

Turkish-French Relations in Recent Years: Signs of Normalization During Hollande Period and Predictions for The Future

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Abstract: Turkish-French relations are well rooted and based on strong economic, cultural and political ties between two countries. However, in recent years, there have been some problems between two countries and especially during the Presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-2012), these problems began to spoil relations between two nations as well. However, with the election of François Hollande as the new President of the Republic in 2012, Turkey and France opened a new chapter in their relations. Although some issues creating problems in bilateral relations were not completely solved, there has been a visible progress in Turkish-French relations during Hollande's tenure in office. This article aims to analyze Turkish-French relations during Sarkozy and Hollande periods separately, to state main issues creating problems in bilateral relations, to analyze economic and cultural aspects of relations and to discuss the future of relations in the light of recent political developments and Charlie Hebdo incident.

Keywords: France, Turkish-French Relations, Franco-Turkish Relations, Turkish Foreign Policy, Nicolas Sarkozy, François Hollande, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Abdullah Gül, Ahmet Davutoğlu, Laurent Fabius, Turkey-EU Relations, Turkish Accession to EU, Armenian Genocide Claims, Kurdish Question, Islamophobia, Charlie Hebdo Incident.

1. INTRODUCTION

Turkish-French relations are well rooted and based on strong economic, cultural and political ties between two countries. Bilateral relations, which started during the Ottoman period and having diplomatic, economic and cultural aspects, were further intensified with the emergence of modern and secular Republic of Turkey founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923. This new state took France as its role-model in many aspects. Turkey's engagement into Western political, economic and military organizations after the Second World War due to Soviet threat also positively affected Turkish-French relations. Although the dominant position of France and other European powers in Turkish Foreign Policy was replaced by the United States in years to come, France has kept its privileged position for Turkish political elite, intellectuals and Turkish people thanks to Republican heritage. Two countries still enjoy high level of political, economic, cultural and diplomatic relations. Both countries are members of NATO and Council of Europe for long years and are considered as allies. Moreover, Turkey has been trying to become a full member of European Union, a supranational political organization in which France acts as one of the leaders together with Germany. France played a positive role during the Presidency of Jacques Chirac (1995-2007) in Turkey's membership to Customs Union and becoming a candidate for full membership to EU. However, bilateral relations have never been perfect and without any problems. In recent years, these problems became much more apparent and especially during the Presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-2012), began to spoil not only political relations, but also relations between two nations. However, with the election of François Hollande as the new President of the Republic in 2012, Turkey and France opened a new chapter in their relations. Although some issues creating problems in bilateral relations were not completely solved, there has been a visible progress in Turkish-French relations during Hollande's tenure in office.

2. SARKOZY PERIOD (2007-2012)

Turkish-French relations reached the most tense and problematic level during the Presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy. Sarkozy objected to Turkey's accession to EU in a frank even rude way. This

led to a perception on the Turkish side that France has been turning into an Islamophobic and Turcophobic country. Sarkozy, in fact, objected to Turkey's EU membership with the idea that these two countries belong to two different civilizations and Turkey geographically is not part of Europe.¹ As a result of Sarkozy's efforts, 5 chapters were blocked in Turkey's EU accession process. According to Dorothée Schmid, during Sarkozy's Presidency, Turkey's "best European enemy" -France- did not want to spoil relations with this country, but rather wanted to prevent Turkey to become a full member.² The head of French think-tank IRIS (*Institut de Relations et Stratégiques*)³, Professor Didier Billion thinks that Sarkozy took a negative stance toward Turkey's EU membership also for internal political reasons; namely to prevent the rapid rise of far-right leader Marine Le Pen and her party National Front.⁴ Thus, Sarkozy's anti-Turkey rhetoric was the result of a tactic-based approach. After all, although during his Presidential campaign he promised to end negotiations for Turkish accession to EU, Sarkozy only froze 5 chapters and did not terminate the negotiation process during his tenure in office in the Élysée Palace. However, here it should be stated that Sarkozy also made a serious mistake during his Presidency; his policy preferences were perceived as he is against Turks and Turkey although his aim was just to prevent Turkey to become a full member of the EU. Turkish media also portrayed him as an antipathic figure and created an artificial personal rivalry between Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Sarkozy. For instance, Sarkozy's choice of chewing a gum during his Turkey visit led to criticism in Turkish media about his lack of respect towards Turkey and Turkish people.⁵

In 2011, when the French Parliament passed a new law about the criminalization of the denial of Armenian Genocide, the antipathy toward Sarkozy and France reached its peak in Turkey. Although this law was later cancelled by the French Constitutional Court, economic and political relations hit the bottom after this event. According to some researches, French firms' share in Turkish market fell from 6 % to 3 % as a reaction to this law.⁶ In addition to this, when the Turkish media portrayed Sarkozy's Turkey policy not as a strategic choice of France, but rather as Sarkozy's personal obsession, Turkish decision-makers began to think that they should get rid of Sarkozy in order to make bilateral relations strong again.⁷ French President was even portrayed as Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler by Turkish daily *Vatan* in its edition on December 4, 2009.⁸ It should be stated that the media in both countries did not play a very constructive role during Sarkozy's Presidency.

However, it would be wrong to conclude that Sarkozy period was a complete failure. For instance, a new project that was initiated by Sarkozy, Union for the Mediterranean⁹, was not really analyzed and appreciated by Turkish and French intellectuals and decision-makers.¹⁰ It

¹ Veysel Ayhan & Mehmet Dalar & Muhittin Ataman (2010), "Fransa'daki Türkiye Algısı: Türk Dış Politikası ve AB'ye Üyelik Süreci Bağlamında Bir Analiz", *Ortadoğu Analiz*, November 2010, Vol. 2, No: 22, p. 83.

² Dorothée Schmid (2010), "Les Elites Françaises et la Turquie: Une Relation dans l'Attente", *EDAM Report*, June 2010, p. 14.

³ For its website; <http://www.iris-france.org/>.

⁴ Veysel Ayhan & Mehmet Dalar & Muhittin Ataman (2010), "Fransa'daki Türkiye Algısı: Türk Dış Politikası ve AB'ye Üyelik Süreci Bağlamında Bir Analiz", *Ortadoğu Analiz*, November 2010, Vol. 2, No: 22, p. 86.

⁵ "Gökçek'ten sakız misillemesi" (2011), *Hürriyet*, Date of Accession: 12.01.2016 from <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/17125247.asp>.

⁶ See; Elsever Abdullayev (2015), "AB vs. Türkiye: Bütünleşmenin Derin Uykusunu", *Uluslararası Politika Akademisi*, Date of Accession: 12.01.2016 from <http://politikaakademisi.org/ab-vs-turkiye-butunlesmenin-derin-uykusu/> and François Picard (2014), "Hollande in Turkey: no more questions please", *France24*, 26.01.2014, Date of Accession: 12.01.2016 from <http://www.france24.com/en/20140125-hollande-turkey-no-more-questions-please>.

⁷ Dorothée Schmid (2010), "Les Elites Françaises et la Turquie: Une Relation dans l'Attente", *EDAM Report*, June 2010, p. 16.

⁸ Dorothée Schmid (2010), "Les Elites Françaises et la Turquie: Une Relation dans l'Attente", *EDAM Report*, June 2010, p. 16. It can be seen from here; <http://www.euractiv.com.tr/yazici-sayfasi/article/turk-basinindan-sarkozye-agir-soz-fasist-007989>.

⁹ For its official website; <http://ufmsecreariat.org/>.

¹⁰ For a short analysis on the Union for the Mediterranean see; Ozan Örmeci (2014), "Akdeniz Birliği ve Doğu Akdeniz Enerji Rezervleri", *Uluslararası Politika Akademisi*, Date of

was probably the timing of the project, simultaneously with the German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Sarkozy's statements about a model of "privileged partnership" for Turkey, led to negative reactions on the Turkish side. Turkish public opinion saw this offer as a second-class membership while ignoring the serious difficulties related to the Turkey's full membership to EU. However, this project might become a serious geopolitical design and vision in the near future if Turkey and EU will both realize that Turkey's full membership to EU is not an easy goal, especially at a time when European nations seem very much concerned about the spread of Islam and extremist Islamic groups into Europe. The Arab Spring process also was not used as leverage by Turkey and France during Sarkozy's Presidency. Although Sarkozy was the French leader who secured French return to the military wing of the NATO, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan followed a paradoxical foreign policy during the Arab Spring. Erdoğan first criticized France and NATO for getting involved in Libya and a week later, he began to support the NATO involvement.¹¹ Although both countries supported the transition process in some North African and Middle Eastern countries (Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Syria) during the Arab Spring, they did not act together and they focused on strategic competition instead of strategic cooperation. That is why; the surprising defeat of Sarkozy in 2012 Presidential elections was welcomed and even celebrated by the Turkish side.

3. HOLLANDE PERIOD (2012-)

Unexpected victory of François Hollande in 2012 Presidential elections was hailed in Turkey mostly because of prejudices against Sarkozy.¹² This led to the emergence of high hopes for the normalization process in the bilateral relations.¹³ New French President Mr. Hollande met with his counterpart Mr. Abdullah Gül first time in May 2012 in Chicago for the NATO meeting. The meeting had a positive atmosphere and was followed by two Foreign Ministers, Laurent Fabius and Ahmet Davutoğlu's meeting in July 2012.¹⁴ After this meeting, Davutoğlu made reference to "visionary cooperation" between two countries.¹⁵ The positive atmosphere was supported by Hollande's help for the opening of a new chapter in Turkey's EU accession process¹⁶ although Mr. Hollande was making reference Turkey's inability to complete the reform (EU harmonization) process in one of his Twitter messages before the Presidential elections in 2012.¹⁷ Fabius and Davutoğlu announced the opening of a new chapter (Chapter 22: Regional Policy and Coordination of Structural Instruments) on February 12, 2013 and this was welcomed in Turkey. Since Erdoğan-Sarkozy competition is also over, France's new approach to Turkey's EU membership was seen as a positive step by Turkey. Another chapter (Chapter 17: Economic and Monetary Policy) was opened between EU and Turkey in December 2015. This is another sign of the rapprochement process that took place between two countries during Hollande's tenure in office. For sure, this was not only caused by the leader change in France, but also by the new geopolitical and structural conditions related to Russia-Ukraine crisis and Syrian civil war as well as the newly emerging international problems such as the Syrian refugee crisis and ISIS terrorism which force two countries to act together. As a result, Turkey and EU concluded a deal in March 2016 for additional economic help from EU to Turkey in order to keep Syrian refugees in Turkey in return to visa-free travel right for

Accession: 12.01.2016 from <http://politikaakademisi.org/akdeniz-birli-ve-dogu-akdeniz-enerji-rezervleri/>.

¹¹ Dorothée Schmid (2014), "France-Turquie: Retour d'Alliance ?", *Institut de Bosphore*, p. 8.

¹² "Les Turcs saluent la défaite de Nicolas Sarkozy" (2012), *Le Monde*, Date of Accession: 12.01.2016 from http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2012/video/2012/05/09/les-turques-saluent-la-defaite-de-nicolas-sarkozy_1698342_1471069.html.

¹³ "La Turquie séduite par "le printemps Hollande"" (2012), *Le Monde*, Date of Accession: 12.01.2016 from http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2012/06/25/la-turquie-seduite-par-le-printemps-hollande_1723891_823448.html.

¹⁴ Didier Billion (2012), "De nouvelles perspectives dans les relations franco-turques", *IRIS*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁵ Dorothée Schmid (2014), "France-Turquie: Retour d'Alliance ?", *Institut de Bosphore*, p. 8.

¹⁶ "Hollande to make long-awaited visit to Turkey on Jan. 27" (2013), *Today's Zaman*, Date of Accession: 12.01.2016 from

http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action;jsessionid=4DF22DAE723707F33A58B6C2086DF6AF?newsId=330778.

¹⁷ It can be seen from here; <https://twitter.com/fhollande/status/190169591660552192>.

Turkish citizens into EU countries in case Turkey could meet 72 conditions.¹⁸ This (visa-free travel right for Turkish citizens in the Schengen area) will be an important step on which Turkey has been insisting and lobbying for long years. Although many experts think that Turkey's EU membership is still a long and painful process¹⁹, this deal could secure Turkey's European identity and could reduce critics towards Turkish government.

There were also some other positive steps and signals during Hollande's Presidency. For example, the extensive interest shown by French and Turkish members of the parliament to the activity of FEDIF (*Fédération des Entrepreneurs Franco-Turcs*)²⁰ and PDP (*Plateforme de Paris pour le Dialogue Interculturel*)²¹ was a positive signal.²² During Hollande's Presidency, Turkey's fourth consulate in France was opened in Bordeaux and the opening of the fifth one in Nantes was decided.²³ Moreover, a new Theological Faculty of Islam was established in Strasbourg with the participation of people coming from Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs.²⁴ Poetic statements expressed by French Economy, Industrial Renewal and Information Technology Minister Mr. Arnaud Montebourg in his recent visit to Turkey was the peak of rapprochement process.²⁵ However, the 100th anniversary of 1915 events (Armenian Genocide controversy) created problems again in bilateral relations. Hollande called for the recognition of 1915 events as genocide²⁶ by Turkey and actively participated to commemorative ceremony organized in Yerevan in 2015. The speech he made during this ceremony was condemned by the Turkish Foreign Ministry.²⁷

In fact, during ongoing Hollande's Presidency, two countries shared a similar perspective in the initial process over the revolutionary political turbulence arising in some of the North African and Middle Eastern countries, the event known as the "Arab Spring". However, except for the successful democratic transition in Tunisia, the failure of Arab Spring to create an Islamic model compatible with democracy and secularism in Egypt, Libya and Syria prevented further cooperation between two countries. For instance, in Syria, both countries criticized the Assad government for its extensive use of violence over the civilians. However, after the emergence of a new and very radical terrorist organization in Syria and Iraq, Islamic State (IS or ISIS), both countries, especially France, preferred to adopt a more moderate strategy in Syria and put ISIS at the highest rank of its threat perceptions instead of Assad government. Turkish government on the other hand, continued to keep Assad at the top of his targets. Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu attended to anti-terror demonstration organized in France together with many world leaders after the *Charlie Hebdo* Incident, but was not very warmly welcomed by French President Hollande.²⁸

¹⁸ See; Mustafa Aydın (2016), "Unsustainable agreement between Turkey and the EU", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 24 March 2016, Date of Accession: 24.03.2016 from <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/Default.aspx?pageID=449&nID=96829&NewsCatID=468>.

¹⁹ See; Nick Danforth (2016), "Erdogan's Epic Europe Trolling", *Foreign Policy*, 23 March 2016, Date of Accession: 24.03.2016 from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/23/erdogans-epic-europe-trolling-eu-migrant-refugee-deal/>.

²⁰ For its website; <http://fedif.fr/>.

²¹ For its website; <http://www.plateformedeparis.fr/>.

²² "Türkiye-Fransa ilişkilerinde yeni dönem!" (2013), *Star*, Date of Accession: 12.01.2016 from <http://haber.stargazete.com/dunya/turkiyefransa-iliskilerinde-yeni-donem/haber-815245>.

²³ Dorothée Schmid (2014), "France-Turquie: Retour d'Alliance ?", *Institut de Bosphore*, p. 6.

²⁴ Dorothée Schmid (2014), "France-Turquie: Retour d'Alliance ?", *Institut de Bosphore*, p. 6.

²⁵ Dorothée Schmid (2014), "France-Turquie: Retour d'Alliance ?", *Institut de Bosphore*, p. 9.

²⁶ "Hollande appelle la Turquie à « faire son travail de mémoire » sur le génocide arménien" (2014), *Le Monde*, Date of Accession: 12.01.2016 from http://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2014/01/27/hollande-appelle-ankara-a-faire-son-travail-de-memoire-sur-le-genocide-armenien_4355393_3214.html.

²⁷ "No: 132, 24 Nisan 2015, Fransa Cumhurbaşkanı Hollande'ın Erivan'daki Etkinlikte Yaptığı Konuşma ile Başbakan Valls'ın Paris'teki Açıklamaları Hk." (2015), *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı*, Date of Accession: 12.01.2016 from http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-132_-24-nisan-2015-fransa-cumhurbaskani-hollande-in-erivan-daki-etkinlikte-yaptigi-konusma-ile-basbakan-valls-in-paris-teki-tr.mfa.

²⁸ "Hollande herkesi öptü, Davutoğlu ile sadece tokalaştı" (2015), *Hürriyet*, Date of Accession: 12.01.2016, from <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/hollande-herkesi-optu-davutoglu-ile-sadece-tokalasti-27949267>.

In addition, François Hollande made a two-day visit to Turkey on 27-28 January 2014.²⁹ The visit came exactly 22 years after François Mitterrand's visit to Turkey in 1992 and thus, had a historic importance.³⁰ Before this visit, Turkey was harshly criticized by France and other European countries due to the extensive use of violence by Turkish police forces during the Gezi Park protests in 2013. President Hollande was accompanied by a large group, including 50 important French businessmen. A total of 13 agreements were signed between Turkey and France during this visit including energy, transportation, customs, agriculture and credit facilities as well as a new strategic proclamation document signed between Foreign Ministers of two countries. With this document, bilateral relations between two countries gained a new institutional framework. This was followed by again two countries' Foreign Ministers' signature of an action plan for 2014-2016.³¹ Following these developments, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan paid a visit to Paris. This visit confirmed the similarities between two countries' policies concerning Syrian refugee crisis and IS (ISIS) danger. President Hollande announced during this visit that France is ready to help Turkey to open two new chapters (Chapter 23 and Chapter 24) without any prior condition. Hollande also pointed out the multi-dimensional nature of French-Turkish relations and added that France is ready for new ways of cooperation and agreements in civil aviation and aerospace industry, defense, agriculture and nuclear energy.³² Recent visit of French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian to Turkey in the first days of 2016 was also important. Le Drian had meetings with his Turkish counterpart İsmet Yılmaz, Turkish Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and President of the Republic Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. This visit confirmed once again two countries' cooperation and shared approach vis-a-vis Syrian crisis and struggle against terrorism.³³ If we have to make a general assessment of the ongoing François Hollande period, there has been a visible progress in bilateral relations; at least the artificial rivalry created during Sarkozy period was corrected. However, it seems like both countries need more time to completely engage in high level of cooperation as they used to do before as two allies. Concerning this, Dorothée Schmid claims that "Turks want spectacular whereas French side wants progressive normalization".³⁴

4. MAJOR DISAGREEMENTS

Major disagreements between Turkey and France can be classified as such;

A-) Armenian Genocide Claims

France recognized 1915 Events as genocide first time in 1998 by passing a law from its Parliament. With an additional law passed from the Parliament in 2001, this law gained a legal status as well. Following this decision, many statues related to the tragedy of deported Armenians were built in French cities. Considering the high level status and dense effect of

²⁹ For an analysis on this visit, see; Gizem Araz (2014), "François Hollande en Turquie", *Uluslararası Politika Akademisi*, Date of Accession: 12.01.2016 from <http://politikaakademisi.org/francois-hollande-en-turquie/>.

³⁰ Previous President of the Republic of France, Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy also made a short visit to Turkey in 2011 February which lasted only 5 hours. However, this was for the G-20 meeting, not a bilateral official diplomatic initiative. Thus, Hollande's visit was the first high-level official visit after Mitterrand. See; "Hollande en Turquie pour solder les différends des années Sarkozy" (2014), *Le Monde*, Date of Accession: 12.01.2016 from http://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2014/01/27/francois-hollande-se-rend-en-turquie-pour-sortir-de-l-impasse-diplomatique_4354886_3210.html.

³¹ Sema Çapanoğlu & Deniz Servantie (2015), "2015: Fransa'ya Türk Göçünün 50'nci Yılında Türkiye-Fransa İlişkileri", *İktisadi Kalkınma Vakfı Değerlendirme Notu*, No: 129, June 2015, p. 5.

³² Sema Çapanoğlu & Deniz Servantie (2015), "2015: Fransa'ya Türk Göçünün 50'nci Yılında Türkiye-Fransa İlişkileri", *İktisadi Kalkınma Vakfı Değerlendirme Notu*, No: 129, June 2015, p. 5.

³³ Hüseyin Hayatsever (2016), "Türkiye ve Fransa'nın Suriye konusunda işbirliğinden başka seçenekleri yok", *Sputnik News*, Date of Accession: 12.01.2016 from <http://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/20160105/1020030257/turkiye-fransa-suriye-konusunda-isbirliginden-baska-secenekleri-yok.html>.

³⁴ Dorothée Schmid (2014), "France-Turquie: Retour d'Alliance ?", *Institut de Bosphore*, p. 9.

Armenians in France's cultural, political and economic life, what happened until this point could be considered as normal for France. However, in 2006, French Parliament passed a very controversial law (Denial Law) about criminalizing the denial of Armenian Genocide. Anti-France sentiments in Turkey reached its peak due to this decision. The law was not approved by the French Senate upon diplomatic pressures coming from Turkey. In 2011, this law was ratified this time by both of the chambers in French Parliament. But thanks to the decision of the French Constitutional Court (Council) in 2012, the law was made void.³⁵ Another decision taken by the French Constitutional Court in January 2016 also clearly pointed out that the tragic 1915 Events cannot be considered equally to the internationally recognized genocide against Jews during the Second World War, a proven historical tragedy known as the "Holocaust".³⁶

French President Hollande, previously during his Presidential campaign, promised Armenian originated French people to relegalize the Denial Law. Although he made some preparations, he did not make pressure until today for the Denial Law. According to Dorothee Schmid, Armenian Genocide claims constitute the most problematic aspect of Turkish-French relations.³⁷ Considering the 101 years old and controversial nature of the event, both sides might hope that they could overcome this problem in the near future. If we have to look at the reasons of aggressive Turkish reaction to French claims over the issue of 1915 Events, we can say that the Turkish public opinion takes the issue very seriously and believes that France follows an anti-Turkish policy concerning 1915 Events. Although 1915 Events took place long decades ago and there is still no clear evidence of an organized genocide plan made by the Ottoman State, France blames Turkey for committing genocide while ignoring a real and proven genocide that was made by Armenians to another Turkic nation, Azerbaijanis, in Hodjali (*Hocali*) in 1992. Moreover, France and in general European countries seem to ignore about Turkey's efforts to overcome its problems with Armenia. For instance, Turkey, for the first time in its history, issued an official condolence message for massacred Armenians in 2015. Turkey's former President of the Republic, Mr. Abdullah Gül, took high political risks and went to Armenia and signed some protocols to initiate political and economic relations with Armenia in 2010. This was made just after Turkey's invitation to Armenia for establishing an independent committee of historians for investigating the factual aspects of 1915 Events. Turkey also engaged in the restoration of Armenian churches in Anatolia for showing its willingness to improve bilateral economic and political relations. All these efforts were declined by Armenia. It is also a fact that Armenia has problematic relations with all neighboring countries in its region (except Islamic Republic of Iran) including Azerbaijan, Turkey and Georgia. France, on the other hand, probably sees the Armenian issue as an opportunity to act as the guardian of Armenians and have a balancing power especially upon Catholic Armenians against Russian Federation, which began to control and even dominate the economic and political life of Armenia in recent years. However, looking from a realist perspective, France's policy is not based on French national interests because the country risks losing Turkey and Azerbaijan, two Western-oriented and secular Muslim countries important for European energy security, due to this problem. Considering the silence of Germany on that issue and British moderateness, French policy seems like an unsuccessful initiative. Moreover, some French and European academics' and politicians' ideologically motivated views on this controversial historical event, make serious academics such as Maxime Gauin uncomfortable because of the use of history as a political tool instead of a scientific branch.³⁸

B-) Kurdish Question

³⁵ Sema Çapanoğlu & Deniz Servantie (2015), "2015: Fransa'ya Türk Göçünün 50'nci Yılında Türkiye-Fransa İlişkileri", *İktisadi Kalkınma Vakfı Değerlendirme Notu*, No: 129, June 2015, p. 3.

³⁶ "Fransa Anayasa Konseyi, Yahudi soykırımı ve Ermeni iddialarını farklı tuttu" (2016), *NTV*, 08.01.2016, Date of Accession: 11.01.2016 from <http://www.ntv.com.tr/dunya/fransa-anayasa-konseyi-yahudi-soykirimi-ve-ermenii-ddialarini-farkli-tuttu.TONZnV0oIESIHTI2azhr4Q>.

³⁷ Dorothee Schmid (2014), "France-Turquie: Retour d'Alliance ?", *Institut de Bosphore*, p. 7.

³⁸ Maxime Gauin (2015), "Robert Fisk, Between Francophobia and Turkophobia", *AVİM*, Date of Accession 22.02.2016 from <http://www.avim.org.tr/analiz/en/ROBERT-FISK--BETWEEN-FRANCOPHOBIA-AND-TURKOPHOBIA---Maxime-GAUIN/4290>.

France is an active supporter of Kurdish national movement since François Mitterrand's Presidency. Kurdish Institute in Paris³⁹ was established in 1983, at a time when Kurds were not even recognized as a different nation by the rest of the world. Although France is against all kinds of terrorism, the presence of PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party, a Marxist-Leninist secessionist political party employing terrorist methods to establish an independent Kurdistan) militants and sympathizers in France has always created problems between Paris and Ankara. The assassination of 3 PKK members in January 2013 in France⁴⁰, brought this issue into headlines and political agenda again. The statement of French President Hollande about his personal relationship to one of these 3 PKK members was condemned by Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.⁴¹ The arrest of a Turkish student Sevil Sevimli and the controversial prosecution of Turkish sociologist Pınar Selek are other examples of problematic relations between two countries related to Kurdish Question in recent history.

France, similar to many other European countries, makes pressure upon Turkey to make reforms in order to solve the Kurdish Question. Reforms conducted by Gül and Erdoğan governments between 2002 and 2007 and the "peace process" initiated by the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (*Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*) in 2009 in Oslo was closely followed by Paris. However, the failure of this process and the resurgence of terror in Turkey directed France to think that Turkey's reforms concerning the Kurdish Question are not sufficient and successful. The socialist government in France might be closer to the model of autonomy for Kurds, whereas the French right -traditionally- is less concerned about Kurdish rights. Recent visit of French President Hollande to Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq also showed the emphasis given by the French leadership to Kurdish issue. During this visit, Hollande met with Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani and expressed France's support to Kurdistan region against ISIS (IS) terrorism.⁴² Looking from a geopolitical perspective, this visit and statement might be considered as a support for the Kurdish independence. It should not be also forgotten that, France, as a country having a developed defense industry, looks at Middle Eastern countries also as a marketplace.

C-) Turkish Accession to EU

Turkey's adventure for realizing the "Blue Apple" and becoming a full member of EU started with the 1999 Helsinki Summit. Negotiations began in 2005 and 15 chapters were opened so far, though only one could have terminated. Cyprus Dispute (Additional Protocol issue) is a condition for the opening of 8 chapters and the closure of all chapters according to the decision of General Affairs & External Relations Council on December 11, 2006.⁴³ According to a survey conducted by IFOP (*Institut français d'opinion publique*)⁴⁴ in 2014, 83 % of French people are against Turkey's accession to EU.⁴⁵ This is a very high percentage and it shows that the current perceptions of French people toward Turkey cannot be changed easily.

Groups that support Turkey's accession to EU often make reference to Turkey's economic importance as a member country of Customs Union, having nearly 80 million population and being the 17th largest economy in the world. In their eyes, Turkey is an ally country that should not be pushed toward other unions or blocs. Moreover, European orientation of Turkish economy (37 % of total Turkish exports are made to European countries and 70 % of direct investments in Turkey are coming from Europe) and Turkey's active support for peacekeeping operations of the Western bloc such as in Bosnia and Kosovo make this country an important

³⁹ For its website; <http://www.institutkurde.org/tr/>.

⁴⁰ For an analysis on these assassinations, see; Göktürk Tüysüzöğlu (2013), "Paris Suikastının Arka Planı", *Uluslararası Politika Akademisi*, Date of Accession: 14.01.2016 from <http://politikaakademisi.org/paris-suikastinin-arka-plan/>.

⁴¹ Dorothée Schmid (2014), "France-Turquie: Retour d'Alliance ?", *Institut de Bosphore*, p. 7.

⁴² For an analysis, see; Ozan Örmeci (2014), "Fransa Cumhurbaşkanı François Hollande'ın Irak Ziyareti", Date of Accession: 14.01.2016 from <http://politikaakademisi.org/fransa-cumhurbaskani-francois-hollandein-irak-ziyareti/>.

⁴³ "Katılım Müzakerelerinde Mevcut Durum", *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Avrupa Birliği Bakanlığı*, Date of Accession: 14.01.2016 from <http://www.ab.gov.tr/index.php?l=1&p=65>.

⁴⁴ For its website, see; <http://www.ifop.fr/>.

⁴⁵ "Le long chemin de l'adhésion turque à l'Union européenne" (2014), *Le Monde*, Date of Accession: 14.01.2016 from http://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2014/01/29/le-long-chemin-de-l-adhesion-turque-a-l-union-europeenne_4355569_3210.html.

ally for the Europeans.⁴⁶ In addition, Turkey might be very helpful to EU in terms of designing and conducting pro-European policies in Balkans, Caucasus, Middle East and North Africa. Former socialist Prime Minister Michel Rocard also points out this aspect of Turkey and states that “Turkey should be integrated to the West, in order to prevent its move towards the East”.⁴⁷ Groups that are against Turkey’s membership on the other hand focus on Turkey’s lack of progress related to political and economic reforms conducted by this country. Another reason not stated openly by the European elites might be Turkey’s increasing and high Muslim population and the advantage that this country will enjoy in the European Parliament (it will be the largest seated country together with Germany) if it becomes a member.⁴⁸ It is now clear that especially for right-wing populists and nationalists, Turkey’s EU membership is also an attack to European identity.⁴⁹ There are also fears in France that Turkey’s EU membership will lead to a large wave of migrants from this country to Europe.

Far-right (National Front) and center-right (former UMP, now Republicans) are clearly against Turkish accession to EU, whereas the center-left and extreme-left are not against it in principle. In order to overcome these problems, US might play a constructive role. In the past, US was able to weaken European resistance against Turkey’s EU membership especially during the Presidency of Bill Clinton.

D-) Cyprus Dispute

Another major problem between Turkey and France as well as Turkey and EU is the Cyprus Dispute. Cyprus Dispute not only prevents Turkey’s ability to open 8 chapters and conclude all chapters, but also creates an anti-Turkish political atmosphere within the EU due to successful lobbying activities of Greece and Cyprus Republic (South Cyprus administration). However, thanks to the election two pro-solution leaders (Mustafa Akıncı in TRNC and Nikos Anastasiades in South Cyprus), there are now high hopes in the island for the solution of the Cyprus Dispute. Professor Anne-Marie Le Gloannec for instance thinks that Cyprus Dispute is a critical issue for Turkey’s EU membership and better relations with France.⁵⁰ However, Cyprus Dispute is an instrumental issue for groups that are against Turkey’s EU membership. These groups might think that if Cyprus Dispute is solved, it might be very difficult to prevent Turkey’s full membership since there will not be a valid pretext for them to object to Turkey’s bid. Moreover, Turkey might not want to leave Turkish Cypriots to the mercy of Greek Cypriots and Europeans, which resulted in massacres taking place between 1963 and 1974 in the past. Even the Turkish Cypriots, who voted in favor of Annan Plan in 2004, might try to avoid an unfair solution without Turkey’s guarantee in the island. It should not be forgotten that, it was not the United Kingdom or Greece (two other guarantor countries of the Cyprus Republic), but only Turkey that supported Turkish Cypriots against EOKA attacks in the near past.

Recent natural gas discoveries around the Mediterranean Sea including Cyprus and South Cyprus government’s agreements with some energy companies created a new dynamism in Cyprus Dispute and added an economic motivation to the solution efforts.⁵¹ It is also a fact that

⁴⁶ Elsever Abdullayev (2015), “AB vs. Türkiye: Bütünleşmenin Derin Uykusu”, *Uluslararası Politika Akademisi*, Date of Accession: 14.01.2016 from <http://politikaakademisi.org/ab-vs-turkiye-butunlesmenin-derin-uykusu/>.

⁴⁷ Dorothée Schmid (2010), “Les Elites Françaises et la Turquie: Une Relation dans l’Attente”, *EDAM Report*, June 2010, p. 12.

⁴⁸ Veysel Ayhan & Mehmet Dalar & Muhittin Ataman (2010), “Fransa’daki Türkiye Algısı: Türk Dış Politikası ve AB’ye Üyelik Süreci Bağlamında Bir Analiz”, *Orta Doğu Analiz*, November 2010, Vol. 2, No: 22, p. 86.

⁴⁹ Deniz Pişkin (2013), “Türkiye’nin Avrupa Birliği’ne Üyelik Sürecinde Fransa’daki Türkiye Algısı”, *İdarecinin Sesi*, July-August 2013, Date of Accession: 14.01.2016 from http://www.tid.web.tr/ortak_icerik/tid.web/157.SAYI/19-%20Deniz%20PI%3%8C%E2%80%A1S%C3%8C%C2%A7KI%C3%8C%E2%80%A1N.pdf.

⁵⁰ Veysel Ayhan & Mehmet Dalar & Muhittin Ataman (2010), “Fransa’daki Türkiye Algısı: Türk Dış Politikası ve AB’ye Üyelik Süreci Bağlamında Bir Analiz”, *Orta Doğu Analiz*, Ekim 2010, Cilt 2, Sayı: 22, s. 83.

⁵¹ For a detailed analysis, see; Ozan Örmeci (2015), “Cyprus Dispute in terms of Energy Politics”, in *Turkish Foreign Policy in the New Millennium*, edited by Ozan Örmeci & Hüseyin Işıksal, Peter Lang, pp. 325-335, Date of Accession: 14.01.2016 from

the economic situation in South Cyprus is worsening in recent years. However, this issue did not become a dominant factor in Cyprus negotiations until now since some other problems related to land, property ownership and guarantees still dominate the negotiation process. It is also stated by some experts that Cyprus resources will be sufficient for Cyprus only and without establishing a larger hub to Turkey together with Egyptian and Israeli gas resources, this might not turn into a very profitable-efficient energy project for the EU. Mediterranean energy resources, thus, can be best analyzed from a larger Mediterranean perspective. Large resources discovered in Israel and a new huge gas field discovered in Egypt⁵² can play a constructive role in the emergence of new geopolitical designs and political and economic agreements. Economic gains, by creating win-win situations, can become a strong leverage for the solution of difficult political problems. Recent rapprochement between Turkey and Kurdistan Regional Government is a perfect example for this. In addition, if both sides in Cyprus will realize that they cannot solve their political problems, they can focus on economic projects and partial political solutions. Here, the opening of Varosha (Maraş region), the extension of Turkey's water project to South Cyprus and even Israel and most importantly, energy projects for the transportation of Mediterranean gas resources to Europe via Turkey might be attractive issues for cooperation between two communities as well as other Mediterranean countries.

E-) Criticism on Turkish Democracy

European countries including France are used to criticize Turkey because of its democratic deficits. This trend was almost completely disappeared between 2002 and 2007 when Justice and Development Party (*AK Parti*) was making very successful and efficient reforms for the consolidation of democracy in Turkey and the country -in a sense- was passing through a "silent revolution" (*sessiz devrim*) process. However, after 2007, especially after the Gezi Park protests in 2013, criticism towards JDP government increased in Europe and in France. There are also serious concerns for President of the Republic Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's plans for making transition into Turkish-type Presidency. Increasing critical approach towards Turkey can be seen in EU's progress reports on Turkey as well as the broadcasting policy of European newspapers and tv channels. In recent months, especially increasing governmental pressure over the Turkish media is critically analyzed in European press. For instance, two well-known Turkish journalists, Can Dündar and Erdem Gül, face life in prison over a story alleging that the Turkish government was arming Islamist militants in Syria.⁵³ Police raid and appointment of a trustee to the Fethullah Gülen movement's popular newspaper *Zaman* also had media coverage in France⁵⁴ and Turkey was criticized by the new French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault who replaced Laurent Fabius in the cabinet revision of the February 2016 because of this event, largely seen as an effort to silence the free press.⁵⁵

French intellectuals considered Turkey for long decades as a country strongly inspired from the Jacobin modernization and French Revolution and were estranged from Turkey in recent years because of the post-modern and Islamic transformation of the country.⁵⁶ Some anti-democratic practices and irresponsible and provocative statements of the members of Turkish government also strengthen fears and prejudices in Europe toward Turkey. So, looking from Paris, French intellectuals think that Turkey seems like getting away from democracy as it gets away from Europe. In addition, considering the cordial ties between secular groups in Turkey and France,

[https://www.academia.edu/15570691/ %C3%96rmeci Ozan 2015 Cyprus Dispute in terms of Energy Politics in Turkish Foreign Policy in the New Millennium eds. by Ozan %C3%96rmeci and H%C3%BCseyin I%C5%9F%C4%B1ksal Peter Lang pp. 325-335.](https://www.academia.edu/15570691/%C3%96rmeci_Ozan_2015_Cyprus_Dispute_in_terms_of_Energy_Politics_in_Turkish_Foreign_Policy_in_the_New_Millennium_ed._by_Ozan_%C3%96rmeci_and_H%C3%BCseyin_I%C5%9F%C4%B1ksal_Peter_Lang_pp._325-335.)

⁵² For an analysis on this issue, see; Sina Kısacık (2015), "Mısır, Doğu Akdeniz Enerji Jeopolitiğinde Yeni Yıldız Olabilir Mi?", *Uluslararası Politika Akademisi*, Date of Accession: 14.01.2016 from <http://politikaakademisi.org/2015/09/05/misir-dogu-akdeniz-enerji-jeopolitiginde-yeni-yildiz-olabilir-mi/>.

⁵³ "Turkish journalists face life in jail over Syria report" (2016), *BBC*, 27.01.2016, Date of Accession: 07.03.2016 from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35422357>.

⁵⁴ "Turquie : mis sous tutelle, le nouveau « Zaman » affiche une ligne pro-Erdogan", *Le Monde*, 06.03.2016, Date of Accession: 07.03.2016 from http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2016/03/06/turquie-mis-sous-tutelle-le-nouveau-zaman-affiche-une-ligne-pro-erdogan_4877434_3218.html.

⁵⁵ "Fransa'dan Türkiye'ye Eleştiri" (2016), *Sputnik Türkiye*, Date of Accession: 07.03.2016 from <http://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/20160307/1021322303/fransa-turkiye-elestiri.html>.

⁵⁶ Dorothée Schmid (2014), "France-Turquie: Retour d'Alliance ?", *Institut de Bosphore*, p. 3.

a country known with its strong secular tendency, trending Islamism in Turkey negatively affects Turkish-French relations. However, with a new pro-secular government in Turkey (or with a JDP government that returns to its reformist identity) and new reforms concerning the Kurdish Question, the critical French approach to Turkey can be easily reversed. French model of semi-presidentialism can also be an inspiration for Turkey in the near future if Erdoğan could not realize his wish to transform Turkey into a strong Presidential system. This might create sympathy for Turkey in Paris, but of course, the check and balance mechanism in such a system is a sine qua non condition for Paris and Brussels (EU).

F-) Islamophobia

Turkey's high population, consisted nearly all by Muslims, leads to a serious concern about integration in Paris in case of Turkish membership to the club. France is a country that hosts more Muslims than any other European country and has already a serious integration problem. With Turkey's entry into the club, French decision-makers think that there might a new flow of hundred thousands of Kurdish and Turkish Muslims to Europe. This triggers fears and anxieties in Europe and is reflected clearly by the rising Islamophobia and racist movements in Europe.

Professor Didier Billion from IRIS accepts that Islamophobia is on the rise in France.⁵⁷ This trend can be proven by the rising vote percentages of far-right parties in EU countries. This phenomenon seems like a natural consequence of the clashing cultures and increasing number of migrants in European cities. Ghettoization of France's *banlieus* and increasing crime rates cause not only Islamophobia, but also racist reactions against African and Muslim groups.

French political elite uses this issue for populist reasons especially in the wake of elections. Especially Marine Le Pen uses racist and Islamophobic arguments perfectly well to get more support from people. Her growing popularity also forces center-right leaders to use some racist and Islamophobic arguments. Although French left is much more careful about the prevention of racist and Islamophobic rhetoric, they are also concerned about female liberties and patriarchal social order within Muslim groups. So, in short, Islamist policies of Turkey in recent years negatively affect two countries' relations in the political field. However, Turkey's unique position (together with Tunisia and TRNC – North Cyprus) as a country dominated by Muslim population but still implementing a secular and democratic model, can be a supporting factor for the spread of French *laïcité* on the European Muslims if Turkey returns to its classical secular model.

5. ECONOMIC RELATIONS

French Chamber of Commerce is the oldest trade chamber in Turkey, which has 131 years old history in Anatolia.⁵⁸ This proves the density and the rooted nature of the bilateral economic relations similar to political/diplomatic and cultural relations. France is still one of the most important economic partners of Turkey. According to French Foreign Minister Mr. Laurent Fabius, Turkey is France's fifth biggest trade partner outside the EU and except Switzerland (in total 12th) with a volume of trade of 12.5 billion euro.⁵⁹ Recent decision of Ankara in choosing French-Japanese partnership (Areva-Mitsubishi) for the establishment of a nuclear plant in Sinop that will be terminated in 2017, is a clear sign of importance given to France by Turkey.⁶⁰ Fabius again states that there are 400 big French firms operating now in Turkey and they employ more than 100.000 people.⁶¹ Economic relations continue to make progress in

⁵⁷ Veysel Ayhan & Mehmet Dalar & Muhittin Ataman (2010), "Fransa'daki Türkiye Algısı: Türk Dış Politikası ve AB'ye Üyelik Süreci Bağlamında Bir Analiz", *Ortadoğu Analiz*, November 2010, Vol. 2, No: 22, p. 86.

⁵⁸ Laurent Fabius (2012), "France /Turquie - de nouveaux horizons pour une relation seculaire", *Fondation Robert Schuman Policy Paper*, Question d'Europe, no: 262, 17 December 2012, p. 1.

⁵⁹ Laurent Fabius (2012), "France /Turquie - de nouveaux horizons pour une relation seculaire", *Fondation Robert Schuman Policy Paper*, Question d'Europe, no: 262, 17 December 2012, p. 1.

⁶⁰ Arzu Çakır Morin (2013), "Hollande'ın gezisi ve Gezi Parkı", *Hürriyet*, Date of Accession: 09.09.2015 from <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/25373983.asp>.

⁶¹ Laurent Fabius (2012), "France /Turquie - de nouveaux horizons pour une relation seculaire", *Fondation Robert Schuman Policy Paper*, Question d'Europe, no: 262, 17 December 2012, p. 1.

tourism sector as well. Turkey hosted 1 million French tourists in 2012 and a survey made out by IPSOS indicated that 17 % of French people visited Turkey in last 10 years and 40 % are willingly to visit soon.⁶² Tourism activities also positively affect cultural relations.

Fransa-Türkiye Ticari İlişkileri 2002-2014 (milyar dolar)



Kaynak: Fransa Gümrük İdaresi, 2014

Source: Sema Çapanoğlu & Deniz Servantie (2015), “2015: Fransa’ya Türk Göçünün 50’nci Yılında Türkiye-Fransa İlişkileri”, *İktisadi Kalkınma Vakfı Değerlendirme Notu*, No: 129, June 2015, p. 6

A recent report prepared by Turkish Economic Development Foundation - *İktisadi Kalkınma Vakfı* clearly indicates the strong basis of the economic relations between two countries. According to 2014 statistics, bilateral trade volume between Turkey and France reached 14.6 billion euro (Turkey’s exports were around 6.5 billion euro, France’s exports on the other hand reached 8.1 billion euro). This means 200 % increase in the trade in the last 12 years. By the end of 2014, France is Turkey’s 4th largest export partner (after Germany, United Kingdom and Italy). The most imported goods from Turkey to France can be classified as clothes and textile products, electronic devices, fruits and vegetables and highway vehicles. Most exported good on the other hand are transportation vehicles, machines, iron and steel.⁶³ As the report suggests, businessmen have a very important role in the developing economic relations. The number of French-capital involved private enterprises reached 1.158 in 2013 and French investments in Turkey between 2002 and 2014 rose to 6.6 billion euro.⁶⁴ French investments in Turkey are mostly concentrated on automotive, electronic, cement, pharmaceutical, retailing and insurance sectors. Among these investors, there are famous firms such as Renault, Peugeot, Valeo, Michelin, Carrefour, Danone, Axa, Groupama, BNP Paribas, Lafarge and Saint-Gobain. The number of Turkish firms established in France is also increasing rapidly in recent years. Turkish investments reached 137 million euro between 2002 and 2014. Turkish firms in France are mostly operating in furniture, textile and clothing, transportation, storing, chemical materials (packaging), spare part production in automotive, agriculture and food sectors. One thing to be mentioned here is the progressive nature of economic relations albeit political problems and polemics. Especially in tourism sector, this can be seen very clearly. Although

⁶² Dorothée Schmid (2014), “France-Turquie: Retour d’Alliance ?”, *Institut de Bosphore*, p. 4.

⁶³ Sema Çapanoğlu & Deniz Servantie (2015), “2015: Fransa’ya Türk Göçünün 50’nci Yılında Türkiye-Fransa İlişkileri”, *İktisadi Kalkınma Vakfı Değerlendirme Notu*, No: 129, June 2015, p. 6.

⁶⁴ Sema Çapanoğlu & Deniz Servantie (2015), “2015: Fransa’ya Türk Göçünün 50’nci Yılında Türkiye-Fransa İlişkileri”, *İktisadi Kalkınma Vakfı Değerlendirme Notu*, No: 129, June 2015, p. 7.

both countries had serious political disagreements and polemics between their leaders, French tourists coming to Turkey rose to 1 million in 2014. According to Association of Turkish Travel Agencies - *TÜRSAB*, France was the sixth highest tourist-sending country to Turkey in 2014.

If we have to make a general assessment, it can be clearly said that the economic relations constitute the strongest part in Turkish-French relations. Economic relations are symbiotic in nature and help both sides to prosper more. Increasing power of businessmen in both countries might help Turkey and France to overcome their problems and to establish stronger relations in the near future. Here, both sides should be careful enough not to incite the other side on sensitive topics such as the genocide claims about the 1915 Events, an issue that could seriously sabotage all economic relations. A negative development related to recent history is Turkey's interesting choice of a Chinese firm (Precision Machinery Import and Export Corp.) for the air missile defense system.⁶⁵ Although there are serious critics about the compatibility problem as a NATO country, Turkey preferred Chinese firm instead of American PAC3 or French-Italian Eurosam.⁶⁶ Because of the recent cancellation of Mistral delivery to Russia, France had an economic burden in defense industry and looks at Turkey as an important market. New purchases from France in the military field can boost better economic and political relations.

6. CULTURAL RELATIONS

The beginning of French-Turkish cultural relations dates back to Ottoman period similar to diplomatic and economic relations. Especially in the field of education, France has important initiatives and contacts in Turkey. In addition to highly prestigious Galatasaray Lyceum, which was established in 1868 in İstanbul, there are many private French lyceums and colleges in Turkey including İstanbul and İzmir Saint-Joseph French Colleges, İstanbul Saint-Benoit Lyceum, İstanbul Notre Dame de Sion Lyceum, Ankara and İzmir Tevfik Fikret Lyceums and Ankara Charles De Gaulle Lyceum. Moreover, Galatasaray University was opened in 1992 as the first completely Francophone university in Turkey. These institutions not only educate French, but also spread the French culture in Turkey. There are also other important French educational/cultural institutions in Turkey such as the French Culture Centers in Ankara, İstanbul and İzmir as well as the *Alliance Française* in Adana.⁶⁷ Erasmus program allows student exchange between Turkish and French universities. In addition, recently a Yunus Emre Cultural Center was established in Paris by Turkey.⁶⁸ Researches and reports prepared by *TÜSIAD* (Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association) originated think-tank in İstanbul, Paris Bosphorus Institute (*Paris Boğaziçi Enstitüsü*)⁶⁹ and Galatasaray University based European Studies and Documentation Center (*Centre de documentation et d'études européennes*)⁷⁰ are praised by some French academics as well.⁷¹

Although there are these well-functioning institutions in the cultural and educational field, according to the governor of Ardahan from Turkey, Mr. Deniz Pişkin, French look towards Turkey is still full of orientalist and anachronistic elements. However, it is possible to diminish the effects of these prejudices with cultural activities such as more than 400 cultural activities

⁶⁵ Turkey later cancelled this bid and began to develop its own national air missile defense system.

⁶⁶ For an analysis, see; Fazıl Esad Altay (2013), "Çin'den Alınan Füzeler, Savunma Sistemimize Yarar Sağlar Mı?", *21. Yüzyıl Türkiye Enstitüsü*, Date of Accession: 15.01.2016 from <http://www.21yyte.org.tr/arastirma/milli-guvenlik-ve-dis-politika-arastirmalari-merkezi/2013/09/29/7232/cinden-alinan-fuzeler-savunma-sistemimize-yarar-saglar-mi>.

⁶⁷ Laurent Fabius (2012), "France /Turquie - de nouveaux horizons pour une relation seculaire", *Fondation Robert Schuman Policy Paper*, Question d'Europe, no: 262, 17 December 2012, p. 2.

⁶⁸ Laurent Fabius (2012), "France /Turquie - de nouveaux horizons pour une relation seculaire", *Fondation Robert Schuman Policy Paper*, Question d'Europe, no: 262, 17 December 2012, p. 4.

⁶⁹ For its website; <http://www.tusiad.org.tr/etkilesim/foto-galeri/paris-bogazici-enstitusu/>.

⁷⁰ For its website; <http://www.gsu.edu.tr/tr/akademik/arastirma-merkezleri/avrupa-arastirmalari-ve-dokumantasyon-merkezi>.

⁷¹ Didier Billion (2012), "De nouvelles perspectives dans les relations franco-turques", *IRIS*, p. 1.

organized as part of “*Fransa’da Türk Mevsimi*” (Turkish Season in France) campaign.⁷² Furthermore, Turkish movie director Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Turkish originated German director Fatih Akin recently received prizes in Cannes Film Festival. Another Turkish director, Deniz Gamze Ergüven, won a prize in the 28th European Film Awards and her movie “*Mustang*” became France’s Oscar candidate in 2016 Oscar Awards.⁷³ French music and cinema is closely observed and admired in Turkey especially by Francophone Turkish people. For example, one of the most important leading female singers in Turkey is Candan Erçetin, who was a former music teacher in Galatasaray Lyceum and chants songs in both French and Turkish languages. Former French national football team player Pascal Nouma is a respected retired football player, actor and showman in Turkey. French actor Jean Reno is one of the most popular international actors in Turkey. Edith Piaf is like the official voice of France in the world and still has thousands of admirers and fans in Turkey. French author Jean-Christophe Grangé is one of the highest selling foreign writers in Turkey. Among the Turkish intellectuals and authors, Francophones still have a very important and privileged status. In addition to historical figures such as painters Fikret Mualla and Abidin Dino, Kurdish originated director Yılmaz Güney is a symbol of Turkish intellectuals having lived in France. Important people in the cultural relations today can be listed as author Nedim Gürsel (he even had a lunch with French President François Hollande before his visit to Turkey), pro-secular journalist Mine Kırıkkanat, journalist Doğan Yurdakul and academics Ahmet İnsel, Ahmet Kuyaş, Baskın Oran, Hamit Bozarslan, Nilüfer Göle and Taner Timur. Moreover, 600.000 Turkish citizens living in France and 7.000-8.000 French citizens living in Turkey act as bridges between two countries.⁷⁴ Although the number of French people living in Turkey is extremely few, one here should not forget the large population and sphere of influence of Turkish Francophones, often coming from wealthy and elite families in Turkey. Most of these people are emotionally and culturally attached to France but became offended and even angry to Paris because of the anti-Turkey rhetoric adopted by Sarkozy in recent years. These people are also mostly pro-secular and expect French support to their political cause in Turkish domestic politics.⁷⁵ In fact, this situation also clearly shows why France has some problems with Turkey during the successive Justice and Development Party governments (2002-...).

Turkish people in France on the other hand, are mostly welcomed and do not have major integration problems unlike many other Muslim migrant communities in France and in Europe. In the recent terrorist activities of the radical Islamists groups in Europe, it seems like Arab and Maghreb originated people are involved and no Turkish Muslim was ever found guilty. Turks living in France have more than 400 religious and cultural civil society organizations and they recently began to show their presence in politics as well. For example, in the 23-30 March 2014 local elections, 16 Turkish originated deputy mayor and 178 Turkish originated town councilors were elected in France. This meant a rapid 100 % rise compared to the previous election.⁷⁶ However, there is not even a single Turkish originated member of the parliament or senator in France yet. In addition, compared to Armenian diaspora in France, Turkish diaspora is still very weak. But the lack of integration problems of Turks living in France is a very good sign and a clear proof of the unlikely dystopian scenarios, in case Turkey becomes a full member of EU one day.

7. CHARLIE HEBDO INCIDENT AND RISING ISLAMOPHOBIA IN FRANCE

The shocking terrorist attack made to French satire magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, on January 7, 2015, led to the death of 12 French citizens (including the artists) and the emergence of a pessimistic and even terrifying mood in France about the integration of Muslims living in this

⁷² Deniz Pişkin (2013), “Türkiye’nin Avrupa Birliği’ne Üyelik Sürecinde Fransa’daki Türkiye Algısı”, *İdarecinin Sesi*, July-August 2013, p. 57.

⁷³ “Deniz Gamze Ergüven ‘Mustang’ filmi ile ödüle doymuyor”, *Euronews*, Date of Accession: 16.01.2016 from <http://tr.euronews.com/2015/11/25/deniz-gamze-erguven-mustang-filmi-ile-odule-doymuyor/>.

⁷⁴ Dorothée Schmid (2014), “France-Turquie: Retour d’Alliance ?”, *Institut de Bosphore*, p. 5.

⁷⁵ Dorothée Schmid (2014), “France-Turquie: Retour d’Alliance ?”, *Institut de Bosphore*, p. 5.

⁷⁶ Sema Çapanoğlu & Deniz Servantie (2015), “2015: Fransa’ya Türk Göçünün 50’nci Yılında Türkiye-Fransa İlişkileri”, *İktisadi Kalkınma Vakfı Değerlendirme Notu*, No: 129, June 2015, p. 2.

country.⁷⁷ The incident was even compared to September 11 attacks in USA in 2001 and was described by some people as “France’s 9/11”.⁷⁸ Following the incident, a massive anti-terror demonstration was organized in Paris with many world leaders participating in order to condemn barbarism and terror.⁷⁹ There are growing concerns about the rise of Islamophobia in France and Europe after this tragic event. For instance, recent activities of PEGIDA movement⁸⁰ show that Islamophobia in Europe is on the rise. A research conducted by Ipsos/Sopra-Steria for French daily *Le Monde*, proves the dangerous trend of Islamophobia in France.⁸¹

The research was conducted right after the incident, on January 21-22, 2015 by 1003 participants from the internet. The research starts with the following question; “Is France at a war against terrorism today?”. 53 % of the participants answered this question as “Yes, we are at war”, whereas 47 % of the respondents did not consider this incident as the start of a war and considered war claims rather exaggerated. 84 % of the respondents who agreed on the war situation thought that this war is initiated against terrorism, whereas 16 % thought it is against Islam. Among this 16 %, which could be considered as Islamophobic, 42 % is from far-right National Front (FN), 16 % is from center-right Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) and 6 % is from center-left Socialist Party (PS). On the other hand, 63 % of the respondents claimed that France will win this war contrary to 36 % who thought they could not win. Another interesting finding of the research is that 51 % of the participants considered Islam not compatible with the democratic values. Considering the presence of more than 6 million Muslims in France, this trend, which identifies Islam as a danger for democracy could be a serious problem for democratic stability in France. However, focusing on the majority (66 %) of respondents from the governing PS who had a favorable view about the compatibility of Islam with democracy, we can claim that the situation in France is not desperate. But it should be added that this amount is only 39 % for UMP and 12 % for FN voters. This shows that, other than the PS, center-right UMP (now Republicans) also has a crucial responsibility in preventing the rise of Islamophobia in France. If the FN mentality becomes the dominant thinking pattern in France, this might lead to serious domestic political problems in France, in addition to foreign policy failures and economic losses related to France’s diplomatic and economic relations with Islamic countries.

There are some positive findings of the research as well. For example, 66 % of the respondents think that Islam belief is equally pacifist compared to other religions. This inclination is very high among PS voters (81 %) and not too low for UMP (53 %) and FN (39 %) voters. Moreover, 50 % of the participants thought that France should militarily do more and increase security level against jihadist terrorism, whereas 40 % supported the idea to keep security measures at the same level and 9 % wanted the softening of the security measures. In addition, 65 % of the respondents wanted France to be more active against ISIS terrorism in Syria as part of an international coalition against radical Islamist groups implementing terrorist methods. Strong trend of interventionism against ISIS might force France to become militarily more engaged in Syria in the months or years to come. Another important part of the study is related to the freedom of expression. 53 % of the respondents thought that the publishing of Prophet Muhammad caricatures is part of freedom of expression and they approved these caricatures. 38 % of respondents did not approve the caricatures, but still considered the publication as part of democratic freedoms. 9 % of the respondents on the other hand, did not approve both the caricatures and their publication. This shows the strong support given by French people to the freedom of expression even for the ideas they do not approve. However, this might not be

⁷⁷ For an analysis, see; Göktürk Tüysüzoğlu (2015), “Paris Saldırıları: Aslında Ne Oldu?”, *Uluslararası Politika Akademisi*, Date of Accession: 18.01.2016 from <http://politikaakademisi.org/paris-saldirilari-aslinda-ne-oldu/>.

⁷⁸ See; Gizem Araz (2015), “Fransa’nın 11 Eylül’ü”, *Uluslararası Politika Akademisi*, Date of Accession: 18.01.2016 from <http://politikaakademisi.org/fransanın-11-eylulu/>.

⁷⁹ “Hollande herkesi öptü, Davutoğlu ile sadece tokalaştı” (2015), *Hürriyet*, Date of Accession: 12.01.2016, from <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/hollande-herkesi-optu-davutoglu-ile-sadece-tokalasti-27949267>.

⁸⁰ For its Facebook account, see; <https://www.facebook.com/pegidaevdresden>.

⁸¹ “Sécurité, politique, islam : comment réagissent les Français après les attentats ?” (2015), *Le Monde*, Date of Accession: 18.01.2016 from http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2015/01/28/securite-politique-islam-comment-reagissent-les-francais-apres-les-attentats_4564681_3224.html.

welcomed in the Islamic world since publishing Prophet Muhammad's caricatures is a taboo subject in nearly all Muslim dominated countries.

Charlie Hebdo incident and other resembling events strengthen anxieties and prejudices against Turkey's EU accession. It is a fact that religion might not be a strong factor in the daily lives of French people similar to most of the European nations. However, Catholic Christian identity was internalized by most of the French people in a secular way.⁸² According to the head of Turcology department in Strasbourg University, Professor Paul Dumont, Turkey was defined as the "Orient" in French people's collective memory and Turkey's image was built around historical events such as the Crusade Wars.⁸³ In reality, of course, Turkey's current economic, political and cultural ties make this country an ally of the West and even a part of the Western civilization, but in ordinary French people's world of perceptions, Turkey is still not part of the West. This shows Turkey's inability to present itself correctly outside of its borders and also the lack of knowledge about Turkey in France. In addition, provocative statements made by Turkey's Islamist political elite can be blamed as an important factor in distorting relations and strengthening negative perceptions.

According to Professor Dorothé Schmid from IRIS, there are 3 different groups that create/constitute the image of Turkey in France. These are; French firms and their political connections (they favor Turkey's EU accession process), French public (they know Turkey mostly from touristic activities and historical prejudices and they are strongly against Turkey's membership) and French political elite and bureaucracy (they mostly see Turkey as competitor instead of partner).⁸⁴ This shows that the most advantageous group in France for Turkey, in developing bilateral relations, refers to the business circles. This might not seem enough at first glance, but considering the growing power of business groups around the world and in both of these countries, this might be very important in the near future. Moreover, French political elite and bureaucracy, who often consider Turkey as a competitor for the moment, might realize that Turkish support could be more beneficial for them in many areas like Africa, Caucasasia and the Middle East. Professor Christian Lequesne from Sciences PO CERI (*Centre d'études et de recherches internationales*)⁸⁵ research center also thinks that Turkey has shown its power and reliable partner status in Iraq, Afghanistan and other problematic areas both in terms of hard and soft power.⁸⁶

Another group in France that gives support to Turkey's membership is the Arab-Muslim population living in this country. Their population exceeds 5 million and they are much more organized and influential in France's economic and political life compared to Turks or Kurds. For instance, Dr. Djelloul Seddiki from *Grande Mosquée de Paris* affiliated Al-Gazali Institute⁸⁷, thinks that their rights could be better defended if Turkey becomes an EU member.⁸⁸ Turkey's transformation into a good role model might not only help Turks' integration to European values and the EU, but also might encourage other Muslim groups to do the same as well. Here, it should be also added that Islamophobia in France targets Arabs more than Turkish Muslims and this might not completely spoil Turkish-French relations if it continues to grow. Turkey also, should be careful in differentiating itself from radical Islamist/jihadist groups especially in the Syrian civil war by protecting its democratic and secular regime in order not to give a wrong impression of itself.

⁸² Veysel Ayhan & Mehmet Dalar & Muhittin Ataman (2010), "Fransa'daki Türkiye Algısı: Türk Dış Politikası ve AB'ye Üyelik Süreci Bağlamında Bir Analiz", *Ortadoğu Analiz*, October 2010, Vol. 2, No: 22, p. 83.

⁸³ Veysel Ayhan & Mehmet Dalar & Muhittin Ataman (2010), "Fransa'daki Türkiye Algısı: Türk Dış Politikası ve AB'ye Üyelik Süreci Bağlamında Bir Analiz", *Ortadoğu Analiz*, October 2010, Vol. 2, No: 22, p. 84.

⁸⁴ Veysel Ayhan & Mehmet Dalar & Muhittin Ataman (2010), "Fransa'daki Türkiye Algısı: Türk Dış Politikası ve AB'ye Üyelik Süreci Bağlamında Bir Analiz", *Ortadoğu Analiz*, October 2010, Vol. 2, No: 22, p. 85.

⁸⁵ For its website, see; <http://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/fr>.

⁸⁶ Veysel Ayhan & Mehmet Dalar & Muhittin Ataman (2010), "Fransa'daki Türkiye Algısı: Türk Dış Politikası ve AB'ye Üyelik Süreci Bağlamında Bir Analiz", *Ortadoğu Analiz*, October 2010, Vol. 2, No: 22, p. 87.

⁸⁷ For its website, see; <http://www.institut-al-ghazali.fr/>.

⁸⁸ Veysel Ayhan & Mehmet Dalar & Muhittin Ataman (2010), "Fransa'daki Türkiye Algısı: Türk Dış Politikası ve AB'ye Üyelik Süreci Bağlamında Bir Analiz", *Ortadoğu Analiz*, October 2010, Vol. 2, No: 22, p. 89.

On November 13, 2015, series of simultaneously organized horrible terrorist attacks took place in France and caused the death of 130 French citizens.⁸⁹ Organized by ISIS and its connected cells in France, this came as the second traumatic event in France in 2015. The incident's effects were so dense that it led to the declaration of emergency law in France as well as the discussions within the EU about the cancellation of Schengen regime that allows free visa for European nations. This incident did nothing but to increase Islamophobia in France. However, again, this type of incidents might also serve for Turkey as a chance to differentiate and distance itself from the radical groups thanks to its Republican heritage and secular model.

8. PREDICTIONS FOR THE NEAR FUTURE

Local elections that were held in France in March 2015 showed the strength of right-wing politics in this country. As a result of these elections, Republicans (former UMP) party under Nicolas Sarkozy's leadership acquired 65 councils, whereas the governing PS lost 30 councils.⁹⁰ Although they could not win in any of the councils, far-right FN increased its total votes. This election proved the high chances of Nicolas Sarkozy after his return to politics for the 2017 Presidential elections. Although there is still very long time before the elections and recent surveys point out FN leader Marine Le Pen as the most popular politician in France for the moment⁹¹, considering Le Pen's polarizing rhetoric and divisive political stance, as well as center-left and center-right voters' Republican sensitivity to vote for more moderate names⁹², it can be easily concluded that Mr. Sarkozy is still the favorite for the 2017 Presidential elections. However, legal prosecutions against Sarkozy might constitute a problem for him since corruption is considered as an important issue in European politics unlike Turkey.

If Nicolas Sarkozy becomes French President again, probably he will change his approach toward Turkey. As an experienced and well-informed politician, Mr. Sarkozy probably knows Turkey's importance better now. However, this will not mean that Sarkozy will facilitate Turkey's EU membership this time especially if Islamists will continue to rule Turkey. Sarkozy will probably try to make France a more influential actor within the EU and devise new policies together with Germany. Union for the Mediterranean could be such an initiative for Turkey and other Mediterranean countries if Sarkozy takes over again. This might give Turkey a new dynamism and existential meaning considering the difficulty of Turkey's EU membership. However, for the moment there are no political parties defending such project and all 4 major parties (JDP, RPP, NAP and PDP) defend Turkey's EU membership at different levels. Moreover, Sarkozy's candidacy is not still guaranteed. In fact, recent polls show that experienced right-wing politician Alain Juppé has more support compared to him (44 % - 32 %) in his own party *Les Républicains*.⁹³ Juppé is largely seen as a unifying force in the country that uses common sense contrary to Marine Le Pen and sometimes Sarkozy who employ divisive and ideologically motivated arguments.⁹⁴

If the current President of France, Mr. François Hollande makes a great leap forward and secures his seat in the next Presidential elections, Turkish-French relations will continue to develop. As a moderate left-wing figure, Mr. Hollande did some good things and implemented a very clever crisis management strategy after the terrorist attacks in France in 2015 by not

⁸⁹ For an analysis, see; Temmuz Yiğit Bezmez (2015), "Fransa'da İnsanlığa Karşı Terör", *Uluslararası Politika Akademisi*, Date of Accession: 18.01.2016 from <http://politikaakademisi.org/2015/11/14/fransada-insanliga-karsi-teror/>.

⁹⁰ "2015 Fransa Yerel Seçimleri" (2015), *Uluslararası Politika Akademisi*, Date of Accession: 18.01.2016 from <http://politikaakademisi.org/2015-fransa-yerel-secimleri-muhafazakar-zafer/>.

⁹¹ "Sondage : Hollande exclu du second tour de la présidentielle" (2015), *Le Figaro*, Date of Accession: 18.01.2016 from <http://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/2015/09/06/01002-20150906ARTFIG00155-sondage-hollande-exclu-du-second-tour-de-la-presidentielle.php>.

⁹² For instance, in the 2002 Presidential elections, French voters gave to center-right candidate Jacques Chirac 82 % support against far-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen who could get only 18 %.

⁹³ Gérard Courtois (2016), "Alain Juppé en position de force avant la primaire et la présidentielle", *Le Monde*, Date of Accession: 22.02.2016 from http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2016/02/09/alain-juppe-en-position-de-force-avant-la-primaire-et-la-presidentielle_4861992_4854003.html.

⁹⁴ Robert Zaretsky (2016), "France's John Kasich Is Winning", *Foreign Policy*, Date of Accession: 22.02.2016 from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/02/19/frances-john-kasich-is-winning-alain-juppe-sarkozy-immigration/>.

intimidating or inciting French Muslims, while at the same time increasing security measures against radical groups. Hollande seems to lose popularity mostly because of growing economic problems of the country. Prime Minister Manuel Valls is another important name for the governing PS. Because of his inclination to security policies, Mr. Valls is often labeled as the “leftist Sarkozy” or “young Sarkozy” and has shown to be able to take votes from right-wing segments as well. Valls could be the Presidential candidate of PS if the polls will put him in a more advantageous position against Hollande. As a pragmatic politician, Mr. Valls will continue to improve Turkish-French relations similar to Hollande. Considering Turkey’s EU accession process, a left-wing government and President is always more advantageous for Turkey. But the French left on the other hand, seems more concerned about the Armenian issue and Kurdish rights compared to French right.

Although recent polls suggest her victory in the first round of Presidential elections, experiences of the near history make Marine Le Pen a less favorable candidate. In fact, Mrs. Le Pen is a more moderate political figure compared to her father Jean-Marie Le Pen, former leader of FN and she was able to bring her party closer to the center compared to earlier years.⁹⁵ However, racist and Islamophobic tendencies are still very strong in her party. Le Pen’s Presidency will not only make Turkey’s EU membership controversial, but also might risk French membership to the Union due to her Frexit plan.⁹⁶ More inclined toward historical Gaullist (De Gaulle) line, Le Pen defends French nationalism and harshly challenges the very foundations of the EU project. Her plan is to make France a more influential foreign policy actor by itself by saving from the influence of Germany and USA. If she is elected, she can realize the Frexit; French exit from the EU. She will also increase pressures on migrant population and might seek for ways to send back some of the African and Arab migrants from France. However, this kind of radical transformation does not seem very probable for the moment.

Local elections made in France in December 6-13, 2015 also strengthened the message given by the French people after the previous local elections. Although FN became the leading party in the first round with 28 % of the votes⁹⁷, it could not win any of the regions in the second round. Sarkozy and Republicans won 7 out of 13 regions, whereas Valls-Hollande duo and PS won 5 of them. Mr. Valls called for cooperation among left and center-right before the second round against far-right danger and was praised for being the architect of FN’s failure at the second round.⁹⁸ The election results prove Sarkozy’s favorite position, but Le Pen’s increasing vote percentage is also an alarming signal for France. Following the elections, Le Pen started a new pr effort with the slogan of “*La France apaisée*” (an appeased France) in order to attract more votes from the center-right.⁹⁹

Today, when the EU faces economic crises, most of the decisions taken by the EU are driven by Germany. However, many political issues, including Turkish accession to EU, are also related to French decisions. France affected Turkey’s relations to EU positively (Jacques Chirac) or negatively (Nicolas Sarkozy) in the past and showed its ability to play a decisive

⁹⁵ Gizem Araz (2014), “Marine Le Pen’in Önlenemez Yükselişi”, *Uluslararası Politika Akademisi*, Date of Accession: 18.01.2016 from <http://politikaakademisi.org/marine-le-penin-onlenemez-yukselisi/>.

⁹⁶ Recent polls show that 53 % of French people support referendum for Frexit. See; “Une majorité de Français souhaite un référendum sur la sortie de la France de l’UE” (2016), *Le Monde*, Date of Accession: 12.03.2016 from http://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2016/03/12/une-majorite-de-francais-souhaite-un-referendum-sur-le-frexit-la-sortie-de-la-france-de-l-ue_4881768_3214.html.

⁹⁷ “Elections régionales : ce qu’il faut retenir après le deuxième tour”, *Le Monde*, Date of Accession: 18.01.2016 from http://www.lemonde.fr/elections-regionales-2015/article/2015/12/13/ce-qu-il-faut-retenir-du-second-tour-des-elections-regionales_4831114_4640869.html.

⁹⁸ “Fransa’da seçimlerin ikinci turu tamamlandı”, *Habertürk*, Date of Accession: 18.01.2016 from <http://www.haberturk.com/dunya/haber/1166575-fransada-secimlerin-ikinci-turu-tamamlandi>.

⁹⁹ Carlo Invernizzi Accetti & Christopher Bickerton (2016), “Neither Left Nor Right in France”, 18 December 2016, *Foreign Affairs*, Date of Accession: 20.02.2016 from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/france/2016-02-18/neither-left-nor-right-france>.

role in EU's diplomatic maneuvers concerning Turkey.¹⁰⁰ If Turkey eventually faces with a crisis in its accession process to EU, Union for the Mediterranean might be an alternative for this country to rearrange its relations to EU and acquire a new geopolitical direction/goal. Turkey seems like having serious problems in the last years due to the failure of its neo-Ottoman dreams and the economic unattractiveness of going back to Kemalist policy of non-interference and isolationism might force Turkey to become more interested in Mediterranean Union in the near future. Recent discoveries of gas resources around the Mediterranean might be encouraging for such an initiative. Non-EU countries in the Mediterranean including Turkey, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (North Cyprus), Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Morocco, together with EU member Mediterranean states such as France, Italy, Greece and Spain might engage in greater economic and political cooperation and integration process thanks to Union for the Mediterranean project. This might even help them to solve their political problems. Most important problems of the region for the moment can be stated as civil war in Syria, instability in Libya, Cyprus Dispute, Israel-Palestine conflict, Turkish-Greek disagreements over the Aegean Sea and the partition of the exclusive economic zones in the Mediterranean. For sure, Turkey's EU accession goal should never be left, but in case it becomes impossible, it might be better to focus on the Union for the Mediterranean instead of isolationism or pan-Islamist ideals.

9. CONCLUSION

Finally, it should be stated that recent problems between Turkey and France should not be reflected as a newly emerged rivalry between these two important countries and two great nations. Emerging problems and critical approaches to the other side are examples of disagreements taking place between two allies and friendly nations. These problems can be solved easily since we live in age where people's perceptions can be managed and their views can be changed with effective public relations strategies. Moreover, already existing and strong political, economic and cultural ties create a very comfortable ground for the amelioration of the relations. Thus, it is rather unnecessary to be pessimistic about the future of Turkish-French relations. There will be certainly new agreements and ways of cooperation between these two countries in the future. However, Turkey's EU membership might not be included to these agreements and cooperation at least in the short term. That is why; Turkey should focus on developing its relations with France and other European countries in every aspect, simultaneously with the EU harmonization process. Creating win-win situations with all European countries might make Turkey's EU membership possible one day. Turkey might also use its geopolitical advantage as a bridge between East and West and North and South in order to increase the inter-civilizational dialogue and economic relations between countries in different continents. Especially energy industry might become a crucial factor here since most of the energy rich countries (Iran, Azerbaijan, Russian Federation and Iraq) are around Turkey and European countries need cheap and clean energy to keep their industries strong. It is not coincidence that many new important energy projects (Trans Anatolian Pipeline project, Turkish Stream etc.) are based on Turkey. Furthermore, recent conflict between EU and Russian Federation due to Ukraine crisis also shows that Turkey might play important roles in relation to EU's security. It should not be forgotten that Turkey assumed a very critical role during the Cold War for the protection of European countries against communist expansionism.

France, on the other hand, might work more on the struggle against Islamophobia and anti-Turkish rhetoric since this trend does not really help this country in economics or politics. Although France is still among the top powers in the world and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, considering the fact that even USA cannot afford hostility to a whole Islamic civilization, France could do more efforts for the prevention of Islamophobia and might improve its relations with Turkey and other Turkic and Islamic countries. In order to prevent new wave of refugees, France could also engage in more active foreign policy initiatives for the solution of Syrian civil war in the next few years. In case of instability in Syria and Middle East, refugee crisis and increasing terrorism danger might negatively affect France and other European countries. The solution of Syrian crisis might be a good leverage for the improvement of strategic relations between Turkey and France. However, it seems like the

¹⁰⁰ Elsever Abdullayev (2015), "AB vs. Türkiye: Bütünleşmenin Derin Uykusu", *Uluslararası Politika Akademisi*, Date of Accession: 09.09.2015 from <http://politikaakademisi.org/ab-vs-turkiye-butunlesmenin-derin-uykusu/>.

Western decision-makers will have to wait for the result of 2016 Presidential elections in the USA and the foreign policy preferences of the new American President in order to react for the solution of Syrian crisis and other problems (refugee crisis, terrorism etc.) related to Syrian civil war.

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