

Chapter Ten

Turkey and its Transatlantic Partners in the Wider Mediterranean: The European Perspective

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Geopolitically, economically, and culturally, the wider Mediterranean is an indispensable region for Turkey and the European Union. Although at different instances, extents, and pace, both actors have had a significant impact on the region. While the Arab Spring revealed the strengths, but also the limits of these actors' influence on the region, this period also led to a moment of convergence. Praised and promoted by Europe, the Turkish model initially stood out as an example for Middle Eastern and North African countries facing political transformation.

This convergence was challenged in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, eventually leading to a failure for both sides. In the longer term, neither of the two actors' policies were able to keep up with the changing realities of the region. The shifting strategies increasingly disengaged the European Union and Turkey from one another, along with their outlook on the region.

How does Europe position itself regarding the crises in the wider Mediterranean neighborhood, and what role does Turkey play in this equation? This chapter presents how the European Union and Turkey have responded to various crises in the wider Mediterranean region, and sets forth when and where the strategies and policies have converged, collided, or followed separate tracks. The chapter concludes by analyzing the policies of both sides and looks for a way out of the current deadlock in relations.

Living with Complicated Neighbors

The Mediterranean region has always been a priority for the EU's foreign policy and especially for some its influential member states. The EU tried to intensify bilateral relations with all countries in the region, particularly through trade agreements and reform programs under the Euro-

pean Neighborhood Policy (ENP), but also by investing in region-building endeavors such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). Taken together, Europe expected these mechanisms to contribute to making the region more peaceful, stable, and prosperous. The EU, as once stated by Romano Prodi, (former President of the European Commission), aimed at building a ring of friendly, stable, and well-governed countries.¹

Some parallels can be found between this EU approach and former Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's doctrine of "zero-problems with neighbors." In the end, both approaches fell short in reaching their intended goals. The EU is now surrounded by a ring of fire composed of increasingly defiant, unstable, and economically vulnerable countries. Turkey, in the meantime, entertains problematic relations with almost all of its neighbors.

Both Turkey and the EU initially thought that the Arab Spring could serve as an opportunity, and both tried to adapt their policies and instruments to the situation at hand. The EU reviewed the ENP² accordingly. However, the EU's response, articulated through further incentives for reform and new technical instruments, was mainly a bureaucratic exercise, and differed significantly from Turkey's response. By presenting itself as a source of inspiration for nascent democracies in the region, and trying to expand its area of influence, Turkey's approach to the Arab Spring was a genuine political approach.

Several years before the onset of the Arab Spring, Turkey's image had been shifting from a Westernized, secular militant actor to a country embracing and promoting its Muslim identity and Ottoman heritage. Turkey was presented as a case demonstrating that democracy and Islam were compatible, with the AK Party (Justice and Development Party) serving as an example for other actors linked to political Islam. Turkey's pro-democracy stance soon clashed with its economic and security interests

¹ Prodi, Romano. "A Wider Europe—A Proximity Policy as the key to stability." Peace, Security and Stability International Dialogue and the Role of the EU, *Sixth ECSA-World Conference* (December 5-6 2002). http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-02-619_en.htm

² See: European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy reports, "A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean." COM (2011) 200 final (2011a); "A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood. A review of European Neighbourhood Policy." COM (2011) 303 final (2011b); "Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy." JOIN (2015) 50 final (2015).

in the Arab Spring context, but its initial foreign policy responses were still complementary and even mutually reinforcing with those of the EU.³ The EU's financial and institutional resources and Turkey's cultural proximity and popularity among the Arab people seemed to pave the way for complementary policies in the region.⁴

However, two elements limited the possibility of cooperation on this particular front: Strained EU-Turkey relations, and the perception in Europe that Turkey was becoming increasingly authoritarian and repressive. As argued by Fuat Keyman, rather than looking at Turkey as a model, the EU's instrumentalist and functionalist vision framed Turkey only as a buffer state.⁵ In this notion, the EU was still willing to work with Turkey on practical issues such as the handling of the refugee crisis.

The Arab Spring and Beyond

The Arab Spring proved to be a tough test for both the EU's and Turkey's foreign policy. From the EU's perspective, the Arab Spring did not only come as a surprise, but also caught the member states unprepared, in the midst of a financial crisis. On the other hand, the precarious balance of Turkey's "zero problems with neighbors" gradually collapsed through the course of the Arab Spring, as it was largely established on the basis of good relations with leaders of the autocratic regimes that were now the targets of protests.

Tunisia

Tunisia is perhaps the only success story of the Arab Spring. Following the ousting of long-time president Ben Ali, the country swiftly entered a track of democratization under the Islamist Ennahda party, forming a coalition with secular parties. The new elections that took place in 2014

³ See: Soler i Lecha, Eduard. "The EU, Turkey, and the Arab Spring: From Parallel Approaches to a Joint Strategy?" in *GMF Mediterranean Paper Series* (2011). https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/134202/TocciEtAl_TurkishModel_Nov11_final.pdf

⁴ Eralp, Nilgun Arisan. "The Possibility of a 'Transformational Partnership' Between Turkey and the EU: Will 'Opportunity' Become a Reality?" in *Europe in Dialogue* 3 (2012) p. 19. http://www.tepav.org.tr/upload/files/13370626854.The_Possibility_of_Transformational_Partnership_Between_Turkey_and_the_EU_Will_Opportunity_Become_Reality.pdf

⁵ Keyman, Fuat. "Turkish foreign policy in the post-Arab Spring era: from proactive to buffer state." *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 12 (July 15, 2016). <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01436597.2016.1199260>

were won by Nidaa Tounes, a secular party tasked with forming a new government. Tunisia's transition to democracy became the lone exception of what many had hoped would happen in the Arab countries following the 2011 protests. However, six years after the revolution, Tunisia's economy is struggling with currency devaluation, trade deficits, and high unemployment rates.⁶ This is problematic because socio-economic needs were one of the main drivers behind the revolution. Additionally, Tunisia had to cope with terrorism and other security threats spilling over from neighboring Libya.

Due to its geographical proximity and symbolic importance, Tunisia became a priority for Europe's neighborhood policy. In addition to a close cooperation between the EU and the democratically-elected government to support political and economic reforms, security became an increasingly prominent topic in EU-Tunisia relations, particularly in the approach of individual states such as France, the United Kingdom, and Italy. Among other reasons, European countries' concerns mainly stem from Tunisia's proximity to Libya and the problems that haunt it: Terrorist attacks in tourist hotspots, a large number of Tunisians joining the ranks of ISIS, and human trafficking.

Turkey's interest in Tunisia was based on different grounds. The AK Party government was particularly attracted by the emergence of Ennahda as a central political force in Tunisia. With the fall of Ben Ali, relations improved significantly and Turkey's presence in Tunisia became more prominent. From Ankara, the ideological proximity between Ennahda and the AK Party was perceived as means to enlarge Turkey's sphere of influence. For Tunisia, relations with Turkey became a highly-politicized issue and secularist circles presented it as a move towards further Islamization. For Brussels and other European capitals, Turkey's activism in Tunisia was not perceived as a direct threat, but contributed to the idea that the strategies of the EU and Turkey in the post-Arab Spring context (with regards to Tunisia) were following different paths.

Egypt

The EU's response to political developments in Egypt epitomizes its overall response to the Arab Spring. As with Tunisia, the EU tried to scale

⁶ Ghilès, Francis. "Tunisia's Future Lasts a Long Time." *CIDOB Notes Internacionals* 171 (April 2017). http://www.cidob.org/es/publicaciones/serie_de_publicacion/notes_internacionals/n1_171/tunisia_s_future_last_a_long_time

up its support mechanism through a reviewed ENP and welcomed the participation of the Muslim Brotherhood in an inclusive and sustainable transition to democracy that started with the ousting of Hosni Mubarak.

In contrast, Turkey's reaction revealed its high expectations and subsequent frustrations. It is worth noting that, already in 2011, Ahmet Davutoğlu, (then-Foreign Affairs Minister) referred to the creation of an "axis of democracy of the two biggest nations in our region, from the north to the south, from the Black Sea down to the Nile Valley in Sudan."⁷

The differences in their approach were visible in the way Turkey and Europe reacted to the growing polarization in Egypt in 2013. When the democratically-elected Islamist President Morsi was removed by a military *coup d'état* in the summer of 2013, the EU was not able to shift its cautious attitude to a more proactive one. Instead, it expressed disapproval of Morsi's policies, but refrained from describing the events as a coup.⁸ After the initial decision to freeze weapons exports and repeated statements calling for Egyptian authorities to bring the transition back on track, the EU, but even more so the member states, showed their willingness to work with the new Egyptian authorities. Turkey, on the other hand, was extremely critical not only of the Egyptian military, but also of the EU for not taking a solid stance against the coup, the removal of Morsi, and the clampdown on the protesters. Since 2013, bilateral relations between Cairo and Ankara are at an all-time low. Egypt's attempt to block a statement by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) that called for respect to the democratically elected government of Turkey right after the coup attempt in July 2016 best exemplifies the state of relations between the two countries.

The widening gap in perceptions and policies of Turkey and its European partners towards Egypt is symptomatic of their increasingly divergent positions towards the post-Arab Spring Middle East. Conflicting views on this highly-politicized issue are likely to prevent a more structured cooperation between Ankara and the European capitals.

⁷ "Turkey Predicts Alliance with Egypt as Regional Anchors." *The New York Times*, September 18, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/19/world/middleeast/turkey-predicts-partnership-with-egypt-as-regional-anchors.html>

⁸ Karacasulu, Nilufer and Karakir, Irem Askar. "EU-Turkey Relations in the Context of the Middle East after the Arab Spring." *Insight Turkey* Vol. 16 No. 4 (2014) p. 212. http://file.insightturkey.com/Files/Pdf/07_karacasulukarakir_5.pdf

Regional Conflicts

Syria

The war in Syria represents a collective failure, including for the EU and Turkey, not only because of the incapacity to stop the destruction of the country, but also because of its destabilizing spillover to the wider region. Turkey, with its 900-kilometer-long border with Syria, is directly affected by this instability, happening simultaneously with a new wave of violence between the PKK and Turkish security forces on Turkish soil. The effects of the Syrian conflict were felt in Europe through the refugee crisis, increasing radicalization, and terrorist attacks in several European cities.

At first, the position of the EU and Turkey was not very different from each other: Both entities tried to convince Assad to accommodate the demands of the demonstrators, then realized that this was an impossible mission, and demanded for Assad to step down. However, they differed in approach. The EU opted for sanctions, while Turkey preferred military intervention in addition to sanctions. In response to the escalation of violence by the Syrian regime, the EU introduced restrictive measures, most of them in the form of economic sanctions.⁹ Turkey also applied sanctions but went a step further by actively supporting the opposition and asking the international community to intervene militarily. Some European countries, (France in particular), were also willing to engage in such an operation, but they were a minority in the EU. The onset of a civil war and the international community incapacity to put pressure on Assad pushed Ankara to adopt a more interventionist and unilateral approach, deploying military troops in the north of the country, through the “Euphrates Shield” operation. In this process, the main objective shifted from removing Assad to pushing ISIS away from Turkey’s borders and preventing a PKK-controlled corridor on Turkey’s southern border.

Turkey’s growing stakes in this conflict were reflected by a greater prominence in the diplomatic attempts to reach a solution. This became evident in late 2016, with Turkey’s mediation with the rebels to end the siege of Aleppo and its active involvement in the Astana talks. More recently, in May 2017, together with Iran and Russia, Turkey signed a deal

⁹ See: “European Union Restrictive measures (sanctions) in force.” http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/cfsp/sanctions/docs/measures_en.pdf

calling for the setup of de-escalation zones in Syria, an important step towards ceasefire.

The EU, its member states, and the US choose to count on the outcome of the Astana talks rather than to take the role as mediators in Syria, and thus have very limited leverage in this setting. One could argue that having a NATO member as part of the process could reassure them that, (albeit in an indirect way), they are represented in the settlement. But they felt sidelined because Turkey's involvement was a by-product of rapprochement with Russia, and Moscow presented the Astana talks as a manifestation of the decline of the Western influence in the Middle East.

Libya

In contrast with Syria, European countries took the driving seat in the military operation that put an end to Gaddafi's rule in Libya. Turkey, this time, was more reluctant. Both the EU and Turkey welcomed the transition process that started right after the intervention, but neither were able to impede the Libya's collapse in 2014. In fact, all international players contributed to the fragmentation of Libya's political system as they all tried to build strategic alliances with different local actors to promote their interests in particular parts of the country.

One of the characteristics of post-Gaddafi's Libya has been the mounting fragmentation in domestic politics due to the intervention of regional powers in Libyan affairs. Libya turned into a field of confrontation between forces sympathetic and antipathetic toward the Muslim Brotherhood. Countries that considered the Brotherhood a threat to their regime's security (Egypt after the fall of Morsi, and the United Arab Emirates right from the outset) became the main backers of the alleged anti-Islamist Tobruk government and its strongman, Khalifa Haftar. On the other hand, Turkey and Qatar entertained contacts with the Tripoli government, characterized by its close ties to the Brotherhood. Thus, it can be argued that Libya became an extension of the ideologically motivated Ankara-Cairo rivalry.

Europe's position on Libya followed a different reasoning. The issue of irregular migration from the Libyan coast to Europe and the fight against local ISIS fragments dominated the agenda. For the EU, the creation of a legitimate and effective governmental body that could control the entire Libyan territory was a priority. As such, Europeans became one of the main backers of the UN-sponsored Government of National Accord

(GNA) and welcomed the rapprochement between this government and the Misrata militias, with whom several countries—Italy in particular—established direct contact. Today, Libya is not a major contentious issue between Turkey and the EU but it is not an area of cooperation either. They follow different strategies but do not see each other as rivals or obstacles.

The Domestic Effects of Regional Conflicts

The Kurdish Question

The war in Syria opened up space for Kurdish groups to act as key players, intensifying Turkey's threat perception and further endangering relations with its transatlantic partners vis-à-vis the Kurdish question. The siege of Kobane by ISIS forces in 2014 has been a turning point in the West's perception of the Kurds. The PYD, a group that is often presented by Ankara as PKK's franchise in Syria, capitalized on the resistance of this city and through its affiliated militias (i.e., the YPG) proved to be an effective force in repelling ISIS territorial extension. Once considered relatively weak, fragmented, and secluded actors by Western eyes, Syrian Kurds became increasingly important regional players. They even openly received support from the West and after the siege of Kobane, were seen as the secular pioneers of the war against ISIS, in a way, stealing Turkey's spotlight. Gradually, Kurdish fighters became a substitute for Western boots on the ground. The siege of Kobane also brought attention to the Kurdish diaspora in Europe, enabling the diaspora members to shape the debates on the Kurdish question in their host states, even influencing policymakers in Europe.¹⁰ They used this traumatic episode and the YPG confrontation with both ISIS and Turkey to depict Turkey as a hostile country not only against the Kurds, but also against Europe's security interests in the region.

Turkey does not hold back from pushing the U.S. and the EU to make a choice between Turkey and the YPG/PYD, but the U.S. and the EU are making great efforts to avoid the all-or-none principle of Turkey, which

¹⁰ The extensive media coverage of the demonstrations against the war, especially in countries hosting a Kurdish diaspora played a significant role in bringing attention to Kobane and the Kurds' role in the war. See: Baser, Bahar. "The Kurdish Diaspora Response to Kobane: Uniting Kurds Under One Roof?" *Oxford Diasporas Program*, 2014. https://www.academia.edu/9537488/The_Kurdish_Diaspora_Response_to_Kobane_Uniting_Kurds_Under_One_Roof

puts the Kurdish question in deadlock for all parties. The different priorities, fighting ISIS and preventing a YPG/PYD advance for Turkey, restrain the efforts for cooperation leaving the two sides on the edge of conflict.

Similarly, Turkey has hardened its position regarding the possible independence of areas under control of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq, particularly since Massoud Barzani decided to move forward with the results of the September 25 referendum. At the time of writing, the impact of the event has endangered traditionally good relations between Erbil and Ankara and this has served as an opportunity for Turkey to mend ties with Baghdad and Tehran. On this particular issue, the EU has decided to keep a low profile, even though it is concerned with the possible emergence of a new conflict in an already volatile Middle East.

In fact, the Europeans are more concerned about the management of the Kurdish issue within Turkey, as this directly affects Europe through the Kurdish diasporas in various European countries. The end of the peace talks between Turkey and the PKK in the summer of 2015, combined with the arrest of politicians, journalists, academics, and civil servants on terrorism claims (starting in 2016) contributed to the increasing tension between Turkey and its transatlantic partners. Since then, Ankara has often accused European and U.S. policies of “feeding terrorists,” and some Turkish pro-governmental columnists went even as far as blaming the West for deliberately trying to weaken and divide Turkey.¹¹ This hostile attitude towards the West has spread not merely to pro-government actors, but also to nationalist and even opposition circles, reigniting an updated Sèvres syndrome.¹² The Kurdish question has been a source of constant friction in the relations between Turkey and its European partners, likely to grow into an even bigger obstacle in years to come.

¹¹ “Erdoğan accuses Germany of abetting terrorists.” *Hürriyet Daily News*, April 12, 2017. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/erdogan-accuses-germany-of-abetting-terrorists.aspx?pageID=238&nID=111921&NewsCatID=510>; Dedeoglu, Beril. “Sponsor states behind terrorism in Turkey,” *Daily Sabah* (21 March 2017), <http://www.dailysabah.com/columns/beril-dedeoglu/2017/03/21/sponsor-states-behind-terrorism-in-turkey>

¹² A common sentiment of being encircled by enemies and threats is often referred to as the “Sèvres syndrome,” after the treaty that partitioned the Ottoman territories among the European powers, followed by the war of independence. See: Arango, Tim. “Turkey’s Suspicious Mind-Set Has Been a Century in the Making.” *New York Times*, September 12, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/13/world/what-in-the-world/turkey-conspiracies-sevres-syndrome.html?_r=0

The Fight Against ISIS

The scale of the ISIS attacks in European capitals, and the problem of European nationals joining the jihadist group had a negative impact on Europe's national security perception. The EU response, (specifically of certain member states), has been to support the U.S.-led anti-ISIS coalition through military assistance, weapon supplies, and training of the Peshmerga and Iraqi security forces.¹³ France, once again, went a step further by bombing ISIS targets in Northern Syria. Turkey, on the other hand, joined the coalition in September 2014 with a rather low profile. This changed after the ISIS attack in July 2015 in Suruç, followed by Turkey's declaration of war against the organization and the opening of NATO's Incirlik base to the U.S.-led coalition.

In the fight against ISIS, Europeans attribute different roles to Turkey. They've termed it a transit zone for ISIS to and from Europe but also a buffer zone that prevents ISIS' progression to Europe. In one way or another Turkey is seen as an indispensable partner to protect Europe from further terrorist attacks. Yet many in Europe blame Turkey for not doing enough, particularly in the period 2013-2015. Turkey's targeting of YPG forces was perceived as undermining the overall anti-ISIS campaign. Additionally, Turkey's assistance to Islamist factions in Northern Syria, particularly in the Idlib province, was seen as contradictory with the overall aim of an anti-jihadist strategy. Such different understanding of the threats stemming from Syria has prevented more ambitious anti-terrorist cooperation.

The Refugee Crisis

The refugee crisis, one the most destructive effects of the war in Syria, will have a long-term impact on EU-Turkey relations. The underprepared and panic-driven reaction of the EU countries to the refugee crisis badly affected the EU's image, and drastically impacted internal solidarity. By 2017, one year after the signing of a refugee deal between Turkey and the EU, Turkey hosted about three million Syrian refugees, with less than 4,000 transferred to EU countries.¹⁴

¹³ Hayder Al-Khoei, Ellie Geranmayeh, and Mattia Toaldo. "After ISIS: How to Win the Peace in Iraq and Libya." *ECFR* (2017). http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/after_isis_how_to_win_the_peace_in_iraq_and_libya_7212

¹⁴ Gogou, Kondylia. "The EU-Turkey deal: Europe's year of shame." *Amnesty International* (2017). <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/03/the-eu-turkey-deal-europes-year-of-shame/>

At the start of the war in Syria, the welcoming attitude by the Turkish government of Syrian refugees was a relief for EU countries, fearing a worsening of the economic crisis, social, and security problems. Amid a period of growing distance between the EU and Turkey and the political stalemate regarding Turkey's accession, an EU-Turkey joint action plan was drafted in October 2015. The plan included significant incentives for Turkey (e.g., speeding up the accession negotiations and visa-free travel for Turkish citizens) in return for cooperation in preventing illegal migration to the EU.¹⁵ The result was a refugee deal that came into effect on March 2016. However, the EU's initial praise and support for Turkey did not last long.

The human rights and legal issues surrounding the deal, the non-materializing of the EU promises, and the increasingly defiant attitude of the Turkish government risk backfiring. Not only did the refugee deal turn into a bargaining chip between the two sides, but the politicization of the refugee crisis has made it a potential source of conflict in mutual relations.

The Traditional Diplomatic Agenda

Arab-Israeli Conflict

This decades-old conflict has been one of the main drivers of geopolitics in the Middle East. European countries and the EU have consistently supported a two-state solution and have been actively engaged in diplomatic efforts through the Quartet in providing financial support to the Palestinian authorities. There are many aspects on which Turkey and the EU coincide in their views on this issue, such as their criticism of the separation wall and the proliferation of settlements, but they disagree on how to deal with Hamas.

Europe's priority has been to join forces with other global powers, (particularly with the U.S.), to explore the possibility of regional initiatives such as the Arab Peace Initiative. Brussels, Paris, and London have not seen Turkey as a critical player on this issue, even when Turkey tried to become a player in the Middle East process. The exception was when Turkey mediated between Israel and Syria in 2008 and between the Hamas

¹⁵ Toygur, Ilke and Benvenuti, Bianca. "The European response to the refugee crisis: Angela Merkel on the move." *IPC-Mercator Policy Brief* (2016) p. 3. http://ipc.sabanciuniv.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/IlkeToygur_BiancaBenvenuti_FINAL.pdf

and Fatah. The prospects for increased EU and Turkey involvement in peace efforts are limited. Even if that would happen, it is not likely that either side would recognize the other as a partner, in order to increase its leverage over the other.

Iran and the Nuclear Deal

The election of Hassan Rouhani as the President of Iran in 2013 brought new hope to cease tensions between Iran and the international community regarding its nuclear plan. The EU seized this opportunity by investing heavily in finding a diplomatic solution through its High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy. A deal was finally reached in 2015, which the EU considered a confirmation of its effective sanctions-policy and the success of its persistent multilateral diplomacy.

Well before this negotiation process, Turkey tried to take on the role as a mediator between Iran and the West.¹⁶ This was in tune with its “zero-problems with neighbors” approach and interest in developing bilateral relations with Iran. Yet neither the U.S. nor the EU welcomed this move.

The increasing regional rivalry between Turkey and Iran (following the war in Syria) is likely to prevent Turkey from playing the role of a mediator if new tensions were to arise between Iran and the West. In the meantime, Europeans will try to detach the Syria issue from their relations with Iran and turn the improving ties into an economic opportunity. Turkey’s stakes in the Middle East will not allow Ankara to follow a similar line.

The Recent Gulf Crisis

The Gulf region has not lacked conflict and tension, and the recent escalation between a Saudi-led group of countries and Qatar is an additional destabilizing element. Riyadh accuses Doha of sponsoring terrorism and interfering in the domestic affairs of its neighbors. Qatar’s believes that the Saudis and their allies are limiting Qatar’s independence. Turkey has played a major role in this crisis; a condition for the Saudi bloc to end their blockade against Qatar was the closure of the Turkish military base in Qatar. Turkey has openly supported Qatar, vowing to increase its military presence in the country.

¹⁶ The best example was the attempt by Turkey and Brazil to explore alternative diplomatic channels in 2010.

In contrast, Europe tried to remain neutral on the issue. Nevertheless, there were contradictory messages from different EU states. If Europe had decided to become actively involved, this could have opened space for dialogue between Ankara and the Europeans. Europe's low profile in a crisis directly affecting Turkey may reinforce Ankara's view that Europe has little leverage over Middle Eastern affairs. In other words, Europe's lack of involvement only contributes to Ankara's conviction that in order to preserve its interests, it should give priority to actors that do have leverage in the region (i.e., the U.S., Russia and Iran).

Conclusion

The wider Mediterranean is not an exception to the ongoing tensions between Turkey and the EU. As seen in this chapter, both Turkey and the EU are interested in this region becoming more stable and prosperous. However, they do not necessarily agree on how to achieve this goal. It is not a coincidence that in the very moment we witness a deterioration of EU-Turkey relations, we also observe a growing perception gap on issues such as the fight against terrorism, or on how to deal with political Islam at the center of policies towards the wider Mediterranean. Turkey feels abandoned by the EU, and Europeans no longer see Turkey as a model or as a source of inspiration for the region.

Despite all their differences, the EU and Turkey can agree that they both failed in their attempts to transform the region. They can also agree that alliances are shifting rapidly and that endangering long-term alliances such as (e.g., NATO) is a risky exercise. Both sides should critically assess their decisions in the last few years, and recalibrate whether alternative ways could—or should—have been explored. Finally, they should acknowledge that despite the current tensions, they are bound to work together—if for nothing else, because they have common (and complicated) neighbors.

The current situation in both Turkey and the EU, along with the growing instability in the Middle East, will not help lessen tensions. At this stage, the most one could expect is for all parties to realize how big the stakes are, and to try and recognize each other's legitimate grievances, keeping all channels of communication open.

