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Ideological Differences Within the European Parliament: How European Parliament Groups Use Gender Equality Within the Turkey Issue

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**Ideological Differences Within the European Parliament: How European Parliament
Groups Use Gender Equality Within the Turkey Issue**



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List of Abbreviations

AA	Association Agreement
AFET	European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs (<i>affaires étrangères</i>)
AKP	<i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i> , Justice and Development Party
ALDE	Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
EEAS	European External Action Service
EFDD	Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group
ENF	Europe of Nations and Freedom
EP	European Parliament
EPG	European Parliament Group
EPP	Group of the European People's Party
EPSR	European Pillar of Social Rights
EU	European Union
Greens/EFA	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
GUE/NGL	Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left
HR	High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ID	Identity and Democracy Group
IIA	Inter-institutional Agreement
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
NI	Non-attached Member of the European Parliament (<i>non-inscrits</i>)
RCV	Roll Call Votes
S&D	Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament
TEU	Treaty on the European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
TSD	Trade and Sustainable Development

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1. Introduction

The European Parliament (EP) is often regarded as the normative voice of the European Union (EU), as it expressly tries to promote European norms and values, such as human rights, in all policy areas (Irrera, 2015). This includes the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), or the Union's external relations, despite the fact that the EP does not have much power in this area. Still, the EP has seen its influence grow since the 2009 Lisbon Treaty. Hence, it has taken the opportunity to promote, for instance, gender equality and feminism in foreign policy (Mølgaard, 2020). In fact, the Parliament is regarded as the frontrunner in promoting gender equality (Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín, 2019).

While the EP as a foreign actor is often researched (e.g., Nitoiu and Sus, 2017; Gürkan, 2018), its inner dynamics regarding foreign relations remain underrepresented. Specifically, the dynamics of the Groups within the EP (EPGs), are scarcely examined in this regard, and if they are, the object of analysis is usually Roll Call Votes (RCV) or interviews. While this certainly has its merits, an analysis of actual debates can provide more insight into the considerations and calculations the EPGs have to make, as well as observe how key policy issues, such as gender equality, are addressed in practice.

Interestingly, Raunio and Wagner (2020), observe that while the EPGs vote generally coherent on foreign policy issues, this is less so in the case of Turkey. This presents an interesting puzzle. It is commonly observed that the EU's relations with Turkey have been deteriorating in recent years (EP, 2021a). This has prompted many scholars to investigate the relationship, and particularly the EU's ability to influence Turkey's policies and behaviour (i.e., Europeanisation) (e.g., Aybars *et al*, 2019; Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm and Cin, 2021; Dedeoğlu, 2013), who have concluded that Turkey is, in fact, de-Europeanising (Aydın-Düzgit and Kaliber, 2016). This is apparently reflected in the EP, given the lack of cohesion in votes.

These observations lead to an excellent opportunity to assess the dynamics of the EPGs regarding Turkey, to find out why there is a lack of cohesion, but particularly to see how their flagship policy, gender equality, comes into play in such a salient foreign relations topic. This leads to the research question: when considering the EP's championing of gender equality, the lack of cohesion in votes about Turkey, and the increasingly deterioration of EU-Turkey relations, how do the political groups in the EP use the topic gender equality within the debate surrounding Turkey between 2016-2021?

EU-Turkey relations and gender policy thus become a case to investigate ideological dynamics in the Parliament; that is, how certain issues such as human rights (here, gender equality) are prioritised in foreign relations, i.e., the Turkey issue. To investigate this, this thesis employs

content analysis and analyses nine debates about Turkey in the period 2016-2021. 2016 is used as a starting point as this is marked as a turning point in EU-Turkey relations. The frame also provides the most recent data. The thesis proceeds as follows. The next chapter discusses the EP in foreign policy, ideological dynamics in the EP, and presents a brief overview of EU-Turkey relations in order to contextualise the research. The third chapter develops the analytical framework based on left-right and pro-against EU integration dimensions, and provides the methodology. After follows the empirical chapter, where content analysis is applied to debates in the Parliament. This is discussed in the chapter thereafter, followed by some concluding remarks.

2. Literature Review

This chapter outlines the role of the European Parliament in European foreign policy as well as the EP's internal dynamics relating to its political groups. Additionally, it provides a brief overview of EU-Turkey relations in order to contextualise the main focus of this thesis. On the basis of this review, the next chapter constructs an analytical framework that guides the empirical research.

2.1. The European Parliament and Foreign Policy

In the realm of EU foreign policy, the role of the European Parliament is rather limited. European foreign policy is traditionally characterised by intergovernmentalism as it rooted in the sovereignty of the Member States, hence there is little room for a supranational entity. In fact, before the Maastricht Treaty (1993) entered into force, the EP did not have a formal role. However, the Parliament has gradually been able to obtain more means of exerting influence in European foreign policy (Van Hecke and Wolfs, 2015).

The Maastricht Treaty, or the Treaty on the European Union (TEU), established a three pillar system, among which the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) was the second. In this pillar, the EP was granted the rights to information and consultation, in which the Parliament has to be informed regularly (most importantly by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR)), can ask parliamentary questions, make recommendations, and has budgetary powers (Van Hecke and Wolfs, 2015). The decision-making power, however, rests with the Commission, the European Council and the Member States. The Lisbon Treaty, or Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), of 2009 abolished the pillar system but kept the CFSP as a separate policy area. It expanded the EP's powers, granting the EP, for instance, the power of consent in international treaties and a consulting role in the set-up of the European External Action Service (EEAS) (Van Hecke and Wolfs, 2015; Herranz-Surrallés, 2014). The primary reason to involve the EP more in external relations stems from concerns over democratic accountability and legitimacy in the CFSP, as most of these (military)

decisions were made behind closed doors (Van Hecke and Wolfs, 2015). For the most part, they still are. The Lisbon Treaty has sought to address these democratic concerns by making the EP a stronger actor in foreign policy (Nitoiu and Sus, 2017). Where enlargement is concerned, the Parliament has to give its consent to each individual accession treaty. Enlargement has been called one of the EU's most significant foreign policy instruments, hence the EP's role is not unimportant.

Van Hecke and Wolfs (2015) also note that the EP was able to obtain more power 'through the backdoor' by concluding inter-institutional agreements (IIAs), which are, according to Article 295 TFEU, binding in nature. By taking a pro-active stance, so they explain, the EP was able to increase their powers over the budget, formal consultations and (the quality of) reports, oversight of (non-military) expenditures, and limited access to otherwise classified information. The EP's consent was also extended from only Association Agreements (AAs) to now the majority of international treaties except those that are strictly CFSP (Riddervold and Rosén, 2016). Here, the EP has been noted to prioritise human rights issues (Van Hecke and Wolfs, 2015). The latest example here is the investment agreement with China, which the EP has postponed indefinitely over human rights violations and sanctions by China (EP, 2021b).

Hence, through budgetary powers, consultation rights and parliamentary scrutiny, the EP has been able to extend its role and influence in foreign policy beyond their formal Treaty powers. In addition, specific parliamentary committees such as the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) and interparliamentary delegations and networks with third country parliaments enhance the level of involvement and procurement of first-hand information (Van Hecke and Wolfs, 2015, Herranz-Surrallés, 2014). On that basis, the EP has posed itself as an increasingly prominent actor in external relations, for instance in the Ukrainian crisis (Nitoiu and Sus, 2017) and the Macedonian political crisis (Fonck, 2018). It is evident that Parliament tries to be as involved as possible in the external relations of the Union, for the sake of its own status and democratic legitimacy. Discussions in the literature primarily revolve around how the EP has obtained these (different) kinds of power and how they bypass the executive branch, i.e., the Commission and the Council.

In that respect, the EP is particularly known to bring issues such as democracy and human rights to the forefront, showcased by for example the *Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World* and the awarding of the Sakharov Prize, which highlight the EP's status as *the* normative institution of the EU (Irrera, 2015, p. 3). Despite its limited capabilities in foreign relations, the EP has nonetheless posed itself as one of the most vocal actors for the safeguarding and inclusion of human rights in various policy areas, earning the name 'civilian power' or normative voice of the EU (Feliu and Serra, 2015, p. 23). Indeed, in international trade agreements, provisions such as labour standards and conditions (so-called Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) chapters)

have expanded significantly after the EP was allocated more power in the Lisbon Treaty (Harrison *et al.*, 2019). For instance, it has been observed to attempt to spread European norms and values in the Turkish political elite (Gürkan, 2018) and has been noted to be successful in Ukraine (Moskalenko and Streltsov, 2015). Particularly within the sphere of human rights, the EP is often regarded as the frontrunner in gender equality, both within the Union ((Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín, 2019, p. 769), and outside (Mølgaard, 2020).

From these observations in the literature it becomes evident that the EP has obtained more power in the CFSP and used this to forward a more ‘normative’ agenda, where they emphasise human rights, labour standards, gender equality and democracy in international agreements, as well as in relations with candidate countries such as Turkey.

2.2. Ideological Dynamics in the Parliament

The attitude of the Parliament thus appears very straightforward, i.e., the obtention of more influence in foreign policy and the promotion of norms and values; but this naturally has to come from somewhere. The EP’s resolutions are debated in the plenary sessions between all groups, as well as consent for accession. This presents interesting opportunities to examine the inner dynamics of the EP and its political groups, specifically ideological differences and priorities. This subsection first discusses the interaction between the EPGs more generally, and then zooms in on those interactions concerning foreign policy.

The current European Parliament is composed of 705 Members (MEPs) (pre-Brexit 751), who are divided into seven political party groups as well as some non-attached Members (NI). As

Political groups in the European Parliament	Number of seats	% of seats
EPP - Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)	221 ●	29.43 %
S&D - Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament	191 ●	25.43 %
ECR - European Conservatives and Reformists Group	70 ●	9.32 %
ALDE - Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe	67 ●	8.92 %
GUE/NGL - Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left	52 ●	6.92 %
Greens/EFA - Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance	50 ●	6.66 %
EFDD - Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group	48 ●	6.39 %
NI - Non-attached Members	52 ●	6.92 %
Total	751	100 %

Figure 1: Composition of the Eighth European Parliament (2014-2019). Source: European Parliament.

Political groups in the European Parliament	Number of seats	% of seats
EPP - Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)	182 ●	24.23 %
S&D - Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament	154 ●	20.51 %
Renew Europe - Renew Europe group	108 ●	14.38 %
Greens/EFA - Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance	74 ●	9.85 %
ID - Identity and Democracy	73 ●	9.72 %
ECR - European Conservatives and Reformists Group	62 ●	8.26 %
GUE/NGL - Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left	41 ●	5.46 %
NI - Non-attached Members	57 ●	7.59 %
Total	751	100 %

Figure 2: Composition of the Ninth European Parliament (2019-2024). Source: European Parliament.

a transnational parliament, the EPGs are each composed of similar-minded domestic political parties from the Member States. Elections are every five years. The timeframe of this thesis, namely from 2016 to 2021, covers two configurations of the EP; the eighth (2014-2019), and the current¹ ninth (2019-2024). Both configurations feature the same seven groups, shown in the figures above. One difference is that in the 2019 Parliament, ALDE has been succeeded by Renew Europe, and the EFDD is replaced by the ID, whose differences shall be addressed later.

The ideological tensions between these groups have been documented in the literature in various policy areas, ranging from a left-right divide, where the right is more conservative and the left more progressive; to a more nuanced “Green/alternative/libertarian (GAL) to traditional/authoritarian/nationalist (TAN)” or GAL/TAN divide, aiming to find a pattern in domestic political parties regarding proposition and opposition to EU issues (Hooghe *et al*, 2002, p. 966). Other studies have emphasised a need for a multi-dimensional perspective on party politics in order to establish a more nuanced understanding of politics and party dynamics (Hooghe *et al*, 2002; Boomgaarden *et al*, 2011). Specifically, distinctions are made between modes and objects of support, which allow for a more detailed perspective on party attitudes within various policy areas and on how this is shown in practice in debates and voting behaviour (Boomgaarden *et al*, 2011; Kopecký and Mudde, 2002). This refers, for instance, to a distinction between attitudes towards ‘day-to-day’ practices (in the EU or nationally) and more general ideological ideas (i.e., the *feeling* towards for instance the EU or market reform). From these various considerations and subsequent

¹ At the time of writing.

empirical research, it has become clear that the left-wing usually supports progressive, ‘green’, and integrationist stances with an emphasis on ‘social’ policies such as a regulated market or gender equality; whereas the right-wing tends to lean more towards conservative, traditional and free-market arguments, although both the extreme right and left tend to be more Eurosceptic (e.g., Hooghe *et al.*, 2002; Van Elsas *et al.*, 2016; Charalambous, 2011).

It must be noted that a majority of literature on party politics focus on national, domestic political parties within the Member States, with a special focus on attitudes towards European integration. To a certain extent, this holds up for the EP as well, seeing as the groups are composed of national political parties. The EP, as Vesan and Corti (2019) note, is a complex configuration of party groups amid several conflicts and crises, such as the 2008 financial crisis or the 2014 refugee crisis; research into this thus merits from a multi-dimensional approach beyond a ‘simple’ left-right divide. In that respect, Vesan and Corti (2019) apply Ferrera’s (2017) ‘clash-syndrome’ framework, which encompasses not only left-right and pro-EU-Eurosceptic, but also includes ‘creditor vs debtor’, alluding to the impact of the Euro-crisis on the economic geographical divide (North/South), and a “high-wage/high-welfare EU countries and low-wage/low-welfare EU countries” or West/East divide; thus adding geographical and national dimensions. Indeed, in their analysis, they accounted for national votes within the EP, and found that these dimensions, in addition to traditional left-right and pro-against EU accounts, do matter, especially in terms of internal party cohesion (p. 990). Their particular case, the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR, which reiterates the importance of gender equality and equal opportunities), demonstrated that although the EP as a whole is an avid proponent of a strong social Europe, the left-wing mostly voted in favour whereas the right-wing (with some exceptions) voted against the EP’s resolution on the EPSR (p. 982).

The importance of a left-right divide in EP voting constellations remains largely uncontested, especially in the social pillar. Other dimensions, such as pro-against EU integration or creditor-debtor can also be prominent depending on the policy area. For instance, Vesan and Corti (2019) demonstrated their visibility in the EPSR discussions. But are these dimensions visible or useful within foreign policy? Interestingly, party divisions are said to be irrelevant in foreign policy as a country supposedly needs to present a “united front” (Raunio and Wagner, 2020, p. 548). However, Raunio and Wagner (2020) found that this does not hold true for the EP, as they did not find any ‘nationalistic’ voting behaviour in foreign policy resolutions of the EP, but rather along the lines of the left-right dimension. This was confirmed in a study by Bélanger and Schimmelfenig (2021) about the politicisation of enlargement in the European Parliament, as they found that “positions on EU enlargement are consistently shaped by how socially liberal,

multiculturalist and internationalist parties are” (p. 422). Although not explicitly left or right, it can be inferred from previous work (e.g., Hooghe *et al*, 2002) that this does significantly matter as the degrees of social liberalism, multiculturalism and internationalism are directly correlated with positions on the left-right spectrum. In fact, Fiott (2015) mentions that “most of the EP groups are simultaneously acting out of their own political convictions and the broader goal of closer EU integration in foreign affairs” (p. 7). Hence, the EP has a foreign policy goal in promoting European norms and values abroad, but it appears the manner in which this occurs is up for debate. Strikingly, Fiott’s (2015) quote implies that nearly all EPGs take a pro-EU stance in this regard. That has interesting implications for the pro-against EU dimension, which is typically parallel to the left-right dimension.

Further research into EPG ideology in foreign relations is scarce. Much of the literature focuses on diplomacy of both the EP as a whole or separate parties; or studies the effect that previous enlargements have had on the functioning and dynamics within the Parliament. As such, there is ample room to elaborate on this. Turkey lends itself as a good case study for this, as Raunio and Wagner found that votes were least cohesive regarding Turkey (2020, p. 559). How do party dynamics and ideology play into this? To what can the lack of cohesion be attributed? These are some questions this thesis aims to investigate. Before constructing the analytical framework, however, a brief overview of EU-Turkey relations follows in order to contextualise the case.

2.3. EU-Turkey Relations

Turkey has been an associate member of the EU since 1963, when the Association Agreement was signed in Ankara. However, it still is not a full member of the EU almost six decades later, even though it was recognised as a candidate in 1999 and negotiations began in 2005. In fact, as the European Parliament recently stated, “EU-Turkey relations are at a historic low point” (EP, 2021a). Full membership in the near future is, thus, increasingly unlikely. How did this come to be? Scholarship points towards the Europeanisation and subsequent de-Europeanisation of Turkey. ‘De-Europeanisation’ becomes increasingly popular, referring to “the loss or weakening of the EU/Europe as a normative/political context and as a reference point in domestic settings and national public debates” (Aydın-Düzgüt and Kaliber, 2016, p. 5). In other words, policies, norms and values in Turkey first take a deliberate European turn, but then increasingly turn away from Europe with a certain sense of antagonism.

From the perception of the Turkish state onwards, it has been Turkey’s goal to modernise, Westernise, and Europeanise, with a strict sense of secularism (Yavuz, 2019). Association with the EU was, thus, a deliberate step in this process. The steps set out in the Ankara Agreement, i.e., the preparatory stage, the transition stage, and the final stage which would culminate in accession, have

duly been followed, according to Çakır (2011). Since the Agreement, however, Turkey saw itself surpassed by for instance Greece, Spain and Portugal, which were considered as (political) rivals (Çakır, 2011); leading to increasing reluctance to Turkish membership on both sides. Moreover, several incidents occurred over time that uncovered tensions between the two parties. Consequently, a “down-turn in EU-Turkey relations” has been observed, in particular since 2005 (Aydın-Düzgüt and Kaliber, 2016, p. 1; Yılmaz, 2016). In that respect, the literature speaks of the loss of credibility of EU membership since 2005/2007 (Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm and Cin, 2021; Aybars *et al*, 2018; Aydın-Düzgüt and Kaliber, 2016; Ulug-Eryılmaz, 2014). Reasons as to why this happened are diverse, and the situation is incredibly complex. Due to the scope of this thesis, a very simplified overview follows in order to identify markers in EU-Turkey relations.

One prominent factor is the rise of the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, or Justice and Development Party) as the ruling party of Turkey. Elected in 2002, the party had a strong pro-EU position and actively pushed for pro-EU reforms (Gürleyen, 2014). Since 2005, however, there has been a notable slow-down in (pro-EU) reform. Patton (2007) highlights how the European response to the start of Turkish accession negotiations and the open-ended, conditional nature thereof have caused backlash in both the EU and Turkey. Moreover, pending issues caused tension between the two, such as the Cyprus issue, the recognition of the Armenian genocide, the Kurds issue and the war in Iraq (Patton, 2007). Turkey does not recognise Cyprus as a Republic and still occupies Northern Cyprus after the intervention in 1974; nor does it recognise the Armenian genocide, whereas the EU and (most of) its members do. This indicates a divergence of interests despite decades of association. What is more, the rule of the AKP turned increasingly antagonistic towards the West, while President Erdoğan gradually shifted towards “electoral authoritarianism as the electoral system, neopatrimonialism as the economic system, populism as the political strategy and Islamism as the political ideology” (Yılmaz and Bashirov, 2018, p. 1813), which directly oppose the European system.

Tensions rose particularly in 2015/2016 with the refugee crisis and the failed coup in Turkey. After the Arab Spring, millions of refugees aimed to enter Europe through Turkey. After much effort and concessions towards Turkey, the EU was able to conclude a migration deal (or statement) in 2016: Turkey was to take back and hold all irregular migrants that did not have asylum claims in the EU in exchange for an accelerated visa liberalisation process, reopening of accession negotiation chapters and six billion Euros, amongst others (Carrera *et al*, 2019). This was harshly criticised, as the European Parliament was bypassed and thus raised concerns about democratic accountability as well as human rights concerns (e.g., Greens/EFA, 2018). Things worsened after the failed coup in Turkey and Erdoğan’s subsequent consolidation of power, as this was criticised

to be undemocratic as well; the EP voted to freeze further negotiations for accession (EP, 2016), and has subsequently done so up until 2021 (Toksabay and Karadeniz, 2017; DW, 2019; Michalopoulos, 2021). In addition, Turkey received harsh criticism for its military intervention in Syria in 2019 and the withdrawal of the Istanbul Convention, which guarantees women's safety and protection against violence, in 2021. Particularly on the latter subject, the EP has consistently expressed its concern for women's rights and gender equality in Turkey, as the EP is a 'champion of gender equality' and the situation in Turkey is deteriorating (EP, 2012; EP, 2021c).

To be sure, the above outline contains mere highlights since the start of the millennium and is by no means meant to be a comprehensive and detailed overview². These issues made the headlines and prompted high-profile political responses, in particular from the EP. As such, it serves a useful guide to pinpoint the developments in EU-Turkey relations.

2.4. Interim Conclusion

Although the European Parliament does not have many formal powers in the CFSP, it has tried and often succeeded in extending its influence through formal and informal venues. In doing so, it positions itself as the normative voice of the EU and lobbies for the inclusion and observation of democracy, human rights, norms and values in the EU's external relations. Within the Parliament, discussions occur mostly along a left-right or pro-against EU lines, although discussions regarding foreign relations has been observed to unify the Parliament. One outlier, as Raunio and Wagner (2020) found, is Turkey; a topic which prompts less cohesion in the Parliament. This is interesting considering the Parliament has voted to freeze or suspend accession talks with Turkey, given that EU-Turkey relations are consistently deteriorating. This thesis aims to address this lack of cohesion yet 'unified' voice against Turkey by examining discourses between the EPGs in plenary debates from 2016 until 2021. Particularly, the aim is to examine how the groups frame gender policy, a flagship social policy of the EP, within the context of the Turkey issue, and how this plays out along ideological lines. In taking this approach, this thesis complements the literature as the ideological differences in the EP regarding foreign policy are still underrepresented, especially with regards to content analysis in the debates. The next chapter details the approach, providing an analytical framework as well as a methodology.

3. Analytical Framework

This chapter builds the foundation for the empirical analysis. This thesis investigates debates in the European Parliament, specifically ideological divides among the EPGs in order to find out how gender equality is framed within discussions about Turkey. This will illuminate possible tensions

² For interesting theoretical and explanatory accounts, see for instance Çakır (2011) and Reiners and Turhan (2021).

within the EP, as well as trends of prioritisation among the groups. Given that the EP must consent to each accession, this could be indicative of voting behaviour should the EU ever have another enlargement round. This chapter is divided in two sections: the first develops a theoretical framework to assess party positioning in the EP and the second provides the methodology.

3.1. Party Positioning in the EP

As identified in the previous chapter, groups in the European Parliament tend to vote across a left-right divide, but also across a pro- or against European integration line. In some cases, as Vesani and Corti (2019) found, nationalistic tendencies can also be present, albeit rarer. Considering the focus of this thesis, the former two are considered: left-right and pro-against EU integration. These have been elected for two reasons: first, because the promotion of gender equality is generally seen as a progressive, left-wing position (Towns *et al*, 2014) and may thus illuminate differences in ideology; and pro-against EU integration as Turkey concerns an accession candidate, and

		Left-wing	Right-wing
Pro	EU		
Integration			
Against	EU		
Integration			

Table 1: Party Attitudes Matrix.

enlargement is an integral part of European integration (and vice versa). They are taken as separate because being against EU integration does not necessarily mean a group is right; rather, extremes on both sides are found to be Eurosceptic whereas

centre parties tend to be pro-EU (Hooghe *et al*, 2002). Moreover, these present a voting divide in the Parliament that has become increasingly visible since the economic crisis (Van der Veer and Otjes, 2016). This results in Table 1, which presents a simple matrix in order to efficiently map out party attitudes.

These are, then, the two dimensions in which the EPGs will be grouped; thus employing a multi-dimensional framework in order to acquire a more complete and nuanced image of party attitudes. To achieve this, the dimensions need clear conceptualisations. The first dimension, the left-right spectrum, is in itself multi-dimensional, as left and right are usually umbrella terms that encompass different attitudes (Fagerholm, 2018). Hence, it is often further divided in two specific policy areas: social and economic (Lefkofridi and Katsanidou, 2018). However, since the terms left and right are so often used and understood, there are very little concrete definitions in the literature, spare those that study the radical or extreme sides of the spectrum.

For that reason, this thesis borrows from that literature in order to clarify left and right, including the extreme ends. In particular, it builds on the work of Fagerholm (2018), who set out

to provide a clear basis for definitions of the radical left and right. According to him, the (radical) left is often associated with feminism, ecologism, anti-capitalist socialism, multiculturalism, liberal ethics³, populism, anti-systemness, anti-imperialism, anti-fascism, Euroscepticism and ‘Globaphobia’⁴ (p. 417). The (radical) right, on the other hand, is characterised by nativism⁵, populism, authoritarianism, traditional ethics⁶, welfare chauvinism, anti-systemness, anti-leftism, Euroscepticism, and ‘Globaphobia’ (p. 413). Both sides have the ‘anti’ in common, which can be attributed to their radical nature. What remains is a division between left and right, where the left is more open, pro gender equality and minority rights, pro environmental action, and pro-market regulation; and the right is more conservative, traditionalist, and capitalist. Across the spectrum in a diverse party system, these are supported in various degrees: parties towards the centre are more moderate whereas parties towards the extremes tend to be more radical.

Applied to the case at hand, that is, gender equality and EU-Turkey relations (with possible enlargement), the following can be hypothesised:

H1: left-wing parties will discuss gender equality more frequently as a pressing issue than right-wing parties, and will be more prone to criticising women’s situation in Turkey.

Seeing as the left is characterised by its feminist nature, it is therefore expected to push more for equal rights and treatment for women, as well as measures against violence against women, for instance. It is therefore expected that this issue is brought up and emphasised frequently in the debates. This is of particular relevance to the Turkish case, as gender equality and violence against women there have been noted to be worsening in recent years (World Economic Forum, 2021; UN Women Turkey, 2020). This is not to say that the right opposes gender equality per se, but rather that it is less likely to prioritise this issue in debates about Turkey.

The second dimension is pro- or against EU integration. This has been identified in the literature as distinct from the left-right spectrum. This is already teased by Fagerholm (2018), as he characterises both radical ends as Eurosceptic and anti-globalist. This has been picked up by

³This refers to the notion that (radical) left parties are vocal supporters of sexual liberty and minority rights (Fagerholm, 2018, p. 417).

⁴This refers to the idea that radical left parties “reject global neo-liberalism and are critical of multinational associations such as IMF and NATO” (Fagerholm, 2018, p. 417).

⁵Nativism is defined as something that “closely resembles the combination of xenophobia and [ethnic] nationalism”; nativism is, hence, ‘an ideology, which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (“the nation”) and that nonnative elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state” (Mudde, 2007; quoted in Fagerholm, 2018, p. 413-14).

⁶These parties are “supporters of the nucleus family, of religious (Christian) values and of a traditional conception of morality” (Fagerholm, 2018, p. 414), which implies support for traditional gender roles, with the man as the head of the family and the woman as housewife, for instance.

other scholars: parties at both ends of the left-right spectrum are found to be sceptic of the current course of EU integration (or the EU as a whole) (e.g., Hooghe *et al*, 2002; Van Elsas *et al*, 2016). This is relevant to the case at hand, seeing as Turkey is a (contentious) accession candidate, and enlargement is textbook European integration. Furthermore, seeing as the EU and specifically the EP are champions of gender equality, the distressing situation for women in Turkey can intensify anti-enlargement sentiments for more radical EPGs, on both sides of the spectrum. Following this, the second hypothesis reads:

H2: more radical EPGs will be likely to frame gender equality issues to push an anti-accession rhetoric against Turkey.

This is based on the assumption that gender equality is indeed used as such. Its absence in the debates, on the other hand, can also tell an interesting tale: if gender equality is not brought up at all, then the idea that the EP ‘champions’ gender equality could be called into question.

Confirming or discarding these hypotheses can say much about the priorities and behaviour of the EPGs. It will illuminate whether, as stated above, gender equality is indeed high up the EP’s agenda, how it is divided across party lines (left-right), and whether it matters when discussing an enlargement candidate, in particular Turkey. Given the developments in EU-Turkey relations, it may also be used to amplify voices against Turkish membership. In sum, the findings may call into question the credibility of the EP and its groups, illuminate party dynamics, and cast a predictive light over Turkey’s potential accession. After all, the EP does have to give its consent to Turkey’s potential accession. The overview of the hypotheses and expectations are presented in Table 2.

		Left-wing	Right-wing
Pro	EU	Emphasis on gender equality, frequently discussed. Open for EU-Turkey dialogue. Expectation: centre-left.	Prioritises gender equality much less, not as open to Turkey dialogue but door is open. Expectation: centre-right.
Against	EU	Gender equality issues as rhetoric against Turkish accession, against enlargement. Expectation: radical left.	Gender equality issues against Turkish accession, but much less frequent: no priority. Expectation: radical right.

Table 2: Mapping EPG Attitudes Based on Hypotheses.

3.2. Methodology and Data

The above framework allows to map out how EPGs use the gender equality issue within debates about Turkey across the most clearly observed cleavages in the literature: left-right and pro-against EU integration, in order to find out how the EPGs balance high-profile issues such as gender equality and good EU-Turkey relations. For that purpose, this thesis employs content analysis, as it allows for a comprehensive analysis of information and communication in any given text, for instance newspaper articles or, indeed, parliamentary debates. According to Holsti (1969), the method is useful to extract antecedents, characteristics and effects of the communications in question. Moreover, what is *not* said is equally valuable as what *is* said when making inferences from the text as it can indicate the priority of the topic (e.g., gender equality). Seeing as the goal of this thesis is to classify EPGs based on their discourse in plenary debate in order to illuminate the choices they make in their rhetoric, this method is ideal. It is, moreover, better suited than (critical) discourse analysis, because discourse analysis is often more concerned with linguistic analysis to see how a certain reality is constructed, and what its effects are on the audience of the text. Whilst very valuable, this is not the main concern of this thesis. Additionally, content analysis of debates complements the literature on EPG dynamics and ideology, as very often analyses focus on RCVs, general voting behaviour, survey data or interviews with MEPs (e.g., Lefkofridi and Katsanidou, 2018; Hix and Noury, 2018). Rarely is an actual content analysis of debates used to identify ideological dynamics or puzzles in the EP, although it does occur more often at a national level (e.g., Ribera Payá, 2019).

Data is retrieved from the European Parliament database and consists of plenary debates specifically concerning Turkey between 2016-2021, when EU-Turkey relations have been noted to be increasingly deteriorating. Given the frequency of the topic, nine debates about the most salient and pressing issues have been selected given the course of EU-Turkey relations. The speeches of all EPGs are analysed, spare the non-affiliated (NI) as, due to their nature, they cannot reflect a clear and consistent left-right or pro-against EU integration attitude. Given that the MEPs sometimes speak in their native languages, the interpretation function on the video recordings is used to analyse the debates, as well as the translation function DeepL Pro, one of the most reliable and accurate translation programs. Although this does diminish to an extent the accuracy of the content analysis, it is the most accessible manner in which to conduct this analysis in European Parliament debates. The timeframe of five years spans over two parliamentary configurations, which also allows to check for consistency among the groups over time. The content analysis of the transcripts of the debates is done manually, but particular keywords are looked after in the context of the topic: gender equality, women/woman, female, male, accession, integration,

enlargement, and Turkey. These are chosen as they are the most directly related to the topic at hand, although the possibility of indirect references to the topic are also taken into account.

4. Plenary Debates on Turkey 2016-2021

This chapter presents the empirical research, and consists of an analysis of discourses between the parties in the period 2016-2021. Specifically, it looks at debates surrounding Turkey, and how prevalent (or not) gender equality is in those debates. To that end, this chapter is systematically divided in seven subsections, one for each EPG. ALDE and Renew Europe share a section, as well as EFDD and ID, given the respective parliamentary configurations (see Figures 1 and 2). A list of the sampled debates can be found in Appendix 1 in chronological order, so that the analysis and referencing remains structural.

4.1. The EPP

The European People's Party (EPP) is a group of centre-right European political parties, also referred to as Christian Democrats. Their position is captured by the following quote from their 2019 manifesto: “we are challenged by populists and demagogues that preach egoism and nationalism, by a left that is stuck in the past and by a new Green narrow-mindedness that categorically rejects trade, hinders economic growth and fails to include large parts of our societies” (EPP, 2019, p. 1). This demonstrates a rejection of radical right ‘nativism’ as well as a rejection of market regulation and criticism towards environmentalism, which indeed places them as a centre-right party. The EPP has been the largest EPG for at least twenty years. As such, it has been key in decision-making in the EP.

The analysis starts in January 2016, about Turkey's crackdown on the Daesh and the Kurds. The EPP maintains that Turkey should not be rewarded for its violence against the Kurds under the guise of anti-terrorism with the opening of accession negotiation chapters (Debate 1). However, later in 2016, when discussing the failed 15 July coup in Turkey, the group expresses that certain understanding should be expressed for the Turkish government, given the turmoil:

“Und dafür sollten wir, glaube ich, der Türkei Unterstützung und Verständnis geben”;

“And for that, I think we should give Turkey support and understanding” (Elmar Brok, EPP, Debate 2, original in German).

The EPP appears to be showing sympathy for Erdogan's regime but is clearly cautious against Turkish accession. This translates into the support for freezing or temporarily suspending the accession negotiations following the round-up of Erdogan's opponents and other dissidents;

although this is seen as undemocratic and problematic, the EPP recognises EU-Turkey interdependence and therefore do not wish to call off the negotiations entirely (Debate 3, 4 and 5).

From 2019 onwards, the EPP argues that accession is altogether unrealistic, and that the negotiations should come to a definite end (Debate 6). When discussing the 2018 Turkey report following the constitutional changes in Turkey that allow Erdogan more power as president, the EPP opines that democracy in Turkey has deteriorated too much. As MEP Renate Sommer put it:

“Seien wir doch mal ehrlich – jeder weiß, dass es unmöglich ist, die Türkei aufzunehmen, und dass die Europäische Union selbst über lange Zeit in keiner Weise erweiterungsfähig ist. Deswegen bitte ich um Unterstützung zur Änderung des Textes in „Beendigung der Verhandlungen““;

“Let us be honest - everyone knows that it is impossible to admit Turkey and that the European Union itself is in no way capable of enlargement for a long time. That is why I ask for support to change the text to "end the negotiations”” (Renate Sommer, EPP, Debate 6, original in German).

This line of thought it continued into 2021 (Debate 9). In sum, where the EPP was at first quite open to potential Turkish accession, albeit on strict conditions, that door closed gradually and was replaced by the sense that EU-Turkey relations need to be renewed, seeing as there is still a strategic interest in cooperation. The last quote also demonstrates a more general doubt regarding EU enlargement, not just Turkey. It can be inferred that the EPP is becoming increasingly reluctant towards new members.

Where are the women in this? In the nine debates analysed, women were mentioned scarcely; spare for Debate 8 which specifically addressed Turkey’s withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. The group maintains that the EU should condemn Turkey and stand up for women because gender equality and women’s rights are intrinsic values of the EU, but it does not go beyond that. In Debate 9, which takes place after the withdrawal, the EPP only mentions it once as an example of incompatibility with EU values, but the issue is not addressed in substance. In other debates, 1 and 2 to be precise, women are mentioned, but solely as a type of victim of Erdogan’s regime. Again, nothing of substance or concrete action plans; it seems the EPP only defines women’s rights as EU value, but does not act on it. In essence, the EPP’s behaviour does correlate to the expectations of a centre-right group.

4.2. The S&D

The Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) is composed of, as the name suggests, democratic socialists who identify as centre-left. It is, after the EPP, the biggest

party in the EP. According to their website, their core values are freedom, equality, solidarity, diversity and fairness, which means that their “MEPs are committed to fighting for social justice, jobs and growth, consumer rights, sustainable development, financial market reform and human rights to create a stronger and more democratic Europe and a better future for everyone” (S&D, 2021). The prioritisation of these issues indeed suggest their position as centre-left. As the second biggest EPG, S&D balances out the EPP.

In contrast to the EPP, S&D has consistently called for an open dialogue with Turkey, even though the group recognised that the situation was deteriorating. In 2016, S&D supported open negotiations and peace talks after the Daesh and Kurds issue (Debate 1). Similarly, after the coup, the group called to keep accession talks open, in order to protect minorities and keep a channel of dialogue (Debate 2). However, after Erdogan’s round-up of dissidents, the S&D had to recognise democratic backsliding and supported the freezing of negotiations, but absolutely not the total suspension, so as to signal the Turkish people the EU will

“defender sus libertades, su dignidad, la dignidad de las mujeres, la libertad de expresión, la libertad de ejercicio político, y que, porque queremos hacer eso, y porque esa es la Turquía en la que creemos, hoy pedimos que se congelen las conversaciones, con la esperanza —nosotros y el pueblo turco— de que esas negociaciones puedan abrirse el día que vuelvan a abrirse las libertades y la democracia en Turquía”

“defend their freedoms, their dignity, the dignity of women, freedom of expression, freedom of political exercise, and that, because we want to do that, and because that is the Turkey we believe in, today we are asking for the talks to be frozen, in the hope - we and the Turkish people - that these negotiations can be opened on the day that freedoms and democracy are reopened in Turkey” (Elena Valenciano, S&D, Debate 3, original in Spanish).

This quote very clearly encapsulates the S&D view. Up until 2021, they maintained this view (Debate, 4, 5, 6, and 7). However, from 2019 onwards, the party became more critical, proposing sanctions or action before the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

In the end, though, the S&D had to admit that if the negative trend persists in Turkey and trying to improve the relationship only translates giving in Erdogan free game, then suspension becomes inevitable (Debate 8, 9). Still, the priority would be to engage in diplomacy to guarantee human rights. This is particularly present in the reaction to Turkey’s withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, where women were portrayed as victims of Erdogan (Debate 8). Even though the S&D does not want to suspend the negotiations, the endangering of women seems to supersede this concern. This line of thought is a repetition from 2019, where the group also already expressed

concern about women in Turkey (Debate 6). However, these two mentions and the above quote are the only times women are mentioned. While they seem to be a more integral part in the ideology of the S&D regarding the importance to defend civil society and values, i.e., they take on a more 'human' form beyond a mere value; the (lack of) frequency with which they are brought up in the Turkish issue calls into question their prioritisation. Given that the S&D is centre-left, however, this is not too surprising.

4.3. The ECR

The ECR is the European Conservatives and Reformists Group, who identifies as centre-right. As self-proclaimed 'Eurorealists', their cause is "to reform the EU based on eurorealism, respecting the sovereignty of nations, and focusing on economic recovery, growth and competitiveness" (ECR, 2021). This translates into a push for liberal economics and a focus on member state sovereignty and security. This indeed places them at the right side of the spectrum, but arguably a little righter than the EPP, as some of their members originate from radical right parties in their respective member states. Its size tends to vary per configuration.

The ECR was, at the start of 2016, still in favour of Turkey's eventual accession (Debate 1). This quickly changed however, as in the same year the group strictly opposed accession after Erdogan's reaction after the coup (Debate 2). From there onwards, a certain degree of internal division is observed. In Debate 3, one MEP says

"Let us build a new relationship based not necessarily on EU membership but on real cooperation. Let us build a new relationship based not on just fighting today's fires and problems but also on preparing for the challenges we will all face for decades to come" (Syed Kamall, ECR, Debate 3, original in English).

This indicates that the door to accession is not closed *entirely*, but that cooperation and dialogue are key. In Debate 4, 5, and 6, however, the ECR again argues for the suspension of negotiations, stating that the EU and Turkey have drifted too far apart. In particular, they take issue with the treatment of Christians in Turkey. In Debate 7, Turkey is said not to understand dialogue and needs heavy sanctions, in response to its behaviour off the Cypriot and Greek coasts and military mobilisation across the borders. Yet, in Debate 9, the ECR states that the EU needs Turkey, and, as one MEP says,

"Apeluję zatem o utrzymanie warunkowego dialogu i procesu akcesyjnego, utrzymamy w ten sposób instrumenty oddziaływania. Pozbycie się nagród i poleganie tylko na karach nie doprowadzi nas do zmiany polityki tureckiej wobec Unii"

“I therefore call for the conditional dialogue and accession process to be maintained, so that we can maintain our instruments of influence. Doing away with awards and relying only on penalties will not lead us to change Turkey's policy towards the Union” (Witold Jan Waszczykowski, ECR, Debate 9, original in Polish).

This swinging behaviour appears to reflect a conflict between utilitarianism (i.e., Turkey is a strategic partner and using accession to pursue policy goals), and ideology (i.e., Turkey is anti-Christian and undemocratic).

Women and gender equality are not mentioned at all, except in Debate 8, which was specifically about that topic. Here, the ECR states that while the withdrawal of Turkey from the Istanbul Convention is regrettable, the Convention itself

“nie działa, bo jest podlana lewicowym, ideologicznym...”

“is not working, because it is watered down by left-wing, ideological...” (Jadwiga Wiśniewska, ECR, Debate 8, original in Polish; quote cut by EP President).

This follows a critique on the state of gender equality and women in the Union itself, more to point out the EU's perceived hypocrisy rather than to address gender issues structurally. This indicates a strong belief in traditional values and a rejection of the left-wing, in line with right-wing ideology. In sum, although the party seems to be going back and forth on the accession issue, the group is strongly rooted in its right-wing ideology and does not seem to be concerned with gender equality at all.

4.4. ALDE/Renew Europe

ALDE stands for the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in Europe, and represents liberal democrats in the EU. It is the only party that allows citizens individual members. It can be characterised as a ‘liberal’ centre party, with liberal economic ideas while also defending social liberalism; the group is thus economically right but socially left. As their manifesto states: “We want a Europe that is proud of its diversity and works for the benefit of its minorities. [...] Through competition, fairness and open trade, we liberals believe that progress for everyone and support for the vulnerable can be achieved by embracing the dynamics of market economies” (ALDE, 2019, p. 1). In the 2019 elections, ALDE was renamed Renew Europe, identifying as centrist and pro-European. It maintains that “economic growth, environmental sustainability, fair competition, convergence rights and responsibility go hand in hand” (Renew Europe, 2019). According to their group charter, emphasis needs to lie on completing the internal market with open trade and

competition, while at the same time strengthening environmental action and the social dimension. In 2019, it was elected as the third biggest EPG.

In the Eighth Parliament, ALDE showed internal division regarding the accession of Turkey. In Debate 1, the group unequivocally supported future Turkish accession, but already in Debate 2 there are signs of disagreement. One MEP stated:

“Ich fände, es wäre an der Zeit, respektvoll miteinander umzugehen und diesen gescheiterten Beitrittsprozess zu ersetzen durch einen Grundlagenvertrag, durch eine neue positive Agenda, die viel breiter und viel praktischer ist als dieser Prozess...”

“I think it is time to treat each other with respect and to replace this failed accession process with a basic treaty, with a new positive agenda that is much broader and much more practical than this process...” (Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, ALDE, Debate 2, original in German);

whereas another MEP opined:

“Turkey is an important neighbour of the European Union, and is a NATO partner, irrespective of the whole discussion about membership. This means that visa liberalisation should be subject to the criteria set. If they are met, liberalisation will follow. If not, it will take more time. No deadlines should be applied. The same goes for the membership issue” (Johannes Cornelis van Baalen, ALDE, Debate 2, original in English).

Hence, where one talks about abandoning the project and replacing it, the other leaves the door wide open, with an unlimited timeframe to conclude the negotiations. In Debates 3, 4, 5, and 6; ALDE yields that the accession negotiations under the current circumstances have become unsustainable and that they need to be frozen in order for the EU to maintain credibility. One consistency is that ALDE never advocated for the full suspension of dialogue. In all debates, the group emphasises human rights and civil society, and makes a distinction between the European-oriented people of Turkey and Erdogan’s regime.

This continues in Renew. The rhetoric is that dialogue must remain open. Despite this, the group remains realistic in acknowledging that accession is, in all likelihood, not possible anymore (Debate 7). Nonetheless, dialogue to relaunch the upgrade of the customs union and visa regularisation are suggested not only to maintain a channel of dialogue, but also to provide incentive for positive change in Turkey (Debate 9). This degree of openness is the highest out of all the EPGs.

ALDE and Renew both link women's rights and gender equality to human rights, and specifically to democracy (Debate 6 and 8). The groups are keen to include human rights in any dialogue as this should form the basis of a partnership, and, moreover, it is a core European value. In 2019, they already mentioned how the situation in Turkey disproportionately affected women (Debate 6). As such, Renew was outraged at Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention (Debate 8). Instead of using this divergence from European values as an anti-accession rhetoric, however, it is suggested that constructive dialogue is especially necessary. However, unless positive change happens, there can be no accession (Debate 9). Interestingly, despite the importance it seems to attach to gender equality and women's rights in Debates 6 and 8, these issues are scarcely mentioned throughout the rest of samples as a key argument.

Summarising, ALDE and Renew, despite internal differences, have refused to shut the door to Turkish accession entirely and repeatedly called for open dialogue and the relaunches of projects, as the only EPG. Although they place greater emphasis on gender equality issues beyond a 'value', this does not translate in prioritisation and/or structural arguments.

4.5. The GUE/NGL

The 'Left in the European Parliament' is represented by the Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left or GUE/NGL, sometimes also known as 'The Left'. Very straightforwardly, the group identifies as left-wing. They "stand up for workers, environment, feminism, peace & human rights. What unites us is the vision of a socially equitable and sustainable Europe based on international solidarity" (GUE/NGL, 2021). With a greater emphasis on market regulation and social justice, the group appears to move to the left than S&D. The group is often one of the smaller groups in the EP.

The Left has been very consistent in its argumentation. In particular, its MEPs place a large emphasis on the Cyprus issue, which could be a result of the fact that the majority of GUE/NGL speakers was Cypriot or Greek. As such, the group demonstrated strong opposition to Turkey's behaviour. Regarding the violence against the Kurds in 2016, the Left strongly condemned Turkey and maintained that the EU must send a strong message (Debate 1). It also did not show much solidarity for Turkey after the coup, and called Turkey undemocratic (Debate 2), which resulted in the favouring of the freezing of accession negotiations (Debate 3), at least until Turkey complied with its obligations under candidacy and international law (Debate 4). In particular:

‘Τι’ αυτό πρέπει εσείς εδώ, και οι Επίτροποι και οι εκπρόσωποι του Συμβουλίου και οι βουλευτές, να ασκήσετε όση επιρροή μπορείτε στην Τουρκία, ώστε να φύγει το πόδι της από το στήθος των Κυπρίων. Τίποτε

άλλο δεν μπορείτε να κάνετε και η αναφορά στην αναβάθμιση στην τελωνειακή σχέση που γίνεται μέσα στην έκθεση δεν μας επιτρέπει δυστυχώς να την υπερψηφίσουμε”

“That is why you here, and the Commissioners and the Council representatives and the Members of Parliament, must exert as much influence as you can on Turkey to get its foot off the breasts of the Cypriots. There is nothing else you can do, and the reference to upgrading the customs relationship in the report unfortunately does not allow us to vote in favour of it” (Takis Hadjigeorgiou, GUE/NGL, Debate 4, original in Greek).

Hence, in addition to membership, upgrading the customs union is off the table, by reason of the Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus. This reasoning is repeated in Debates 5 and 6, with the emphasis on the need for Turkey to comply with international law (Debate 7). From 2019, however, the Left slowly opens the door, as it suggested that if there is significant change and adherence to human rights, Turkey could be a lasting partner, although dialogue can only be resumed through heavy sanctions and under strict conditions (Debates 7 and 9).

Regarding women, the Left was the only group that called upon the EU to take action (left unspecified) in response to Turkey’s withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention (Debate 8). Earlier, it had already stressed that women in particular suffer under Turkey’s hands (Debates 1 and 6). It is, subsequently, afraid of the consequences of endangering women (Debate 8). The blatant disregard for human rights and the endangering of women is seen as regression and disrespect towards the EU and its values (Debates 8 and 9). Unless the Cyprus issue is resolved and Turkey improves significantly on its human rights record, the Left maintains there can be no agreement with Turkey.

In sum, for the Left, at the core of the issue lies Cyprus, which might be attributed to the nationality of the MEPs speaking in the debate. Notwithstanding, the GUE/NGL was the only one to call upon the EU for concrete action against Turkey in the area of gender equality and women’s rights, and has highlighted the dangerous situation for women more than others. That being said, the clear focus remains Cyprus, which puts gender equality much lower on the priority list.

4.6. The Greens/EFA

Unsurprisingly, the Greens/European Free Alliance (EFA) represents the ‘Green’ or ecological group in the EP. As such, their politics are largely defined by environmental action. Additionally, they “stand for a society where everyone, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, age, race, or religion, can live a dignified and fulfilling life. As a political force, we put the human rights of all human beings, present and future, at the front and center of all policies we advocate and

implement” (Greens/EFA, 2021). This places them socially left. Economically, they advocate for ambitious reforms in for instance taxes and the provision of social services by the States, thus placing them on a similar level as GUE/NGL. The key difference is the stronger ecological focus. The party is usually mid-sized.

Similar to ALDE, the Greens have refused to completely discard dialogue, or even accession. In particular, the group said on multiple occasions that the developments are not the sole responsibility of Turkey. In Debate 1, it was pointed out that due to the blocking of some negotiation chapters by Member States, Erdogan was strengthened in his violence against the Kurds. In Debate 7, one MEP said:

“At the same time, let’s admit something: this conflict will not be solved by one-sided blaming or bilateral escalation” (Sergey Lagodinsky, Greens/EFA, Debate 7, original in English).

The group has been reluctant to freeze the negotiations as it considers the Turkish civil society. As such, it views that the EU should use dialogue to demand the rule of law and protection of minorities, such as transgender people (Debate 2), and support civil groups for women’s rights and the LGBT+ Community (Debate 3). The emphasis on the people is a consistent rhetoric not to break EU-Turkey relations (Debate 4, 5, and 6):

“This is about the future of more than 70 million people and about the future of us. There will be a time after Erdoğan. Let’s not forget that” (Ska Keller, Greens/EFA, Debate 5, original in English).

Evidently, the Greens see a future in the accession of Turkey. In line with its environmental background, it even considers extending the Green Deal to the Mediterranean as the only EPG to do so (Debate 7).

Given this line of thought, a particular difficult topic is women. Indeed, as the above suggests, the Greens do link the protection of women and minorities with future EU-Turkey relations. The withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention was perceived as the further distancing of Turkey from European values, and that human rights must not be sacrificed for *‘realpolitik’* (Debate 8). As such, the group seems to distance itself from an overt pro-accession position. However, as they express in Debate 9: there is still hope, which rests in civil society. For progress to be made, the group maintains that the upgrading of the customs union must continue, but that first, the

prosecution of women and minorities must stop (Debate 9). This is, from all the EGPs, the only sign of willingness to change position based on women's (and more general, human) rights.

In sum, the Greens are hopeful for future EU-Turkey relations, and possibly even accession. They share their optimism with ALDE/Renew, but are more consistent and place greater emphasis on the protection of women and gender equality.

4.7. The EFDD/ENF/ID

The Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group was a populist right-wing group which identified as Eurosceptic. In fact, this was its main concern, as it advocated for “an open, transparent, democratic and accountable co-operation among sovereign European States and reject[ed] the bureaucratisation of Europe and the creation of a single centralised European superstate” (EP, 2014). After Brexit, the group fell apart as the majority of its MEPs were British. The Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) was a party of radical right groups with similar beliefs, most of whose members later joined the EFDD. Both were replaced by the Identity and Democracy group in the 2019 Parliament. The first banner on its website states in bright red: “No to Turkey in the EU” – signifying their stance on EU integration and Turkey in particular. The group further states that “they acknowledge the Greek-Roman and Christian heritage as the pillars of European civilisation” (ID, 2019, p. 4), reflecting a traditionalist and conservative rhetoric upon which they build their opposition to Turkish accession. Furthermore, the emphasis lies on cooperation between sovereign European states and a limit on immigration. The party thus resembles the populist right.

This is highly reflected in the debates. Almost completely opposite of the Greens, the EFDD maintained from the start that Turkey is not European, that European and Turkish values are incompatible, that accession has failed and that Turkey must never accede to the EU (Debates 1, 2 and 3). In particular, following the round-up of dissidents after the coup, the group maintained that the EU must pull its hands off of Turkey, as Turkey

“a tellement renié les valeurs européennes qu'elle n'est même plus capable de défendre les femmes et les enfants. Elle se soumet à l'islam radical”

“has denied European values to such an extent that it can no longer even defend women and children. It submits to radical Islam” (Gilles Lebreton, ENF, Debate 3, original in French).

This is clear language, and repeated in all debates. There is one peculiarity: In Debate 5, one MEP states

“I rapporti UE-Turchia devono essere costruiti su nuove basi: sì al sostegno alla società civile, anche dando a quest'ultima proprio questi fondi pre-adesione”

“EU-Turkey relations must be built on new foundations: yes to supporting civil society, even giving it precisely these pre-accession funds” (Fabio Massimo Castaldo, EFDD, Debate 5, original in Italian).

Here is a rare suggestion to still allocate money to the Turkish people, in particular civil society, and to potential future cooperation. This is in stark contrast to the rest of the debates, where the EU is called upon to take a strong position and cut all ties with Turkey, which is portrayed as an aggressive, Islamist and Ottoman imperialist power (e.g., Debates 7 and 9).

Something which the first quote demonstrates, is that the EFDD/ID is not afraid to stress the situation of women in order to argue against Turkish accession. This occurs in Debates 3, 7, and 8. However, despite the emphasis on the suffering of women and children at the hands of Turkey’s government, the ID defends Turkey in withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention, stating that it has the right to defend traditional family values and that the Convention is full of empty feminism (Debate 8). In the same breath, however, it is stated that equality is a European value, and its breach should reinforce the idea to break with Turkey. In sum, the radical right of the EP has consistently been against Turkish accession, and has not been afraid to frame gender equality issues as reasons to abandon the negotiations.

5. Discussion

As is evident, each group takes a different approach to the Turkish issue, and allocates a different role to gender equality therein. Figure 3 presents a visualisation of the groups arranged in the left-right dimension based on the findings. On the left, the Greens and ALDE/Renew are furthest, followed by the Left (GUE/NGL); S&D is the most towards the centre. This is done for the following reason. . First is the Left, which was the most difficult to place. They are placed furthest

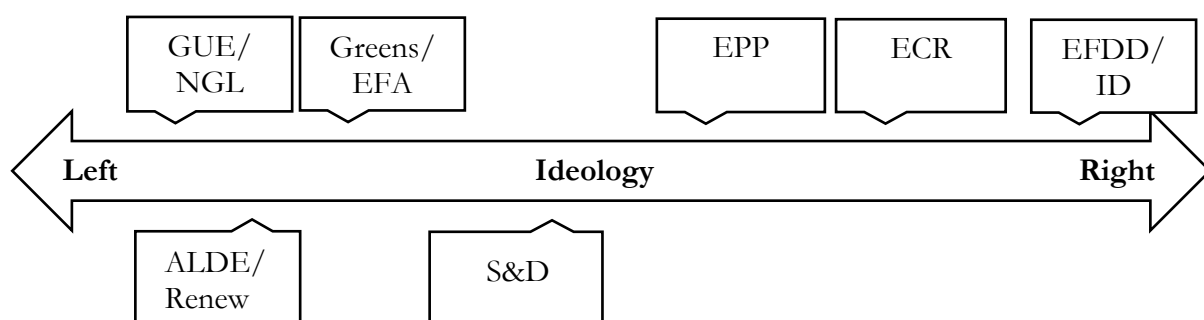


Figure 3: Left-Right Classification of EPGs.

left, as the only group who called for concrete EU action after Turkey’s withdrawal. Furthermore, at each opportunity, they called for solidarity for Cyprus. Given left-wing characteristics (see Chapter 3.1 or Fagerholm, 2018), this places them furthest left. Next, both the Greens and ALDE/Renew advocated the most to keep the dialogue with Turkey open, based on a solidarity/human rights. The Greens were, in that respect, more open, and also integrated women’s rights issues more into the Turkey issue than ALDE/Renew, who did not seem to go beyond ‘equality as European value’. Furthermore, the Greens were the only to consider a position change after the Istanbul Convention issue. Hence, both are placed on the left side, but the Greens a bit further than ALDE/Renew. To the centre-left is S&D, which also highlighted the protection of human rights and minorities, in general civil society, as reason in favour of accession. However, this was more utilitarian in nature, as it was only meant to keep a channel of communication open. Moreover, the group quickly realised accession would not be realistic and supported sanction; and furthermore did not reference women’s rights or gender policy frequently at all, much less so in a structural context. Hence, it is placed a little left of the centre.

The right was easier to classify. The EPP is placed centre-right, as the party focused much more on EU-Turkish interdependence than on human rights issues, stressing Turkey’s position as strategic partner. There was very little reference to women’s rights or gender issues, only in the context of the Istanbul Convention issue. The realistic approach yet interest in partnership, as well as sporadically expressed concern over human rights, merits the group centre-left place. The ECR does not reference gender equality at all, and in fact criticises the EU’s ‘hypocrisy’ in relation to the Istanbul Convention. The reluctance towards leftism/feminism places them right. The EFDD/ID are the on the furthest side, as they defend Turkey in its endeavour to ‘protect family values’. Moreover, the groups display strong anti-Islamist sentiments, which is a characteristic of the radical right (Fagerholm, 2018). Hence, there is their place.

The other dimension, pro-against EU integration, defined in terms of attitude towards accession, is visualised in Figure 4 based on the findings of Chapter 4.

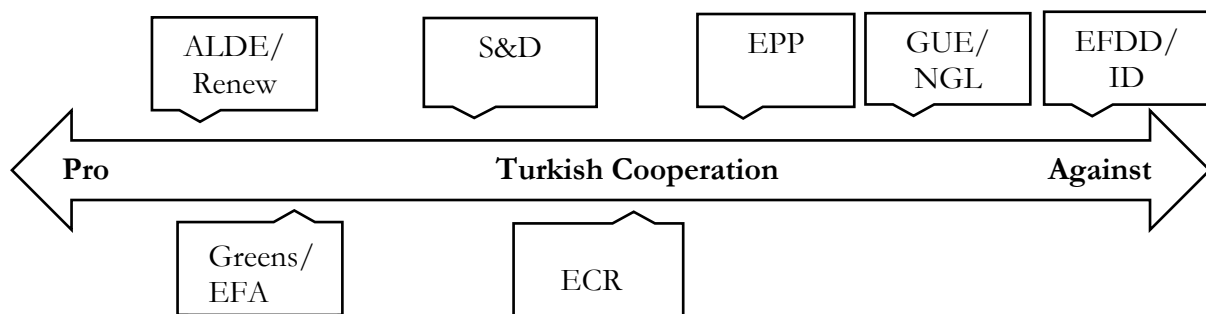


Figure 4: Pro-Against EU Integration EPG Classification.

To left-most side is still hope for accession; the opposite side is in favour as cutting as much ties as possible. What is immediately striking is that those parties at opposite ends of the left-right spectrum are now at the same end: against Turkish accession and cooperation. Second, those classified as left-wing are also, to different degrees, pro-accession, or at least a form of partnership/dialogue. Strikingly, the ECR, a right-wing group, presented much turmoil on the issue, going back and forth, and is therefore placed in the centre. The EPP leans more against accession as it has been quite consistent from the start, but the idea of Turkey as strategic partner does not classify it as entirely against cooperation altogether.

Thus are the dimensions. How does this hold up against the hypotheses in Chapter 3? To revisit:

H1: left-wing parties will discuss gender equality more frequently as a pressing issue than right-wing parties, and will be more prone to criticising women’s situation in Turkey.

H2: more radical EPGs will be likely to frame gender equality issues to push an anti-accession rhetoric against Turkey.

The analysis leads to a revision of Table 2 (Chapter 3.1), the results of which are presented in Table 3. What the analysis has demonstrated, is that gender equality and women’s issues in debates around Turkey are not brought up frequently at all by either side. In fact, the EPGs most frequently alluding to it were EFDD/ID and GUE/NGL, the two groups at the most extreme sides of the spectrum. This confirms the second hypothesis: both ‘radical’ EPGs are against accession and cite women’s issues as a reason to be.

	Left-wing	Right-wing
Pro-EU	ALDE/Renew Greens/EFA S&D Gender equality not frequent, but open door to Turkey.	EPP ECR Gender equality not frequent, semi-open to Turkey
Against EU	GUE/NGL Gender equality more frequent, closed to Turkey	EFDD/IDD Gender equality more frequent, closed to Turkey

Table 3: Remapping EPG Attitudes.

Notably, when discussed, the left-wing parties tend to take a more structural approach to gender equality, whereas right-wing (or centre-left) parties merely classified it as a ‘European’ value. Hence, the expectation that pro-EU left-wing groups would be centre-left is untrue; rather, it is the left: ALDE/Renew and the Greens/EFA. Pro-EU right-wing was predicted to not discuss gender equality frequently and to be less open to EU-Turkey dialogue, and was predicted to be from the centre. This was correct, given the attitude of the EPP, but also the ECR, which is more right-wing, but is uncertain about its openness towards Turkey. Last, the right-wing against-EU dimension was expected to be the radical right, which was correct. The notion that they did not bring up gender equality, however, is not true; EFDD and IDD emphasised the suffering of women in Turkey as demonstration of how far Turkey had diverged from Europe, and that hence accession should never take place.

In sum, H1 can be discarded, but H2 can be accepted. None of the EPGs frequently brought up gender equality issues, but the more radical parties did use it to push an anti-accession narrative. These findings have some implications. First, it appears to be true that the EP is rather divided about Turkey, as mentioned by Raunio and Wagner (2020). The groups all appear to have different priorities and conceptualisation of issues. Whereas centre-right to right defines cooperation more as something strategic in the context of interdependency, the left to centre-left emphasises the role of human rights. Particularly the groups further left see human rights as a tool to engage in constructive dialogue. This does confirm the thesis by Hooghe *et al* (2002): attitudes towards integration, in this case enlargement, takes a U-shape: the radical parties oppose whereas centre parties are more open. However, several groups on either side showed internal division. This demonstrates the complexity of the Turkey case. Moreover, given the strong positions of some groups, most notable EFDD/ID and the Left, a unanimous consent to Turkish accession seems unlikely.

Second, gender equality issues, such as violence, women’s rights or equal treatment, were only sporadically brought up and rarely as a structural topic across all debates; save for Debate 8 which was a topical debate on the Istanbul Convention. The most common appearance of such topics was in the form of general EU value. In that respect, the frequency is also shaped as a U-curve: the more radical groups most frequently discussed it, whereas further towards the centred both frequency and salience decreased. For an institution which is seen as a champion of gender policy (Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín, 2019), this is remarkable, especially given the fact that each of the debated Turkey Reports does include critical point about the state of gender equality in Turkey. Evidently, this is not reflected in the debates. This seems to point towards the growing idea that EU gender policy becoming is a ‘low priority’ (e.g., Bretherton, 2001; Dobrotic *et al*,

2013), although this would necessitate more comprehensive research. Moreover, stressing the importance of gender equality in foreign policy (Mølgaard, 2020) but scarcely pursuing it internally may be detrimental to the EP's credibility. However, it must be noted, the Turkey issue is incredibly complex with many actors, conflicts and external shocks at play; not prioritising gender equality in high-profile debates is understandable: given everything else, perhaps gender equality is simply not a priority in Turkish accession.

6. Concluding Remarks

This thesis set out to find out how, when considering the EP's championing of gender equality, lack of cohesion in votes about Turkey, and the increasingly deterioration of EU-Turkey relations, the political groups in the EP use the topic gender equality within the debate surrounding Turkey between 2016-2021. By conducting a content analysis of nine debates about Turkey between 2016-2021, the answer is that gender equality is not, in fact, used frequently. When it is used, it is dependent on the ideology and position towards EU integration of the EPG. The left to centre-left address the topic more structurally and show willingness to change attitudes. The centre-right to right does not seem to care much, and only mention it plainly as a European value, thus categorising it under 'human rights' in general. Radical groups on both ends use it most frequently, but mostly to push an anti-accession narrative. This illustrates that gender equality is mostly seen as a political tool, but one that is not a high priority. Given the complexity of EU-Turkey relations and ideological calculations that political parties have to make, this is understandable. However it does not rhyme well with the EP's championing of gender equality, which might indicate it is a lower priority than the Parliament maintains.

In researching this, this thesis aimed to complement the literature on the EP in foreign relations, and specifically the branch that delves into dynamics between EPGs. By using content analysis of EP debates, something not often done, this thesis has uncovered these dynamics as well as investigated the 'behind the curtains' of the EP's flagship policy: gender equality. However, this also implies certain limitations. First, EP debate transcripts and videos are not entirely in English. Although software with the highest accuracy rating was used, this cannot account for some potential interpretational mistakes in translation. Second, the sample data and timeframe only represent a snapshot of the subject. Further research could take the shape of a more comprehensive language analysis with scholars from different backgrounds; or could focus on different dimensions or conceptualisations. For instance, in GUE/NGL, nationality did seem to play a role as most speakers were Greek/Cypriot and raised the Cyprus crisis without fail; or the debate on the withdrawal of the Istanbul Convention featured mainly female speakers. Or, the fact that the Greens were the only group to bring up ecological issues. This raises interesting puzzles regarding

the role of individual MEPs, their gender, and their nationality; but also about the ecological priorities.

As for this thesis, it was once again confirmed how multi-faceted and complicated the Turkey issue is, and that EPGs, too, struggle with this. With the recent events in Afghanistan, the relationship with Turkey might become more important than ever. Only time will tell.

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Appendix 1: List of Sampled EP Debates

- Debate 1. (20 January 2016). *Situation in the South East of Turkey (debate)* (2016/2530(RSP)). Available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-8-2016-01-20-ITM-013_EN.html.
- Debate 2. (13 September 2016). *Situation in Turkey (debate)* (2016/2876(RSP)). Available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-8-2016-09-13-ITM-009_EN.html.
- Debate 3. (22 November 2016). *EU-Turkey relations (debate)* (2016/2993(RSP)) Available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-8-2016-11-22-ITM-010_EN.html.
- Debate 4. (5 July 2017). *2016 Report on Turkey debate* (2016/2308(INI)), (A8-0234/2017). Available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-8-2017-07-05-ITM-012_EN.html.
- Debate 5. (12 September 2017). *Turkey-EU relationship (debate)* (2017/2840(RSP)). Available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-8-2017-09-12-ITM-017_EN.html.
- Debate 6. (12 March 2019). *2018 Report on Turkey (debate)* (2018/2150(INI)), (A8-0091/2019). Available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-8-2019-03-12-ITM-016_EN.html.
- Debate 7. (15 September 2020). *Preparation of the Special European Council, focusing on the dangerous escalation and the role of Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean (debate and continuation of debate)* (2020/2774(RSP)). Available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2020-09-15-ITM-004_EN.html and https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2020-09-15-ITM-006_EN.html.
- Debate 8. (25 March 2021). *Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention (debate)* (2021/2610(RSP)). Available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2021-03-25-ITM-003_EN.html.
- Debate 9. (18 May 2021). *2019-2020 Reports on Turkey (debate)* (2019/2176(INI)), (A9-0153/2021). Available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2021-05-18-ITM-009_EN.html.



We hope this information reaches you in good health

Corona/COVID19 Leiden
University Aangepast 9 april
2020

Verklaring van originaliteit / Declaration of originality

By submitting this test, I certify that:

- ✓ this work has been drafted by me without any assistance from others (not applicable to group work);
- ✓ I have not discussed, shared, or copied assessment work from/with other students;
- ✓ I have not used sources that are not explicitly allowed by the course instructors and I have clearly referenced all sources (either from a printed source, internet or any other source) used in the work in accordance with the course requirements and the indications of the course instructors;
- ✓ this work has not been previously used for other courses in the program, unless explicitly allowed by the instructors.

I understand that any false claim in respect of this work will result in disciplinary action in accordance with university regulations and the program regulations, and that any false claim will be reported to the Board of Examiners. Disciplinary measures can result in exclusion from the course and/or the program, and in a permanent endorsement on my diploma.

I understand that my work may be checked for plagiarism, by the use of plagiarism detection software as well as through other measures taken by the university to prevent and check on fraud and plagiarism.

I understand and endorse the significance of the prevention of fraud and I acknowledge that in case of (gross) fraud the program could declare the exam invalid, which may have consequences for all students.