2018 is missing. Despite the shortcomings of the available data, the dataset helps identify voting patterns of individual political groups and national delegations over the last fourteen years inside the EP.

⁴VoteWatch Europe is an independent, international non-governmental organisation. It provides access to the voting data of the European Parliament and European Council. For the Parliament, the voting data for all roll-call votes since July 2004 is available.

10.2.4 *Changes in Sentiment in EU–Turkey Relations? Parliamentary Voting Results from 2005 to 2019*

Our interpretation of the data is based on the following observation and assumption: from 2005 to 2016, every single resolution included the demand to open new negotiation chapters in the accession process. Although many counterarguments by opponents of Turkey's accession can be found in the text of the resolutions, voting for these resolutions, in the end, legitimized the ongoing process and can therefore be interpreted as support for the accession process. On the basis of this assumption, it can also be said that the 2017 resolution then did not include any demand to open new chapters and even called—as mentioned above—for the 'suspension' of the ongoing process. By including the call for suspending the accession process, the meaning of voting 'for' and 'against' reversed. Whereas voting 'for' the resolution stood for support of an ongoing accession procedure from 2005 to 2016, voting 'for' the resolution in 2017 was an expression of deep concern about the accession process and the political demand to put the procedure on hold.

10.2.4.1 *Decreasing Support for Turkey's Accession in the European Parliament*

Looking at the voting behavior of the Parliament on various resolutions since 2005 (Fig. 10.3), it becomes clear that the EP's voting behavior severely changed between 2005 and 2019. The EP's highest approval rating of Turkey's accession was reached in 2008, with just over 70% of MEPs in favor. In comparison with 2005 (49%), the approval level had risen by 23%. At the same time, the number of votes 'against' had decreased by 11% in this period (2005–2008). However, this trend was reversed with the resolution in 2012. Since then, support within the Parliament has fallen. While the proportion of MEPs rejecting the resolutions rose to 20% by 2014, the approval level dropped to 63% (2014) and then to 49.9% (2016).⁶ In 2017, however, the trend of decreasing 'for' votes reversed due to the above-mentioned reorientation of the political

⁶In the case of rulings on which a decision is made by means of a consent procedure, an absolute majority of the MEPs is required, i.e., 50% of the constituent MEPs plus one. This means that everyone who does not vote in favor rejects this absolute majority. This group of objectors, which is made up of three subgroups (Non-voters, Absent, and Against) would have been able to prevent Turkey's accession to the EU in 2005 and again in 2016.

demand of the resolution. The remarkable increase of ‘for’ votes (+14%) is therefore due to the inclusion of the political demand to ‘suspend’ the accession negotiations (European Parliament, 2017: 7). If this reorientation is taken into account (‘Reoriented For’ in Fig. 10.3), support for the accession negotiations continued to decrease and reached its lowest level in 2017.

Figure 10.4 illustrates the support for the accession procedure based on the condensed observations and assumptions presented above. By assuming that ‘non-voters’, ‘abstentions’, and ‘against’ votes from 2005 to 2016 and ‘for’ voters in 2017 imply opposition to the formal accession process, the chart illustrates that the support for the accession procedure increased from 2005 (47.71%) to 2009 (71.74%) and decreased since then to 36.23% in 2017. In 2019, 50.67% of MEPs voted for the resolution, which is due to the fact that the resolution recommends that the EU ‘suspend’ the accession negotiations.

10.2.4.2 Strategic Non-voters in the European Parliament

There is a correlation between the number of MEPs who did not vote and those who voted ‘for’ the resolution. This trend implies that MEPs who do not wish to vote in favor of the resolutions would rather not take part

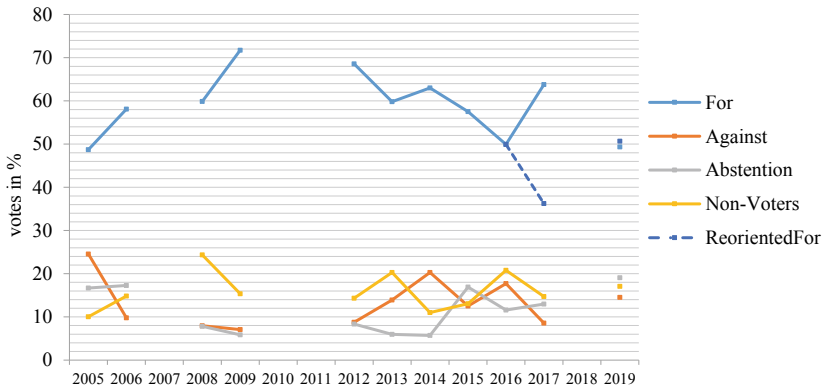


Fig. 10.3 Voting results for European Parliament resolutions on reports on Turkey (2005–2019)⁵ (Source Own illustration based on VoteWatch)

⁵Voting results for 2007, 2010, 2011, and 2018 are missing.

in the vote than abstain or reject the resolution. It is logical to assume that they do this strategically as to avoid being categorized as ‘rebels’ and to avoid internal group conflicts. This is particularly clear in the vote on the 2016 resolution, where the ‘for’ vote decreased by 7%, and the number of non-votes simultaneously increased by 7%. In this vote, more than 20% of the MEPs did not vote at all.

10.2.5 Politicized Voting Behavior of Political Groups in the European Parliament

A deeper understanding of the underlying dynamics within the EP can be established on the basis of voting behavior within political groups (see Fig. 10.5). The extent to which the political groups themselves coordinate or control the voting behavior of their members can be seen from the cohesion rates for each vote. Here, interesting differences occur: The cohesion rates for the conservative groups are, on average, considerably lower than for the groups positioned to the left. The center-right

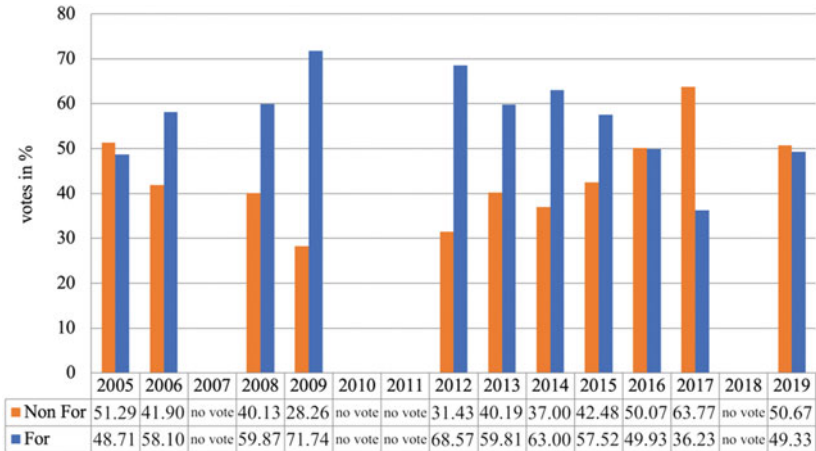


Fig. 10.4 Support for the accession procedure among Members of the European Parliament (2005–2019)⁷ (Source Own illustration based on VoteWatch)

⁷‘Non For’ includes ‘Against’, ‘Abstention’, and ‘Non-Voters’.

European People’s Party (EPP) is—as the biggest group in the EP—particularly striking in this regard. Since 2005, it has supported every majority in favor of the EP resolutions on the Commission’s country reports. However, the cohesion rates for the EPP show that this position has been highly contentious within the group. A comparison with the second-largest political group, the center-left European Socialists and Democrats (S&D), reveals that the cohesion rates of the EPP have, on average, been 22% lower over the last years than those of the S&D group.

To get a deeper understanding of this development in individual groups in the EP, the voting data can be compared at different points in time. We selected 2005 as the starting point of the accession negotiations, 2012 as the turning point marking decreasing support for Turkey’s accession, and the latest votes, in particular in 2019 (see Fig. 10.6).

The voting data for the individual political groups at three different points in time illustrate that S&D, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats

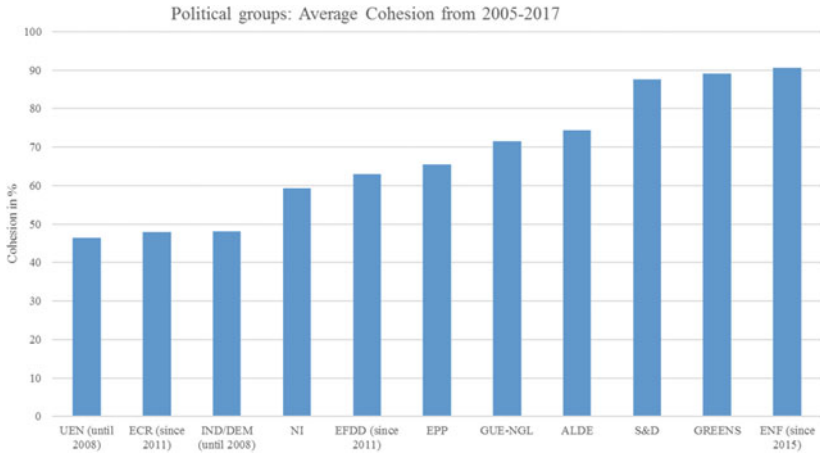


Fig. 10.5 Cohesion of voting behavior of the political groups in the European Parliament on the resolutions concerning the European Commission progress reports on Turkey (in %) ⁸ (Source Own illustration based on VoteWatch)

⁸Abbreviations of further political groups or parties in the EP: ENF: Europe of Nations and Freedom; IN/DEM: Independence/Democracy; UEN: Union for Europe of the Nations. PPE-DE is the French abbreviation for European People’s Party–European Democrats (from 1999 to 2009), which is the EPP since 2009.

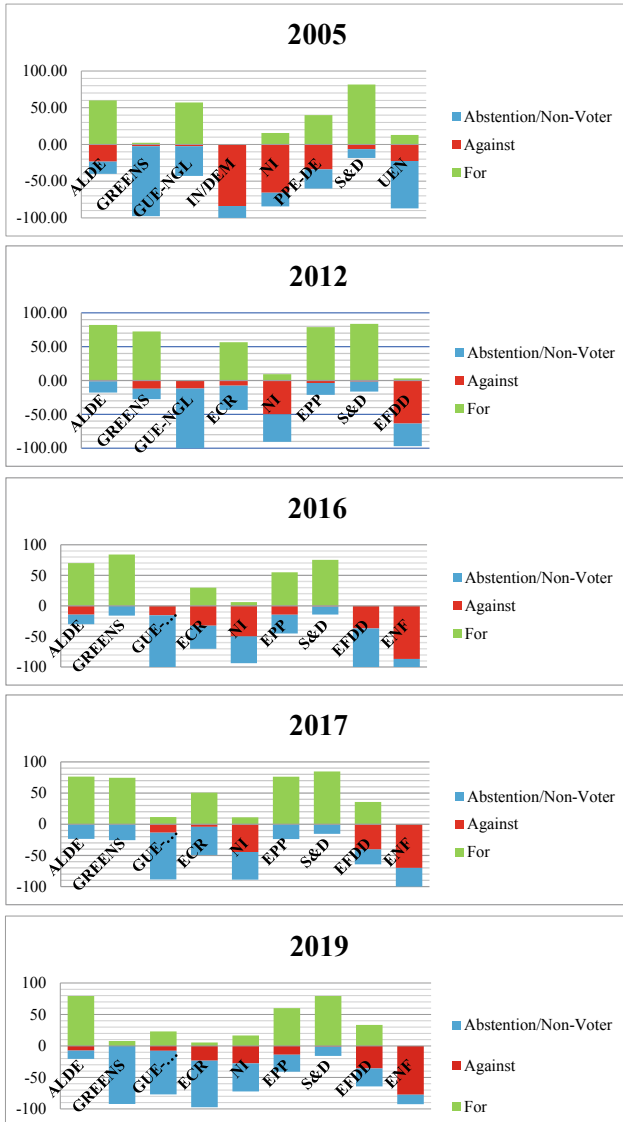


Fig. 10.6 Voting behavior of the political groups in the European Parliament regarding the resolutions adopted in 2005, 2012, 2016, 2017, and 2019 (in %) (Source Own illustration based on VoteWatch)

(ALDE) (Renew Europe since, 2019), and the Greens⁹ had a stable majority voting in favor of the resolutions and had no major anomalies. Only the Greens decided by a majority to abstain in the 2019 from voting on the resolution that called for the suspension of accession talks. One Green MEP explained this vote in the plenary debate by stating, ‘(w)e want to be tough on the regime, but we do not want to suspend negotiations. We want them to continue to be frozen’ (European Parliament, 2019b). In contrast, other political groups have continually stood against the resolutions and shown notable changes over time.

The European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL) group represents a special case, as does the strongest group in the Parliament over the last three parliamentary terms, the EPP. In regard to GUE-NGL, it is worth mentioning that there has been a significant reversal. While the majority voted in favor of accepting the resolution in 2005, the majority abstained from the votes in 2012 and 2016. Also, after the above-mentioned substantive reorientation of the latest resolutions in 2017, the majority of the GUE-NGL voted to abstain (85%). On the one hand, the group repeatedly stressed the unresolved Cyprus conflict. In this context, the Greek GUE-NGL MEP Kostas Chrysogonos said in 2017, for ‘twelve years, Turkey has behaved like a hypocrite. It says that it wants to come into line with the European Union and the EU pretends that it believes that’ (GUE-NGL, 2017). At the same time, the German GUE-NGL MEP Martina Michels stressed in the 2019 plenary debate on the progress report resolution to ‘opt for the signal of freezing the negotiations rather than breaking off. Let us show dialogue and solidarity, because Turkey is more than Erdoğan, it is above all the opposition and civil society. They need our voice!’ (European Parliament, 2019b). It is precisely these different aspects of GUE-NGL’s political positions toward EU–Turkey relations that led these MEPs to vote to abstain.

In this regard, the EPP also seems to have undergone a change. While there was a slim majority against accepting the resolution in 2005, the MEPs in the EPP voted 80% in favor in 2012. This strong support might

⁹One exception is the abstention of the Greens in 2005. From the minutes of the plenary sessions and a comparison of the motions for a resolution from the various political groups it is apparent that the Greens were considerably more open to Turkey’s accession and chose far more positive wording than the other groups (see European Parliament, 2005a). The co-chair of the Greens, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, expressed the criticism that many of the statements by MEPs of other political groups opposing Turkey’s accession were based on ‘racist resentments’ (European Parliament, 2005b).

be explained by a positive-pragmatic agenda that was set in light of a political context shaped by an economic crisis and international security challenges. Although the strategic role of EU–Turkey cooperation was mentioned in adopted resolutions before, the 2012 resolution addresses strategic aspects of the cooperation in an open manner. In 2016, the voting behavior of this political group suggested a major disagreement on this issue. Almost half of the MEPs did not vote in favor (14% against, 31% abstention/non-voter). It seems that the already mentioned substantive reorientation of the 2017 resolution, in which the EP called for suspending the negotiations, solved this disagreement and therefore helped reduce the number of the above-mentioned strategic non-voters. In the latest votes, more than 70% of EPP members voted in favor of the resolution, a few voted against the resolution, and around 20% voted to abstain or did not vote. In the latest votes the EPP's cohesion therefore increased considerably (from 57% in 2016, to 82% in 2017). After the significant change in the political message, there was no disagreement between the German or French delegation and their political group. Thus, the former 'haven for 'rebels' in the German and French EPP delegation' (Kaeding & Schenuit, 2016) does not exist anymore. The remaining rebels within the EPP came from Hungary (11), Croatia (5), Bulgaria (4), Czech Republic (1), and Cyprus (1).

The latest votes in 2016, 2017, and 2019 show that the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) is divided on this issue. Although 'for' votes increased from 30 to 51%, the new political message of freezing the accession in the 2017 and 2019 resolutions did not solve these differences. The voting result of the group Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD), however, seems to be affected by shifting the political message from continuation to freezing the negotiations with Turkey.

10.3 CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

Our analysis shows how the EP's perspective on EU–Turkey relations has changed over time. After increasing support for accession from 2005 to 2008, more and more MEPs have reconsidered their voting behavior. Support for the resolutions reached its lowest point in 2016: less than 50% supported the resolution on the country report on Turkey and more than half of all MEPs decided to vote 'against', 'abstention', or chose strategic non-voting to hide conflicts in the political group. In 2017 and

2019, however, this trend stopped, and the ‘for’ votes increased, again. This recent development is due to a political reorientation: in 2017, for the first time since 2005, the resolution on the report did not demand the opening of negotiations chapters. In fact, the MEPs voted for the demand to ‘suspend’ negotiations. The VoteWatch data suggest that the EPP, in particular, was divided on this issue and that the reorientation solved internal group conflicts.

Overall, we notice that EU–Turkey relations have not only become increasingly politicized but also that the EP lacks a political majority for the continuation of the accession procedure with Turkey. Although its decisions do not have any immediate impact on the formal ongoing accession process, this reorientation is another signal of a ‘closed accession door’ in Brussels.

The development in the EP and its inter-institutional differences with the European Council (see Turhan & Wessels, Chapter 8) shows that Sjursen was right when she observed that a decision to enlarge is ‘something more than instrumental calculations and something less than a selfless concern for human rights has been at play’ (Sjursen, 2002: 491). Whereas the European Council is focusing on instrumental calculations, especially with regard to the migration crisis, the EP is mainly focusing on the importance of human rights, rule of law, and the EU’s other core values—the basic elements of a democratic society.

Our analysis clearly shows that the EP has closed its accession door for Turkey. In the current political situation a re-opening seems unlikely. Nevertheless, in the years between 2005 and 2019, the reports on Turkey and the EP resolutions have voiced many arguments for the importance of a ‘strategic partnership’ between the EU and Turkey. These arguments should not be wiped away in an increasingly politicized environment. Vote-seeking and closing the door to accession without identifying possible alternatives for cooperation would be politically and geostrategically shortsighted. The identification and establishment of new narratives for cooperation with Turkey should be a long-term goal for the EP and its MEPs. The upcoming parliamentary terms could be an occasion for the European parties to present their concepts for the future of EU–Turkey relations.

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Michael Kaeding is professor of European integration and European Union politics and has been teaching and publishing on various aspects of European governance at the Department of Political Science of the University of Duisburg-Essen since 2012. He holds an *ad personam* Jean Monnet Chair in 'Understanding EU Decision Making and Member States' Compliance with EU Policies'. Currently, he serves as TEPSA honorary board member, member of the executive board of 'Arbeitskreis Europäische Integration' and of the academic board of the Institute of European Politics (IEP) in Berlin. Kaeding is visiting professor at the College of Europe in Bruges, the Turkish-German University in Istanbul and the European Institute of Public Administration (EIPA) in Maastricht. He is also a Fulbright alumnus and a former Carl Schurz visiting professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Felix Schenuit is Ph.D. candidate at the Center for Sustainable Society Research and member of the Cluster of Excellence CLICCS at the University of Hamburg, Germany. He holds an M.A. in Political Management, Public Policy and Public Administration from the NRW School of Governance at the University of Duisburg-Essen. His research interests include the political system of the EU, European integration, EU climate policies, and global governance.

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