

Transactional or Transcendent? Turkey's Ties to the European Union

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In March 2017, escalating an ongoing diplomatic crisis with the Netherlands, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accused the Dutch government of Nazism, an allegation he had also previously levelled against the German government.¹ Erdogan's outburst was in reaction to the Dutch government's decision during the weekend leading up to the Dutch parliamentary election to forbid the presence of two Turkish ministers at political rallies in favour of a 'yes' vote in the April 16 Turkish referendum. Turkish voters, including those residing abroad, would be voting in the referendum to approve constitutional changes to make Erdogan executive-style president. This altercation constituted a crisis point in the 406-year old Dutch-Turkish ties – the longest permanent tie Turkey has had with any European nation. The 'yes' campaign would go on to win the vote, receiving nearly seventy percent of the votes in the Netherlands.² And thus, the Netherlands became a pawn in Erdogan's populist gambit to create a 'European enemy' in order to consolidate support in his voter base.

With populist political movements gaining traction across the world, it has become increasingly important for the European Union (EU) to understand populist leaders' motivations both at home and abroad, and to calibrate its foreign policy accordingly. Having come to power as Turkey's prime minister in 2003, Recep Tayyip Erdogan is the archetype of populist leaders gaining prominence today, and, just as US President Donald Trump and Dutch politician Geert Wilders, Erdogan uses foreign threats as a political tool for rallying support at home. For the two sides, stoking anti-Muslim and anti-Western sentiment, respectively, has become an easy political tactic for winning votes domestically. However, the question remains: as far as Turkey is concerned, is this civilisational polarisation a superficial, temporary political tactic that the countries will be able to transcend, or does it signal a more fundamental shift in Turkish-EU ties towards nothing more than a transactional relationship?

Unwilling partners: Turkey's (sad) EU accession story

The prospect of Turkish accession to the EU has long dominated relations between the two entities, and has played an important role in Turkish domestic politics as well. In fact, Erdogan owes part of his ascension to power in 2003 to his Justice and Development Party's (AKP's) platform promoting EU accession. Although now, over a decade later, Erdogan seems to have seriously compromised chances of Turkish accession into the EU, blame for negotiations having thus far failed lies with both parties. It takes two to tango: at the time, key European nations – among them France and Germany – did not commit themselves to Turkey's EU membership even in principle, especially after French President Nicolas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel came to power. Though Erdogan seems to be turning his back on the EU now, the EU was hardly a fully committed partner in the negotiations – almost from the very start.

After failing to act on Turkey's membership bid for years, on December 1997, the EU outright rejected Ankara's application for membership. In the words of Jean-Claude Juncker, then prime

¹ Alissa J. Rubin, "Erdogan Calls Dutch 'Nazi Remnants' After Turkish Minister Is Barred," *The New York Times*, March 11, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/11/world/europe/turkey-netherlands-ban-referendum.html>.

² "İşte Yurt Dışı Referandum Sonuçları," *CNN Türk*, April 17, 2017, <http://www.cnnturk.com/turkiye/iste-yurt-disi-referandum-sonuclari>.



minister of Luxembourg, which in that year held the presidency of the European Council: 'It cannot be that the representatives of a country in which torture is still going on can sit at the table of the European Union.'³ This attitude generated widespread consternation in Turkey toward the Union. After alienating the Turks with this rejection and losing its soft power in Ankara, two years later in December 1999, the EU dramatically changed its position. With some cajoling, including US lobbying on behalf of Ankara, Brussels reluctantly accepted Turkish candidacy and promised to treat Turkey's application in the same manner as applications from other candidate states.

Nevertheless, many EU Member States' opposition to Turkey's membership continued unabated. Just as Turkey entered accession talks with the EU in 2005, Brussels turned back on its earlier promise and explicitly decoupled Turkey's accession process from that undergone by former candidates, and applied substantive new bureaucratic hurdles to Ankara (as well as other incoming countries at the time, such as Croatia). The EU subjected Turkey to modified negotiations: talks that for other accession countries had consisted of one round were broken down into 35 'chapters' of policy issues to be addressed during Turkish membership discussions – discussions in which the 27 different member countries each had a veto on both opening and closing each chapter. In effect, when it entered accession talks with the EU in 2005, Turkey faced 1,890 potential vetoes. Not unexpectedly, no substantial progress has been made on Turkey's EU negotiations, compared to those of Croatia, which (deservedly) became a member in 2013.

How many people died in World War I, and what are their names?

These unfair hurdles and absurd hoops that the EU created for Turkey to jump through for membership undoubtedly frustrated Erdogan and undermined his willingness to model his country after Europe. A joke about Turkey's EU accession, as told by Turkish political scientist Soli Ozel, encapsulates the disappointment Erdogan and others felt when the EU refused to treat Turkey's accession equally alongside other candidate countries' membership talks. The joke is that after dealing with a number of accession countries for a number of years, the EU becomes sick and tired of the arduous talks, and calls in candidate countries Serbia, Montenegro and Turkey for a test on European history. The EU tells the three countries that they will be asked one question. If they know the answer, they can join the EU, otherwise they will be rejected. The Serbs are offered the question, 'When did World War I begin?' This is an easy question. 'The answer is 1914.' The doors open, bells ring and Serbia joins the EU. Then the Montenegrins are asked, 'When did World War I end?' This, too, is an easy question. 'The answer is 1918.' The doors open, bells ring, and Montenegro joins the EU. Finally, the Turks are asked: 'How many people died in World War I, and what are their names?'

The EU's reluctance toward Ankara has permitted Erdogan to turn hostile toward the negotiations, which, in turn, has allowed him to dismiss any criticism from the EU, which could have mediated his authoritarian tilt. Unfortunately, Europe failed to stay alert on Erdogan's democratic record. The EU accession process helped Erdogan pass democratising reforms in the early part of the first decade of the 21st century. One of the most important reforms to this end was placing the secular military firmly under civilian rule. The formal exit of the military, however, effectively made the EU the grand arbiter of Turkish democracy, which was not a role

³ Stephen Kinzer, "Turkey, Rejected, Will Freeze Ties to European Union," *The New York Times*, December 15, 1997, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/12/15/world/turkey-rejected-will-freeze-ties-to-european-union.html>.



Europe was interested in playing. With this in mind, Erdogan learned that he could pay lip service to EU accession to eliminate the military's formal political power and maintain good ties with Europe, while nurturing anti-Western sentiments at home.

Understanding Erdogan

Looking at Turkey's foreign-policy changes under Erdogan indicates the tactical nature of his commitment to building relations with the West and continuing the EU accession process. Erdogan became prime minister as the head of AKP, a self-declared moderate movement that he established in 2001 as a centre-right party. At that time, he declared that the AKP would embrace capitalism, pursue EU accession and improve democratic freedoms that had been limited under Turkey's secularist system. But before establishing the AKP, Erdogan had gotten his feet wet in politics in the 1980s and the 1990s in the Islamist Welfare Party (RP), which subscribed to a virulently anti-Western school of political thought known as National Outlook (*Milli Gorus*)—a school of political thought that was fiercely at odds with the platform of EU accession on which he was elected.

Born in the Cold War milieu, the National Outlook philosophy depicted the West (the 'Judeo-Christian world') as morally corrupt. National Outlook rejected leftist and rightist political movements as alien, contrasting the 'snake oil' of Western thought to the 'rich substance' of Islamic ideas. Rejecting capitalism and communism alike, National Outlook espoused a message of national sovereignty and denounced Turks who did not subscribe to this school of thought as 'foreign proxies.'⁴ According to National Outlook, Turkey's salvation had to derive from the stock of traditions and ideas that had made the Turks great in past centuries—that is, from National Outlook's brand of Islam. Turkey could only become a great power again, and return to its former Ottoman glory, by breaking away from the West. In the Manichean thinking of National Outlook, the West was an adversary constantly scheming to destabilise Turkey.

Erdogan rejected political Islam in 2001 when he established the AKP as a moderate force. This allowed him to pivot to the centre of Turkish politics and win successive elections. He also embraced capitalism, paving the way for a period of unprecedented growth in the Turkish economy since 2003. All of these moderating moves gave Turks hope that Erdogan could make meaningful progress on integrating Turkey into the EU.

Shifting foreign policy to the Muslim sphere

However, although the Turkish government overtly carried out significant economic and political reforms in an attempt to improve its human-rights records and gain EU membership, under the surface, Ankara also cultivated relationships with nations more worrisome to the West. Before the AKP, Turks had looked to the West for political and economic cues. During Erdogan's first decade in government, however, Turkey became a close friend of regimes such as that of Syria, and drew closer to Iran than it had been since the era of the shahs. In a departure from Turkey's traditional foreign policy, Israel was no longer Turkey's only regional partner.

From 2005 to 2007, between the end of his first term and the beginning of his second term as prime minister, Erdogan gradually rolled out a new foreign policy agenda for Turkey that departed from the twin pillars of Ankara's traditional foreign policy: neutrality in Middle East

⁴ Soner Cagaptay, *The New Sultan: Erdogan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 52.

politics and emphasis on ties with Europe and the United States. In the beginning Turkey's pivot did not suggest any ideological undertaking. Seemingly, Ankara wanted to focus a bit less on Europe and the US, and to use its energy instead to build ties with countries in the Middle East, Latin America, Africa and Asia in order to expand markets and gain international influence. Following the AKP's rise to power, Turkey established dozens of new diplomatic missions in Africa, compared to just three new missions in EU countries. Ankara reaped the benefits of this policy by securing a seat at the UN Security Council in 2009-2010, its first entry to the UN's top body since 1961.

However, a subcutaneous force soon emerged under this new foreign policy drive: Turkey was also pivoting to Islamist causes in foreign policy. Signalling this shift in 2006, the AKP invited Khaled Mashal - the Damascus-based leader of Hamas's military wing – to Ankara for meetings with top-level officials. Previously, Turkey had positive ties with the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Now, it was reaching out to an armed Islamist organisation in the Palestinian theatre, marking its pivot to a different kind of Middle East policy – one that included solidarity with Islamist causes. The outreach to Hamas, which is aligned with the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood (MB), should have been an early warning sign to all Turkey watchers. The Turkish Foreign Ministry, a bastion of secular-minded and liberal bureaucrats in the country, didn't want to touch Mashal. Its spokesperson announced that the AKP, and not the Foreign Ministry, had invited the Hamas leader to Ankara. Nevertheless, Mashal showed up in Ankara, where he attended the AKP's September 2015 convention and met Erdogan and his advisor Davutoglu, as well as obliging Foreign Ministry officials.⁵

Erdogan's pivot to Hamas and other Islamist parties in the region aimed to make Turkey an autarchic power in the Middle East through the use of new proxies and allies. In crafting this doomed foreign policy, Erdogan got a helping hand from Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, whose core political philosophy is that Turkey can become a regional power by developing better ties with its Muslim neighbours, sometimes at the expense of its relationships with its traditional Western allies. Davutoglu wanted Turkey to have 'zero problems with its neighbours.'⁶ He believed this would allow Turkey to become a decision-maker country with broad regional influence.

Building Turkish soft power...

In the mid-2000s, conventional wisdom in Ankara had been that Turkey should stop looking to Europe, which had continually snubbed it, and instead focus on the Middle East and other areas in order to regain the regional leadership role it had lost with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War One. This, the AKP maintained, would best be accomplished not through displays of military force but rather by the establishment of soft power.

The growth of Turkish soft power in Muslim countries, namely its increasing commercial, economic and cultural might in foreign policy in the last decade, can be largely attributed to its burgeoning economy under Erdogan. As proof of this success, Turkey in 2010 became a majority middle-class society for the first time in its history, a fact the CIA recognised in September 2013 by listing the country as a developed economy. Individual Turkish businesses

⁵ Ibid, 158.

⁶ "Policy of Zero Problems with Our Neighbors" (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.), <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/policy-of-zero-problems-with-our-neighbors.en.mfa>.



exemplified the country's broader economic success. For example, Turkish Airlines flew from Istanbul to about seventy-five destinations in 2002, many of them domestic routes inside Turkey. Today it services nearly 300, many of them in the Middle East, Eurasia, and Africa. In Iraq alone, the carrier now flies to six scheduled destinations, compared to zero in 2002.⁷

In the last decade, Turkey has indeed emerged as a strong Middle Eastern economy due to increased international ties. Much of the country's growth has come from a strong export sector. Turkish products – from trucks to canned tomatoes – have found happy consumers across the Middle East, bringing Turkey clout in the same way that cars did for Japan in the 1970s and 1980s.⁸ Turkish soap operas, once obscure dramas produced solely for local audiences, are now beamed into the living rooms from Alexandria to Beirut. To name just one example, *Nour*, a classic rags-to-riches show, has enthralled more than 85 million viewers. In 2012, such soap operas earned Turkey about \$130 million from abroad, mostly from the Arab world.⁹ For a time, Turkey's quest for influence, and its apparent success as an affluent, high-functioning Muslim-majority society, seemed to be having the effect desired by Ankara. In a 2011 Brookings Institution poll of the citizens of five Arab countries, Turkey was ranked first among countries believed to have played a 'constructive role' in the Arab Spring. In the same survey, Erdogan's popularity towered above that of other world leaders.¹⁰

Building upon its soft power, Ankara attempted to facilitate stronger diplomatic ties with its Muslim neighbours, as Turkish officials routinely made high-level visits to Baghdad, Damascus, Tehran and other regional capitals. Between November 2002 and April 2009, the Turkish foreign minister visited Iran and Syria eight times in total. In addition, Turkey opened scores of new embassies and consulates across the Arab world, giving the country a visibility in the region that it had lacked since the Ottoman era.

And succumbing to hubris...

Turkey's achievements in the 2000s propelled Davutoglu and Erdogan's belief that Ankara could become a stand-alone power in the Middle East by using its soft power. Turkey flaunted its perceived influence in the region by bandying the idea of a 'Shamgen Zone' – a play on the EU's Schengen free travel area and *Sham*, the traditional name for Syria in Arabic – that would cover the Levant. The idea was that Turkey, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon would come together, and exclude Israel, under a customs and political union.¹¹ With Erdogan brimming with confidence from the attention bestowed on him by then US President Obama, a strong current of opinion in Ankara, which included Turkish foreign policy elites, held that Turkey had played second fiddle to Washington and Brussels for too long in the Middle East. Turkey could become a regional power only by going its own way, even when this meant sometimes breaking with Western foreign policy goals.

⁷ Soner Cagaptay, *The Rise of Turkey: The Twenty-First Century's First Muslim Power* (Potomac Books, 2014), 24.

⁸ This is a comparison Washington Institute scholar Ambassador James Jeffrey has made. For more, see Patrice Hill, "Turkey Leverages Economy for Global Power," *The Washington Times*, January 23, 2011, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/jan/23/turkey-leverages-economy-for-global-power/>.

⁹ Yeliz Candemir, "Turkish Soap Operas: The Unstoppable Boom," *Wall Street Journal*, April 29, 2013.

¹⁰ Shibley Telhami, "The 2011 Arab Public Opinion Poll" (Brookings, November 21, 2011).

¹¹ Cagaptay, *The New Sultan: Erdogan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey*, 162.

While drawing closer to regional neighbours, Turkey moved further away from Europe and the US. At first, the bid for warmer ties with regional neighbours, such as Syria, seemed to work. The new tone gave Turkey ample influence over its smaller southern neighbour, which it hoped to peel away from Iran. But when, in 2011, open rebellion broke out against the Assad regime in Syria, and as the region's hard power political interactions surfaced, Ankara was confronted with the limits of its soft power. Turkey's policies in the Arab Spring, and more specifically in the Syrian war, have exposed the mismatch between the AKP's approach to the Middle East, its soft power ambitions and regional realpolitik.

Turkey also pursued rather dangerous policies that upset Brussels and Washington. In an attempt to depose Assad, Ankara turned a blind eye to the jihadists who were entering Syria through Turkey to fight the Damascus regime. Ankara was willing to ignore these threats because its primary goal in Syria was ousting Assad. Turkey did not intend to support the jihadists; rather, Ankara believed that, 'Assad will fall, and good guys will take over, and then these good guys will clean up the bad guys.'¹² Of course, that has not happened. In the interim, at least some of the fighters who crossed into Syria morphed into ISIS.¹³ Ankara's inability to predict and pre-empt the jihadist backlash added to Western concerns over Turkey. Accordingly, some in Washington, especially at the Pentagon, started to view Turkey as a country that works with America's adversaries in Syria. Ankara, on the other hand, sees the radicalisation process in Syria differently, and blames the lack of US support for the moderate rebels in the early phases of the rebellion as the primary cause for the rise of jihadists later in the conflict. The Syrian civil war has remained the crux of the differences between the US and Turkey, as well as a serious sticking point for relations with Europe.

Erdogan's foreign policy report card

Erdogan's grand ambition to make Turkey a standalone, Middle East power, has largely failed. The problem with the Erdogan foreign policy school is that Turkey's neighbours are not Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands, but rather ISIS, Iran, Iraq, Syria and, across the Black Sea, Russia. In fact, after a decade of AKP rule, Turkey is anything but a country with influence over the Muslim countries of the Middle East, whether it is the Assad regime in Damascus, which Ankara has been trying in vain to oust; the Islamic Republic in Tehran, which has undermined Turkish policies in Syria and Iraq; or the Sisi government in Egypt, which despises Ankara; not to mention the ISIS threat. Additionally, the AKP has made for itself a feared adversary in Moscow, a relationship it has since struggled to repair. Even worse, Turkey's ties with Brussels and Washington are now riddled with problems.

Signalling recognition of this failure, in May 2016 Erdogan fired Davutoglu – whose rise as a household name clashed with Erdogan's strategy of holding a monopoly on power – hoping to use his ouster to shift away from some of the foreign policy moves of the last decade. Nevertheless, the damage has already been done. After Erdogan and Davutoglu's failed gambit to pivot to the Middle East while rejecting Europe, the relationship with Brussels will be fraught with tensions for the foreseeable future under the AKP.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Aaron Stein, "Turkey did Nothing About the Jihadists in Its Midst- Until it was too Late," *Foreign Policy*, July 1, 2016.



In a way, Turkey's struggles in the Middle East mirror those of Japan in East Asia. Even today, Japan – the consummate soft-power nation – relies on US hard power for its security in East Asia. Japan needs US bases, the nuclear umbrella and treaties to guard itself against China and nuclear North Korea. Turkey needs the United States and access to its Patriot batteries to use against Assad and the Russian threat from Syria, as well as NATO guarantees to protect it against the challenges posed by the Syrian war, ISIS, Iran and Russia. As long as Turkey fears Russia and competes against Iran, it will rely on America.

Ironically, despite Erdogan's efforts to shift Turkish foreign policy away from that of his secular predecessors, Turkish foreign policy looks now much as it did under secular Turkish leader Suleyman Demirel's presidency in 1995. Ankara has bad relations with Russia, Iran, Iraq and Syria, while the United States and thus NATO are its only reliable allies; ties with Israel have recently improved; and the relationship with the EU vacillates between one step forward and one step back.¹⁴ In fact, good relations with the United States and NATO now are even more important for Turkey given the growing chaos in the Middle East and the menacing posture of Russia against Turkey.

Brussels and Washington should also recognise their role in Turkey's morphing foreign policy. In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, in order to empower multiculturalism at home, Brussels overemphasised Turkey's Muslim identity at the expense of the country's Western vocation. Later on under President Barack Obama, Washington failed to appreciate on time the hubris emerging in Ankara. In fact, at times the United States helped build this hubris, such as at the beginning of the Syrian uprising when it encouraged Ankara to play a more active role against the Assad regime.¹⁵ Brussels and Washington often showered Erdogan with praise even as the latter was cracking down on media and courts. Erdogan has been a Rorschach test for the political leanings of Western leaders. US President George W. Bush saw in him a faithful Muslim democrat, while Obama saw a multilateralist Muslim democrat. Both were mistaken in their perception. Erdogan is an illiberal Islamist who thrives on challenging the Western-led international order.

July 15 failed coup: will it cement Turkey's Islamist turn?

When Erdogan fired Davutoglu in May 2016, thereby book-ending the 'zero-problems with neighbours' foreign policy that Davutoglu's foreign-ministerial and prime ministerial tenure had represented, Erdogan had the opportunity to turn over a new leaf and reemphasise Turkey's ties to the West. Instead, he started normalising ties with Russia, which had suffered due to the two sides being pitted against each other in the Syrian civil war. In June 2016, Erdogan reached out to Putin with a letter and following this gesture, that same month, Erdogan and Putin spoke by telephone. Less than a month later, when the coup plotters struck on July 15, Putin's quick response – he was the first leader to call Erdogan – and European leaders' delay in offering their condolences only encouraged this upwards trajectory in Russian ties and downward trajectory with the Europeans.

¹⁴ For a discussion of Turkish foreign policy before the AKP, see Lenore Martin and Dimitris Keridis, *The Future of Turkish Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004) and Barry Rubin and Kemal Kirişçi, *Turkey in World Politics: An Emerging Multiregional Power* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001).

¹⁵ Brett Daniel Shehadey, "Is Turkey Serving Up Assad for Thanksgiving?" *In Homeland Security*, November 23, 2014.

However, the traumatic effect of the July 15 coup attempt on European ties appears to run deeper. On 15 July 2016, Turkey witnessed two consecutive historic developments: the botched coup attempt to oust Erdogan and the Islamist counter-revolution that blocked the coup. The successful counter-coup not only saved Erdogan, but also seems to have placed Islamism, a virulently anti-Western ideology, at the heart of Turkish politics.

As soon as news of the putsch attempt surfaced, Erdogan appeared on FaceTime, appealing to his conservative base to save him. Mobilised to help Erdogan by broadcasts from Turkey's 80,000 mosques, thousands of conservative and Islamist Turks took to the streets to block the putschists, going so far as to lie under tanks to save Erdogan's regime. Opposition parties in parliament also swiftly came out against the coup, adding liberals, leftists and nationalists to the coalition of coup opponents. Over 150 Erdogan supporters, as well as a broader coalition of army opponents, died that bloody night. Despite the breadth of the coalition opposing the coup, an Islamist counter-revolution unfolded in Turkey during the night of July 15, and though it went unnoticed in the midst of the nefarious coup plot and Erdogan's ensuing crackdown on the opposition, this counter-revolution has reshaped Turkey since last summer. By allowing forces of political Islam to become hegemonic in Turkish politics, July 15 became Turkey's 'Iran 1979 moment'. An Islamist counter-revolution unfolded in Turkey during the night of July 15, and though it went unnoticed in the midst of the nefarious coup plot and Erdogan's ensuing crackdown on the opposition, this counter-revolution has reshaped Turkey since last summer. By allowing forces of political Islam to become hegemonic in Turkish politics, July 15 became Turkey's 'Iran 1979 moment'.

Until July 2016, Erdogan outwardly maintained Turkey's traditionally strong ties to the West, while simultaneously pursuing the National Outlook dream of making Turkey a Muslim power that defies the West. Since July 2016, that precarious balance between the West and National Outlook has disappeared, and political Islam has become dominant in both domestic and foreign policy.

While most Turks have a 'love-and-hate' relationship with Europe due to a history of conquest, defeat and osmosis between the Muslim Ottomans and Christian Europeans, Turkish Islamists – whose Weltanschauung has been shaped by National Outlook – have a 'hate-and-loathe' relationship with Europe. They not only disdain aspects of Europe, like most Turks, but also loathe everything about it. This explains the new post-July 2016 rhetoric among the AKP elites vis-a-vis Europe, perfectly encapsulated by Erdogan's declaration that the Dutch and German governments along with the Danish, Austrian and Swiss, are behaving like 'Nazis' as a reaction to the cancellation of recent AKP rallies in Europe involving Turkish ministers.¹⁶ Since the crisis with the Dutch and the Germans, pro-Erdogan Turkish media has been running articles casting all Europeans as 'mired in racism and enmity towards Turkey.'¹⁷

The counter-coup of July 2016 has unleashed Islamist forces in Turkey to an extent not seen before, bringing National Outlook thought to centre stage. Political Islam is now not only the driving ideology behind Turkey's foreign policy; it is also becoming forcefully ingrained in the minds of the next generation. Between 2002 and 2016, the number of students attending

¹⁶ Andrew Rettman, "Erdogan: German 'Nazis' Also Back 'terrorists,'" *EU Observer*, March 14, 2017, <https://euobserver.com/foreign/137230>.

¹⁷ "Erdogan'a Karşı Adil Olun," *Yeni Şafak*, March 23, 2017, <http://www.yenisafak.com/dunya/erdogana-karsi-adil-olun-2632520>.



Islamic high schools (originally established to train imams and preachers) increased from 60,000 to 1.5 million.¹⁸ Following curriculum and exam-based changes to the country's education system, a growing number of pupils have been forced to study in these Islamic high schools. No one is spared – not even the grandson of Turkey's chief rabbi, who was placed, along with many Christians, in an Imam Hatip high school in 2014, suggesting that students' placement in such schools in Turkey is no longer a choice, but increasingly an imposition.¹⁹ More frighteningly, a draft educational curriculum circulated by the Ministry of Education for public review in early 2017 described jihad as a 'national and spiritual value.'²⁰

In the aftermath of the July 15 coup attempt, Turkey and the EU are frustrated and mistrustful of each other. Donald Trump's election as the US President somewhat helped ties with the United States, as Erdogan is hopeful of a more cooperative administration, but Trump's anti-Muslim rhetoric will only further polarise the two countries in the long term. There is no question that Erdogan has left Turkey with few allies. But ultimately, as far as the EU and the US's ties to Turkey are concerned, each side still needs the other. Europe needs Turkish cooperation in handling refugees flowing out of Syria, and Washington needs Turkey – which borders Iran, Iraq, Syria, and is a maritime neighbour to Russia – in order to successfully implement its policies regarding these countries. More importantly, Brussels and Washington need Turkey, and access to vital Turkish bases, especially Incirlik, in order to defeat ISIS and jihadists in Iraq and Syria. Unfortunately, these ties will become increasingly transactional as long as populist leaders on both sides continue to polarise their constituents with anti-Muslim and anti-Western rhetoric.

¹⁸ "Cumhuriyeti asıl yıkacak şey işte bu," Odatv [website] (October 16, 2016).

¹⁹ "Hahambaşı'nın torunu imam hatibe yerleştirildi" iddiası," T24 [website] (August 30, 2014).

²⁰ "Eğitim Reformu Girişimi'nin Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Taslak Öğretim Programları İnceleme ve Değerlendirmesi" (Eğitim Reformu Girişimi, February 10, 2017), <http://www.egitimreformugirisimi.org/tr/node/1807>.