



Advisory Council
on International Affairs

The geopolitical role of Türkiye: trends and future scenarios

AIV advisory report no. 123
7 October 2022



The Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV) is an independent body which advises the Dutch government and parliament on foreign policy. The AIV provides advisory reports about international affairs both on its own initiative and on request. Its main areas of expertise are European cooperation, development cooperation, human rights and security policy. The AIV focuses on strategic dilemmas and draws attention to new policy matters with a view to the longer term. It produces independent, carefully argued advisory reports that provide analysis and interpretation of current international developments and recommendations for Dutch foreign policy, and in this way contributes to political and public debate on matters of international significance.

Members of the Advisory Council on International Affairs

Chair

Professor Bert Koenders

Vice-chair

Professor Emeritus Tineke Cleiren

Members

Lieutenant General (ret.) Jan Broeks

Dr Dorette Corbey

Professor Luuk van Middelaar

Professor Barbara Oomen

Koos Richelle

Henne Schuwer

Monika Sie Dhian Ho

Executive secretary

Marja Kwast-van Duursen

Joint Committee on the Geopolitics of Türkiye

This advisory report was prepared by the Joint Committee on the Geopolitics of Türkiye, which consisted of Henne Schuwer (Chair), Professor Luuk van Middelaar, Lieutenant General (ret.) Jan Broeks, Dr Narin Idriz, Dr Hylke Dijkstra, Dick Zandee, Pieter Feith and Marije Balt (council adviser).

The AIV adopted *The Geopolitical Role of Türkiye: Trends and Future Scenarios* (AIV advisory report no. 123) on 7 October 2022.





Contents



Summary	4	5.4 China	34
Recommendations	7	5.5 European Union	35
▶ Chapter 1		▶ Chapter 6	
Introduction	10	Strategic interests and dilemmas for the Netherlands	
▶ Chapter 2		6.1 Bilateral relations between and shared interests of Türkiye and the Netherlands	38
Constants in Türkiye's geopolitical role		6.2 Strategic dilemmas for the Netherlands	40
2.1 Historical development	11	▶ Chapter 7	
2.2 How these constants are reflected in Türkiye's foreign and security policy	14	Future scenarios and policy options	
▶ Chapter 3		7.1 Scenario 1: Ongoing ambiguity	46
How Türkiye started to focus on other regions		7.2 Scenario 2: Explicit rivalry	48
3.1 Reorientation of policy	18	7.3 Scenario 3: Rapprochement	49
3.2 Turning points in Türkiye's relationship with the West	20	7.4 Scenario 4: Increased mutual dependence	51
▶ Chapter 4		▶ Chapter 8	
Türkiye's current foreign and security policy		Epilogue	53
4.1 Economics as a key driver of policy	24	Endnotes	54
4.2 Domestic drivers of policy	26	Annexes	60
▶ Chapter 5		I Request for advice	60
Geopolitical relations with and strategic interests vis-à-vis Türkiye		II List of persons consulted	62
5.1 NATO	29	III List of figures	65
5.2 United States	31	IV List of abbreviations	66
5.3 Russia	32		



Summary



Türkiye stands on the cusp of an important year, 2023, in which it will celebrate the centenary of the Republic and hold elections – a year that will help shape its geopolitical role in the region, in Europe and elsewhere. For more than two decades, Türkiye has strived to become more autonomous in relation to the West. Even before the founding of the Republic, it had pursued a policy of hedging and balancing between the West, Russia and the East. In recent years, we have seen that although Türkiye (a member of the G20 since 2014) wishes to remain a NATO Ally and a candidate for EU membership, it also wants to cooperate and trade with Russia. Furthermore, it has provoked the West – and its European neighbours in particular – on various fronts, paying little heed to international agreements. From a Western perspective, Türkiye’s stance therefore seems ambivalent.

At any rate, Türkiye’s attitude towards the West has changed. For some time now, it has felt rejected. The US and the EU have also started to look at Türkiye differently. It does not help that the secular, democratic state founded by Atatürk in 1923 is now rapidly becoming more autocratic. The authorities are increasingly turning against some of their own citizens, violating their rights and dismantling the rule of law. The Council of Europe has launched infringement proceedings against Türkiye in this regard. This autocratisation is having a profound impact on Türkiye’s foreign and security policy. There is almost no democratic control in this area, and the presidency has taken over the decision-making process.

The government has asked the AIV to publish an advisory report on Türkiye’s geopolitical role and its consequences for the Netherlands, not least within the context of NATO and the EU. Specific questions include what the AIV expects Türkiye’s foreign and security policy to be in the next five to ten years and what the potential consequences of Türkiye’s geopolitical role might be for Dutch interests, the NATO Alliance and the EU.



The present advisory report cannot predict how politics in Türkiye and the geopolitical forces surrounding the country will develop, but trend analyses and scenarios can help paint a credible picture. The report outlines four fictional future scenarios, based on the two greatest uncertainties regarding Türkiye’s future. The first of these uncertainties relates to the level of geopolitical tension and fragmentation and its effect on Türkiye and the region, not least as a result of Russia’s war in Ukraine. The second key factor in the scenarios is the level of autocratisation, with the forthcoming elections as the first point of reference. The outcome of these elections will largely determine the future direction of the Turkish system: further autocratisation or the restoration of democracy and the rule of law.

The key question is how such factors will influence Türkiye’s foreign and security policy vis-à-vis the West. There is a lot of speculation regarding the outcome of the elections in Western capitals, which often blame their mercurial relations with Türkiye on the current Turkish presidency. However, an excessive focus on the leadership obscures a number of constants and patterns in Turkish foreign and security policy that need to be taken into account when formulating policy in relation to Türkiye.

To gain insight into these issues, the AIV consulted various Türkiye experts in think tanks, civil society, the government, the diplomatic service and elsewhere, who explained how Türkiye views the Netherlands at strategic level. Their statements and insights have been incorporated into the present report. These consultations have enabled the AIV to identify a number of trends and scenarios that take account of various constants in Turkish foreign and security policy. One such constant is the country’s geographical location, which can serve as a bridge, a buffer or a barrier. An example of this is the Bosphorus, which provides an access point to the Black Sea, a topical issue in the current Ukraine

crisis. Another – less tangible – constant is the fierce Turkish nationalism underlying many of the country's foreign policy decisions, a trend that would continue under any new leadership. The pursuit of autonomy from the West and Russia and the narrative concerning Türkiye's greatness have also played a key role in Turkish policy over the decades. As a result, the West's relationship with Türkiye will remain complex under any scenario.



Whichever way you look at it, Türkiye's current geopolitical role presents the Netherlands with several strategic dilemmas. The Netherlands' own interests in its relationship with Türkiye are more important than ever. Dutch citizens of Turkish origin now constitute the largest community of people with a migration background in the Netherlands. In the run-up to the 2023 elections, political polarisation is growing in Türkiye. This may have a direct impact on these communities and how they live together in the Netherlands. Moreover, demands from the Turkish authorities for Netherlands to extradite 'enemies of the state' have also led to tensions.

From a strategic perspective, Dutch interests now relate primarily to Türkiye's crucial role in defending the southern flank of NATO territory on the European continent, on the one hand, and combating terrorism and managing migration from fragile regions in the Middle East and Asia, on the other. It is therefore vital to maintain a working relationship with Türkiye, but there is more to it than that. At this point in history, the Netherlands, NATO and the EU cannot ignore a pivotal country like Türkiye, with its unique geographical location and majority Muslim population. This is a country that explicitly opted for a secular, Western-oriented democratic model 100 years ago and still adheres to this form of government today, a country that forms the main migration corridor to Europe and that borders one of the world's most volatile regions.

In fact, Türkiye in 2022 is more important than ever before. If it were to cease to be a strong military power in NATO, Greece would become the cornerstone of the defence of the Alliance's southern flank. In addition, owing to its unique position on the border between East and West, and as a key NATO Ally strategically located on the Black Sea, Türkiye has scope to mediate in the war in Ukraine that other countries lack. This war could go on for a long time, further enhancing Türkiye's importance to NATO in this strategic corner of Europe.



At the same time, Türkiye's leadership is sometimes unpredictable, prompting calls to scale back relations with the country. Both the EU and NATO, and the US in particular, are finding it difficult to maintain a working relationship with Türkiye owing to its idiosyncratic and confrontational policies, which provoke a lot of resistance. EU-Türkiye relations are expected to acquire an added dynamic next year, as elections are also due to take place in neighbouring Greece and Cyprus. The Netherlands should thus be aware of the existence of a more powerful (and partly unnoticed) dynamic that could ultimately lead to the further estrangement of Türkiye within NATO and vis-à-vis the EU. The Netherlands has limited influence in this area and should therefore invest more in working together with like-minded EU partners with shared interests, such as Germany. At the same time, if Türkiye wishes to prevent such estrangement, it will obviously have to meet the West halfway in some form or other.

Whatever the next five years may bring, and however Türkiye orients itself towards the West, each scenario presents the Netherlands, the EU and NATO with several strategic advantages *and* vulnerabilities vis-à-vis Türkiye. Policymakers should take these into account if and when the relevant situation arises. The four scenarios outlined in this report could result in a variety of situations as regards the Netherlands' relationship with Türkiye: from ongoing ambiguity or explicit rivalry to rapprochement or increased mutual dependence. The AIV's recommendations are based on a mixture of the potential courses of action that arise from these scenarios, with an emphasis on limiting risks and maximising the opportunities to improve relations between the Netherlands and Türkiye.

The AIV recommends a proactive Türkiye policy that recognises the importance of the relationship with Türkiye but also prioritises a forward-looking approach and a careful balancing of the Netherlands' interests vis-à-vis Türkiye. The interests that are central to the AIV's recommendations focus on a powerful NATO, a strong and effective EU, and cooperation in the fields of counterterrorism, climate change, energy, migration and reception in the region. The foundation of the relationship between the Netherlands and Türkiye lies in the proper integration of Dutch citizens of Turkish origin and the Turkish diaspora, a close trade and investment relationship with Türkiye and the promotion of values and norms in the fields of human rights and the rule of law. In the AIV's view, this balancing of interests can be summarised by the concept of 'principled transactionalism', according to which the Netherlands continues to act on its principles while pursuing an increasingly transactional approach in its relations with Türkiye.



Recommendations



While Türkiye remains an important ally, the Netherlands and Türkiye disagree on certain key principles and values. When it comes to balancing the Netherlands' various interests vis-à-vis Türkiye, the AIV recommends the following:

► Recommendation 1

Recognise and specify the geopolitical role that Türkiye can play in:

- enhancing European security;
- containing Russia, not only in terms of access to the Black Sea but also on various other fronts, including by means of mediation;
- mitigating the persistent threat of conflict emanating from regions that the West is withdrawing from, such as the Middle East and Afghanistan, as such conflict could potentially trigger migration flows to Europe.

► Recommendation 2

Consistently promote values and norms in the fields of human rights and the rule of law

The aim is to ensure Türkiye's continued participation in the international legal order. This includes supporting the infringement proceedings instituted by the Council of Europe against Türkiye.

► Recommendation 3

Act both strategically and with an eye to the future: keep Türkiye involved in the multilateral system

Be alert to dynamics that could ultimately force Western actors to take irreversible steps, such as terminating the EU accession process. This would not only extinguish the prospect of a common destiny but also remove much of the EU's leverage. Revoking Türkiye's EU candidate status and terminating cooperation within NATO should be considered only in the worst-case scenario, that is to say, in the kind of situation described in the future scenario of 'explicit rivalry'.



► Recommendation 4

Given that the Netherlands and Germany share many interests, work in coalition with Germany to enhance relations with Türkiye

Play an encouraging and facilitating role within the EU in maintaining as many contacts and as much cooperation and dialogue with Türkiye as possible. In this connection, the AIV advises the government to initiate tripartite consultations with Berlin and Ankara, based on the existing bilateral format of the Wittenburg conferences.

► Recommendation 5

In the short term, increase outreach to the Turkish people to prevent them from becoming alienated from Europe

Recognise and specify the value of the Netherlands' ties with Türkiye and Turkish society. Acknowledge the value of its culture, people and economic enterprise, the ambitions of its young people, the country as a whole and its interactions with the Netherlands. Involve the Turkish community in the Netherlands in this process and focus on shared interests, such as developing the close trade and investment relationship and the social, educational and professional networks between Türkiye and the Netherlands. Take account of the needs of Turkish civil society and be flexible in this regard.

► Recommendation 6

Use the EU's strong negotiating position to encourage Türkiye, which is struggling economically, to improve its record on human rights and the rule of law

Implement this recommendation in line with recommendation 2 and the EU's existing conditionality approach. Ask the European Commission to propose a range of measures aimed at promoting Türkiye's economic recovery and resilience. The biggest opportunities in this regard include modernising the customs union – with a focus on services, climate change and the Green Deal, and promoting digital cooperation – and visa liberalisation between Türkiye and the EU.

► Recommendation 7

Ensure that the EU explicitly acknowledges Türkiye's role in refugee reception and that the EU commits to providing multiannual financial support in this area

The AIV advises the government to generously support Türkiye, which has taken responsibility for hosting more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees on a long-term basis. Financial predictability is very important to Türkiye. More transparent communication concerning how and on whom Türkiye spends these funds is also important. In addition, the EU must honour its commitments under the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement regarding voluntary resettlement from Türkiye. At the same time, Türkiye and the EU both need to invest more resources in tackling the root causes of irregular migration and conflict. With a view to the future, the EU must actively seek alternatives to the current form of cooperation on migration with Türkiye.

► Recommendation 8

Play a proactive role in maintaining NATO-Türkiye relations and invest in rapprochement between the US and Türkiye in order to strengthen the Alliance

The protection of Europe's territory is dependent on the survival of the security axis between these militarily vital member countries. The AIV advises the government to provide expertise and mediation for the resolution of territorial and maritime issues in the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas. In addition, Türkiye should be offered access to and integration with Western, NATO-compatible systems as soon as possible.



► Recommendation 9

Take steps to increase Türkiye's involvement in EU foreign and security policy

This can be achieved through meetings – such as those recently conducted in the framework of the European Political Community – or high-level dialogue on cooperation in the area of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and similar initiatives, but also in a practical sense through cooperation on substantive aspects of EU foreign and security policy in order to ensure better coordination between Turkish and EU policy. Until 2018, Türkiye was regularly invited to participate in informal consultations on these topics and co-signed political statements issued by the EU. As a geopolitical player, the EU must exploit the strategic advantage of its proximity to Türkiye. In addition, it will badly need the country to help manage migration from the Middle East and Afghanistan and provide aid to vulnerable and conflict-affected countries.

► Recommendation 10

Throughout government, utilise anticipation and early-warning abilities in order to identify early signs of changes in Türkiye (or relating to it) that may affect Dutch interests

Consider not one but several potential courses of action, based on different future scenarios, and examine the various policy options available to the Netherlands. Do this so as to be better prepared for unexpected developments in Türkiye – in the crucial year of 2023 – and develop contingency plans to facilitate a swift and effective response where necessary.



Introduction

In May 2021, the AIV received a request for advice on the geopolitical role of Türkiye from the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The request, which was also submitted on behalf of the Minister of Defence, contained the following three questions:

1. What domestic, foreign-policy-related and economic factors and developments should be considered when identifying Türkiye's geopolitical interests and role (and changes to them), and its resulting foreign and security policy?
2. What is Türkiye's foreign and security policy expected to be in the next five to ten years? What are the potential consequences of Türkiye's geopolitical role for Dutch interests, the NATO Alliance and the EU?
3. What scope does the Netherlands have for taking action, both at bilateral level and through the EU and NATO? What policy choices may present themselves in the short and longer term?

Thanks to its geostrategic location, Türkiye has always been able to play a greater role in international politics than might be expected based on its size, population, economic power and military capabilities. As a result of the war in Ukraine, its geopolitical importance has increased: the country now plays a key role as the gatekeeper to the Black Sea.

To identify the changes in Türkiye's geopolitical interests, its role and its resulting foreign and security policy, the AIV established a joint committee for this advisory process. The committee spoke to a large number of experts from think tanks, civil society, government, the diplomatic service and various national and international organisations – mostly in Türkiye but also in the Netherlands, within the EU and NATO, and online.

In the past two decades, Türkiye has markedly raised its profile in the geopolitical realm. Chapter 2 analyses Türkiye's geopolitical orientation based on a historical review of the period between 1923 and 2000, with a focus on factors that have long influenced its policy at a systemic level,¹ such as geography and historical experience. Chapter 3 examines key turning points in Türkiye's Western orientation (2000-2022). These turning points had already been ushered in before President Erdoğan came to power, often inspired by powerful nationalist reflexes. Chapter 4 analyses how Türkiye's policy is influenced by economic and domestic political drivers. The major powers, such as the US and Russia, have also had a profound impact on current policy. The same applies to the influence of the East and China and the geopolitical leeway that they have granted Türkiye in the past. This dimension is discussed in chapter 5, which also examines the strategic interests of NATO and the EU. These interests play a crucial role in the definition of the Netherlands' position. Chapter 6 focuses on Dutch interests and the strategic dilemmas arising from the changes in the West's geopolitical relations with Türkiye. Here the AIV examines what opportunities and risks lie in store for the Netherlands.

Chapter 7 outlines four future scenarios relating to Türkiye's orientation towards the West in the period up to 2030:² (1) ongoing ambiguity; (2) explicit rivalry; (3) rapprochement; and (4) increased mutual dependence. For each scenario, it describes the possible implications for Dutch interests and outlines various potential courses of action and policy options for the Netherlands at both bilateral and NATO or EU level. The epilogue, finally, places the report in a contemporary perspective.

Constants in Türkiye's geopolitical role

The geographical location of Türkiye, a country with Asian (Anatolia) and European (Eastern Thrace) parts situated between the West and the East on shores of the Black Sea with Russia to the north, largely determines its geopolitical role. The history of the country and its people are also key factors. For example, its official language, Turkish, is spoken not only by the country's more than 82 million inhabitants but by people across the Eurasian continent. The Turkish language is related to dozens of languages and dialects spoken from the Balkans to China by approximately 200 million people.³ In the following sections, we will discuss the historical development of Türkiye's geopolitical role and a number of constants in Türkiye's geopolitics.

► 2.1 Historical development

The Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire (1299-1922) was founded in the territory of modern-day Türkiye. At its zenith, this Islamic empire covered a vast area that extended from North Africa into Asia and Europe. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 sent shock waves through Europe, even leading to plans for Europe's monarchs to unite in opposition to the Ottomans in the Balkans and deeper within the European continent. The Ottomans regularly sought to build coalitions in Europe as a counterweight to the leading continental power of the time, the Habsburg Empire (Austria, Spain and Italy). In 1526, for example, the Ottoman Empire concluded a military alliance with France against the Habsburgs. However, the privileges granted to the Europeans at this time and subsequently, and the way in which the European powers asserted their role as protectors of the Christian population, aroused resentment within the Ottoman Empire.⁴

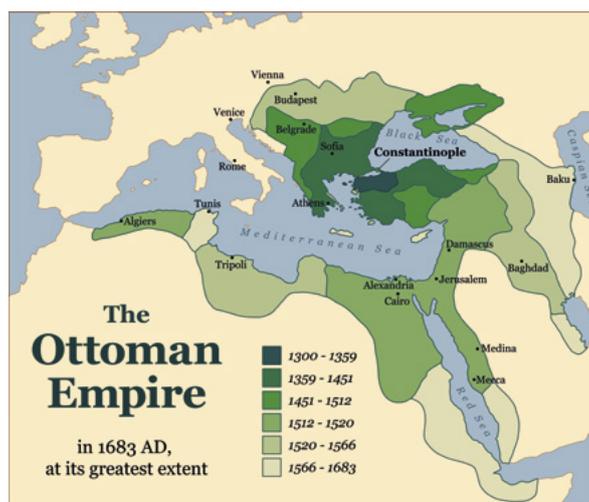


Figure 1 - Extent of the Ottoman Empire in 1683

Russia exerted constant pressure from the north. In 1783, the Russian Empire annexed the territory of Crimea. Prior to this Ottoman defeat by Russia, Crimea, which was inhabited largely by Crimean Tatars (a Turkic ethnic group), had been part of the Ottoman Empire. This sense of humiliation at the hands of Russia and the tsars drove the Ottomans towards the West, in what would become a historical pattern.

The attitude of the European powers towards the end of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th and 20th centuries is often cited today as a source of Türkiye's abiding mistrust of the West. Modern Turkish nationalism has its origins in the occupation of Istanbul and the regions of Antalya and Konya by the Italians and the area around Smyrna (later İzmir) by the Greeks. Cilicia was occupied (near the border with Syria) by France, which had secretly divided up the Middle East with the other major colonial power of the time, the United Kingdom, in the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916.

These events gave rise to the Turkish national movement led by General Mustafa Kemal Paşa (1881-1938), known from 1934 as Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. In 1920, the Treaty of Sèvres was signed by the Turkish government, but the Turkish parliament and Sultan Mehmed VI refused to ratify it, as the new country of Turkey stood to lose a lot of territory. A war of independence was launched from the interior of the country.⁵ In 1923, the Treaty of Lausanne sealed the final peace settlement and drew the borders of modern-day Türkiye. The European powers were required to leave, as were the Greeks on the western coast. In return, Muslims and Turks had to leave Greece. The Republic of Turkey immediately experienced pressure from the Kurdish separatist movement and the new state of Armenia (1919). Following the establishment of the republic, the caliphate was abolished in 1924.

Türkiye turns towards the West

Türkiye became a secular republic in which the separation of religion and state was constitutionally enshrined, thus distancing itself from the Islamic countries in the region. Ottoman values, such as the recognition of ethnic and religious diversity, were replaced by Kemalism: a philosophy based on republicanism, secularism and nationalism. The ideal of a unitary nation state gave rise to a policy of assimilation towards minorities.⁶ Under Atatürk, Türkiye shifted its orientation towards Western modernity under the slogan 'peace at home, peace in the world'.

The new Türkiye pursued a position of neutrality in its foreign policy. The Montreux Convention of 1936 granted Türkiye an important role by restoring its control over the straits between the Aegean and the Black Sea. Still in force today, this agreement imposes restrictions on ships in the Black Sea. Türkiye's policy is based on strict impartiality in its implementation, which means that warships can be denied passage – including Russian naval vessels.

In the period following the Second World War, Türkiye formally joined the Allied camp. This was in keeping with the country's Western orientation and provided it with protection against an increasingly dominant Soviet Union. The country turned out to be of great geopolitical importance to NATO. As a NATO Ally, Türkiye formed a critical buffer against the Soviet Union. The country made good use of its location vis-à-vis the West, becoming a trusted anchor and bastion of security in a geographically important corner of Europe. Incirlik airbase, a highly strategic military base in southern Türkiye, developed into an outpost for the United States.

NATO soon became painfully aware that it had internalised an age-old rivalry as a result of the simultaneous accession of Greece and Türkiye in 1952. The Cyprus question proved to be the main bone of contention between Türkiye and Greece. Under the London and Zürich Agreements of 1959, the guarantor powers were Türkiye, Greece and the United Kingdom. The United States kept its distance, but warned Türkiye not to intervene in Cyprus. In 1974, Turkish troops nevertheless invaded the northern part of the island because nationalist Greek Cypriots were conspiring to unite Cyprus with Greece (enosis) with the support of the military junta in Athens.⁷ A Turkish Federated State of

Cyprus was proclaimed, which declared independence in 1983 as the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. To this day, it has been recognised only by Türkiye.



During the Cold War, Türkiye was expected – as a NATO Ally – to maintain relations with the Middle East, thus acting as a kind of bridge. The region emerged as a key battleground between the major powers. This expectation weighed heavily on Türkiye. Russia was the main military partner of several Arab countries, such as Egypt, Syria and Iraq, which remained traditional feudal economies despite their governments' embrace of socialism. The Soviet Union gradually lost influence in the region. Egypt opted for closer ties with the United States after losing the Sinai Peninsula to Israel. However, the Soviet Union could also count on such allies as Syrian leader Hafez al-Assad, who provided the Soviets with strategic facilities on the coast.

Türkiye's main competitors included not only Russia but also Iran. Iran was never part of the Ottoman Empire, and the Turks respected the Iranians. A process of rapprochement between the two countries only began in the 1990s. An alliance with Iran was consistent with the great dream once articulated by the father of political Islam in Türkiye, Necmettin Erbakan, which was to form an anti-Western bloc.⁸ However, such an alliance met with resistance. As far back as in ancient Persia, Shi'ism had been promoted as a rival to Sunni Islam, the official religion of the Ottoman Empire. Religious differences continued to affect the relationship between Iran and Türkiye, and Türkiye remained in the Western bloc, led by America, which in the doctrine of Ayatollah Khomeini was vilified as the 'Great Satan'.

The need for Türkiye to act as a buffer against the Soviet Union disappeared after the Cold War. Its potential to serve as a bridge to the Caucasus, not least with a view to the supply of energy, was only partially fulfilled. Türkiye's efforts to expand its influence in the Turkic-speaking parts of the Eurasian continent were not entirely successful, bearing fruit in oil-rich Azerbaijan, with which it forged close ties, but failing elsewhere, in part because the rise of Islamism in Türkiye did not meet with the approval of the other secular former Soviet states.



Türkiye's orientation towards Western modernity led to its accession to the Council of Europe in 1949 – at the same time as Greece. It signed an Association Agreement with the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1963 and submitted an application for EEC membership in 1987. In the 1990s, support for EU membership among the Turkish population was strong, but in December 1997 the EU rejected Ankara's application. Prior to the Luxembourg summit, the then Prime Minister of Luxembourg, Jean-Claude Juncker, said in an interview about Türkiye: '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.' When German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and UK Prime Minister Tony Blair championed Türkiye's case – after the country had implemented a number of democratic reforms⁹ – it was granted candidate status in 1999. From that point onwards, Türkiye received pre-accession assistance in the framework of the accession process. The United States was firmly in favour of a closer relationship between the EU and Türkiye and actively supported the country's EU membership bid. Greece accepted Türkiye as a candidate at the 1999 EU summit in Helsinki, but only on the condition that Cyprus would be able to join the EU in due course – even if the conflict on the island had not been resolved – which it did in 2004.

Reorientation

Following the 9/11 attacks in 2001, Türkiye – an ally of the US – backed the interventions initiated by the latter in the Middle East. At the time, the United States was looking for partners in the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan and the Middle East. However, cracks were already appearing in Türkiye's cooperation with the West. Its perception of the interventions in the Middle East shifted. The increasingly dominant narrative was that the West was targeting Muslims and that Türkiye

should stand up for them. A desire to expand its influence among the peoples of the former Ottoman Empire also fuelled Türkiye's eagerness to support the Bosnian Muslims during the war in the 1990s. After all, Bosnia and other countries in the Balkans had been a major source of power and wealth in the days of the Ottoman Empire.

These developments coincided with the rise of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (born 1954), a politician popular among conservative Muslims. Erdoğan rose to prominence when he was elected mayor of Greater Istanbul in March 1994. In 2002, his Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – AKP), founded one year earlier, won the parliamentary elections. In 2003, Erdoğan became prime minister.

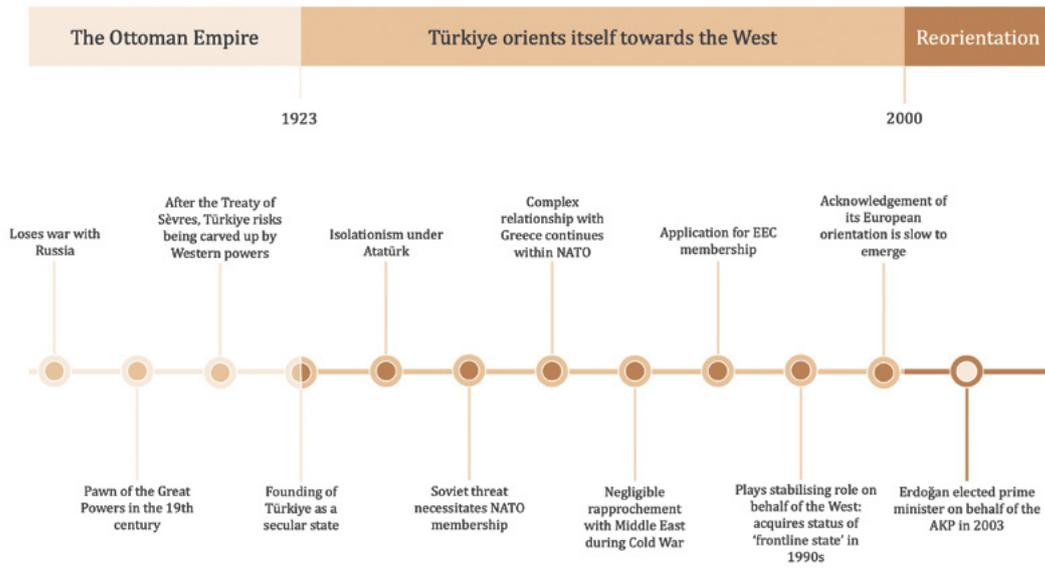


Figure 2 - Developments in Türkiye's Western orientation, 1923-2000

► 2.2 How these constants are reflected in Türkiye's foreign and security policy

Türkiye's current foreign and security policy builds largely on existing patterns and sentiments within the Turkish population arising from the country's history and location and the Turkish people's shared historical experiences and traditions.¹⁰ The current government is following in the footsteps of previous governments in this regard. And future Turkish governments will likewise act in accordance with, and need to take account of, patterns and constants in Türkiye's geopolitical position and role.

In the following paragraphs, the AIV discusses the constants that it considers most relevant to interpreting the current relationship with the West and thus to the choices facing the Netherlands, given its own position and interests (see chapter 6). These constants include: navigating between the West and Russia; the belief that Türkiye's existence is under threat; the Kurdish question; the Turkish leadership's vigilance against coups d'état; mistrust of the West; the complex relationship with Greece; and, finally, nationalism and a longing for greatness.¹¹ This is not an exhaustive overview of all the constants in Türkiye's foreign and security policy.

Navigating between the West and Russia

Türkiye's desire for independence is one of the constants in its foreign and security policy. In geostrategic terms, Türkiye is caught between a rock and a hard place – the West and Russia – and is always seeking to strike a balance between the two. This ambition has profoundly shaped its

geographical self-image. Türkiye fears Russia, which is historically unsurprising given that it fought close to 15 major wars against that country, from the late 15th century until the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. This is compounded by Türkiye's fear of Russian revisionism. This manifested itself in its most threatening form in 1945 when Russia's demands vis-à-vis Türkiye included not only a revision of the Montreux Convention that would enable it to establish military bases on the Bosphorus in the name of 'common security' but also the seizure of Turkish territory. Fear of Russia inspired Türkiye to become a loyal ally of the West, but its posture remained a balancing act that has resulted in an ambiguous and compartmentalised relationship with Russia,¹² in which there is cooperation in some areas and a clash of visions and interests, or even conflict, in others. Türkiye sometimes draws close to Russian President Vladimir Putin, only to distance itself again. Similarly, it is sometimes highly critical of the United States or Europe, and at other times supportive. This attempt to 'play both sides of the fence' goes down well with people in Türkiye. Since 2013, Türkiye has deliberately opted for ambiguity in its foreign policy.

The belief that Türkiye's existence is under threat

Over the decades, Türkiye has developed a siege mentality, which is defined as 'a defensive or paranoid attitude based on the belief that others are hostile towards one'.¹³ To this day, Turkish people remember how the country's existence, security and unity were already under threat in the run-up to the founding of the republic in 1923. Under the Treaty of Sèvres (1920), the country stood to lose a lot of territory to the Allies. The treaty was never ratified or implemented, but the country's 'Sèvres phobia' is reflected in its fear that 'the external world and their internal collaborators are [continuously] trying to weaken and divide Turkey'.¹⁴ The concept of *dış mihraklar* (sinister external forces) continues to be cited in the domestic discourse on the threat to Türkiye's survival – and not just by President Erdoğan. A recurring narrative promoted by the authorities is that certain domestic forces pose a threat to the country's *existential interests*. According to this logic, such forces should be tackled and suppressed in order to protect the republic. This often results in restrictions on the media and freedom of expression, repression of the country's own citizens and flagrant violations of human rights. Against this background, Western advocacy of human rights and the rule of law is viewed with suspicion and accordingly has little effect.

The Kurdish question

The belief that Türkiye's survival is threatened can be cited in response to all kinds of potential threats, both domestic and foreign. It is regularly invoked when minority groups, such as the Kurds, seek to assert their rights in Türkiye. Since the founding of the republic, such groups have had to contend with a definition of Turkishness that excludes the Kurds and other minorities (see the discussion below on nationalism and the longing for greatness as a constant).¹⁵ In Türkiye's history, the Kurds have often been portrayed as a threat.

This has its origins in the Treaty of Sèvres, which referred to an autonomous Kurdistan. Kurdish groups never gave up on the ideal of a state of their own. Turkish leaders brutally suppressed Kurdish uprisings in the decades that followed. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan* – PKK), founded in 1978, has been waging an armed struggle for independence in Türkiye since 1984. In 1992, the Kurdistan Regional Government was proclaimed in the Kurdish region of neighbouring Iraq. Turkish Kurds were granted language rights, but many fled to northwestern Europe during a severe wave of violence in the 1990s. The EU later designated the PKK as a terrorist organisation. After it was forced out of Syria in 1999 and following the arrest of its leader, Abdullah Öcalan, that same year, the PKK regrouped in northern Iraq. The conflict between Türkiye and the PKK continued to simmer until 2010, when Türkiye decided to attack PKK bases in northern Iraq. Turkish foreign and security policy towards certain countries in the region, such as Syria and Iraq, but also towards European countries to which a large part of the Kurdish community has fled, is motivated in part by this history.

The Turkish leadership's vigilance against coups d'état

Türkiye's history is characterised by different phases of authoritarian leadership. The leadership's vigilance against potential coups d'état has its roots in the country's troubled history of civil-military relations. Türkiye has experienced several military coups: in 1960, 1971 and 1980. In 1997, the army managed to overthrow the elected government of Prime Minister Erbakan. As a result of this history, Turkish leaders are often wary. This presumably includes President Erdoğan, who has purged the armed forces, the judiciary, the media, etc. of potential opposition forces in recent years. In Turkish eyes, it is suspicious that the West's response to the most recent coup attempt in 2016 was lukewarm.¹⁶ It thus appears that the Turkish leadership does not trust the West in this regard either.

The complex relationship with Greece

Türkiye and neighbouring Greece have had a complex relationship since the founding of both states, which soon became a problem following their simultaneous accession to NATO. The Turkish discourse contains a wealth of historical examples of instances where Türkiye has been abandoned by the West. For example, it is recalled that the United States and NATO did not want to come to its aid at the time of the Cyprus crisis in 1974. The crisis was not resolved, and the Cyprus question even led to a turning point in Türkiye's relationship with Europe. During its 2004 enlargement round, the EU welcomed the Republic of Cyprus as a member, although the island was still divided. Contrary to expectations, the Greek Cypriot community had voted against UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's plan to reunify the island. To this day, Türkiye has still not recognised the Republic of Cyprus.

Türkiye remained in the proverbial waiting room of EU candidate countries. The Cyprus question thus became a bilateral issue between Türkiye and the EU and, in Turkish eyes, the leading internal obstacle to its EU membership.

Current relations between Türkiye and Greece are marked by several disputes. A recent example concerns the islands in the Aegean Sea, which are the subject of much controversy and distortion in the Greek and Turkish media. According to Türkiye, the islands should be demilitarised. The Treaty of Lausanne states that "no naval bases or fortifications" are to be built on the five main islands in the North Aegean. Nevertheless, the terms do allow Greece to maintain a "normal contingent" of regular troops there. Disagreements about islands in the Aegean Sea are constantly played out through the media, but threatening language is also used. For example, the Turkish president recently warned: 'We have only one word to tell Greece: do not forget Izmir',¹⁷ referring to Türkiye's 1922 entry into İzmir (Smyrna), which had been under Greek occupation since 1919.

Mistrust of the West

In Turkish eyes, the EU cannot be trusted. According to the Turkish government, the EU entered into accession negotiations with the country without actually wanting Türkiye (which currently numbers over 82 million inhabitants) to become a member. This lack of trust has historical roots.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Türkiye currently regards the United States as the biggest threat facing the country, even though they are both members of NATO. This attitude is related to the aforementioned constant in the history of the Turkish republic: the Kurdish question. US contacts with Syrian and Iraqi Kurdish groups in the Middle East are a thorn in Türkiye's side. Another source of mistrust relates to so-called existential interests, which stem in part from the pattern of vigilance among Turkish leaders against potential coups d'état. In particular, it concerns the alleged perpetrator of the coup attempt, Fethullah Gülen, who fled to the United States in 1999. The US authorities are still refusing to extradite Gülen to Türkiye in the absence of evidence that he tried to carry out this coup against Erdoğan. Within Türkiye, this fuels the conspiracy theory that the West wants to tear apart the Turkish republic. This idea stems from the above-mentioned Sèvres phobia, the belief that Western forces are trying to infiltrate the republic through domestic agents.

Nationalism and the longing for greatness

The Republic of Türkiye will celebrate its centenary in 2023. In this sense, it is still a young state in search of a common identity. Part of the Turkish population is proud of its imperial past and former regional influence.¹⁹ On state television, members of political elites rehearse the narrative of Turkish superiority on a daily basis.²⁰ Over the past 20 years, a nationalistic yearning for the Ottoman rule of former days has permeated Türkiye's foreign and security policy towards the Balkans, Central Asia and Africa. However, this sentiment applies to a 'Turkified' version of the Ottoman Empire, which was actually a multicultural empire at the time. Be that as it may, part of the population is receptive to tales of past imperial grandeur.²¹ There is great sensitivity surrounding international interventions in the region, which are regarded as trespassing upon Türkiye's sphere of influence. The desire to become a regional leader with global influence is also fuelled by the idea of a common Turkish ethno-linguistic identity. In reality, although the languages of Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan are quite closely related to Turkish as it is spoken in Türkiye, most of the Turkic languages are not intelligible to Turks.

There are roughly five million Turkish speakers in Europe, mainly as a result of labour migration. However, this connection with Europe is not entirely compatible with the increasingly popular narrative of Eurasian ideology, which focuses on the East. This ideology focuses on the need for a strong, authoritarian regime with an Asian orientation that is not anti-Russian. In recent years, the ideology has become entrenched in the military elites and is gaining increasing support in society, fuelled by the state media. However, opinion polls show that there is still more popular support for a European orientation.²²

Finally, the tension between what is still a secular state and political Islam in Türkiye, which remains a constant, is at the root of many of the country's foreign policy choices. At present, Türkiye continues to use its soft power in a pragmatic way, for example in the Middle East and Islamic parts of Africa, in order to achieve its goal of regional power with global influence. Leaders nowadays dispense with Islamic ideology if it does not suit their intended objective, for example when it comes normalising relations with Israel.



How Türkiye started to focus on other regions

Even before the turn of the millennium, the focus of Türkiye's foreign and security policy was shifting southwards and eastwards, away from the West. This trend accelerated when the country's ongoing efforts to join the EU foundered. A period marked by turning points in Türkiye's Western orientation was already under way before President Erdoğan came to power, often inspired by deeply nationalistic reflexes. This chapter analyses how Türkiye shifted its orientation to other regions, specific turning points in the Western orientation of its foreign and security policy, and new and renewed alliances.

▶ 3.1 Reorientation of policy

From 2009, under its 'Strategic Depth' strategy (2001) formulated by AKP politician and future Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu, Türkiye opened itself up to maximum cooperation with regions of the former Ottoman Empire, such as the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia, especially with countries with ethnic Turkish minorities. Rapprochement was also sought with Islamic countries in Africa and Asia, such as Pakistan.

From 2011, the Arab uprisings provided a vehicle for implementing the AKP-led government's foreign strategy on a larger scale, and Türkiye accordingly launched a diplomatic offensive in the Middle East. The ideology of political Islam served as a guiding principle in this regard. The government focused on leaders who promoted political Islam as the cornerstone of the state. The ideology aroused suspicion in Europe. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood-led government fell after only two years, but Türkiye continued to support Islamist political leaders elsewhere, such as in Somalia.

Türkiye sought to reduce its dependence on European trading partners and vigorously diversified its foreign trade. Its economy flourished from 2010 onwards, ushering in the so-called 'Golden Years'. Since 2012, Türkiye has participated in meetings of the China-led Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), but only as a Dialogue Partner (see chapter 5 for more on China's strategic interests vis-à-vis Türkiye). It also launched its 'The World is Bigger than Five' campaign (referring to the number of permanent members on the UN Security Council). Türkiye subsequently developed a substantial public-private network in Africa, with the help of Qatar. Ankara's efforts to cooperate with African countries proved an instant diplomatic success. In 2010, Türkiye was elected to the UN Security Council, with 50 of Africa's 53 countries supporting its membership.²³

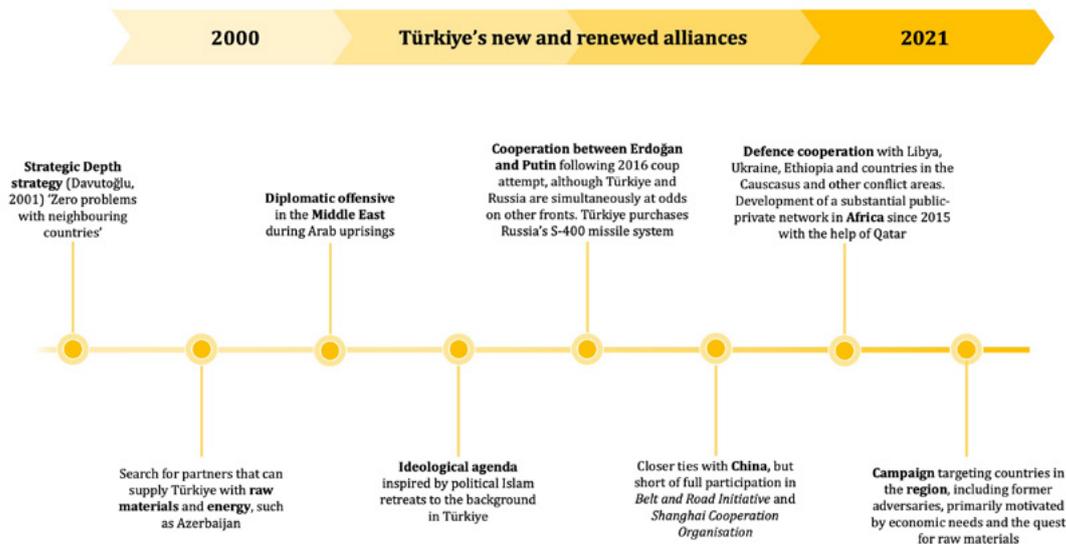


Figure 3 - Türkiye's new and renewed alliances, 2000-2021

In the years leading up to the Arab uprisings, Türkiye's prime minister sought to develop a good relationship with President Bashar al-Assad of Syria in the framework of the 'zero problems with neighbouring countries' strategy. He believed he was doing the Syrian regime a service by advising it on how to deal with Sunni groups, but the Syrian leader brutally suppressed the uprisings. Relations between Assad and Erdoğan swiftly deteriorated. Türkiye openly supported these groups at first but took a step back when they joined forces with former Ba'ath Party fighters from Iraq, laying the foundation for what later became Islamic State (IS). At the same time, a Syrian Kurdish faction known as the Democratic Union Party (*Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat* – PYD)²⁴ and its armed wing, the People's Defence Units (*Yekîneyên Parastina Gel* – YPG), set up defence units in the northeastern region of Syria known as Rojava. When the peace negotiations between the PKK and the Turkish government failed in 2015, Ankara declared the YPG an enemy entity and treated northern Syria as a hunting ground for going after YPG and PKK fighters. In order to contain Türkiye, President Assad mobilised not only former allies, such as Shi'ite Iran, but also Russia, a country long feared by Türkiye.

Türkiye's divergence from international human rights agreements and norms

From 2013 onwards, the erosion of the rule of law in Türkiye became clearly evident, although the trend had already set in previously. In the *Ergenekon* trials of 2008, many generals, as well as secular opposition members, journalists and university rectors, had been convicted on charges of forming a secret organisation that had allegedly sought to influence Turkish politics by undemocratic and violent means. It is worth noting that Prime Minister Erdoğan seized EU demands as a pretext to curb the power of the Turkish armed forces – *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri* (TSK) – over the government. The EU and the member states focused on Türkiye's adoption of the *acquis communautaire*. It was believed that democratic oversight of the armed forces would help further consolidate Turkish democracy. The status of the armed forces needed to be reformed in order to satisfy the accession requirements laid down in the Copenhagen criteria.²⁵

In 2013, the protests in Istanbul's Gezi Park were brutally suppressed. Prime Minister Erdoğan continued to build his power base by cracking down on his opponents and was elected president in 2014. He fell out with Fethullah Gülen, a spiritual leader and former friend. Gülen had set up various organisations at home and abroad on behalf of the Turkish government, including in the Netherlands. In the Turkish discourse, the Gülen movement was portrayed as the Fetullahist Terrorist Organisation (FETÖ), which could supposedly conceal itself anywhere. As a result, the Turkish government's interference in diaspora communities in Europe increased.

▶ 3.2 Turning points in Türkiye's relationship with the West



2015 marked a turning point in Türkiye's relationship with the United States and NATO, which had started to have doubts about Türkiye's intentions. For example, the country only joined the anti-ISIS coalition in 2015. It was exasperating for Türkiye that NATO Allies were in direct contact with Kurdish groups in Syria, which it regarded as a threat. Türkiye was interested in technology transfer, but NATO wavered. Türkiye subsequently considered purchasing China's FD-2000 air defence system.

In previous years, Türkiye's airspace along the Syrian border was violated on a regular basis. The country received assistance from NATO to counter this problem. When Türkiye shot down a Russian aircraft that violated its airspace, Russia promptly imposed sanctions that hit the Turkish economy hard. Türkiye had become heavily dependent on Russia in certain sectors, such as tourism. However, the coup attempt in 2016 triggered a turnaround in Türkiye's relationship with Russia. In President Erdoğan's view, the West's response to the coup attempt was rather tepid. President Putin spotted an opportunity to gain influence with the Turkish government, which had already decided not to join the Western sanctions against Russia following the annexation and militarisation of Crimea. In 2017, after Putin had publicly expressed his support for President Erdoğan following the coup attempt, Erdoğan decided to purchase Russia's S-400 missile system. Russia subsequently eased its sanctions, and Türkiye became even more dependent on Russia than before, not only for tourism but also for the import of raw materials. The two countries became increasingly aligned. In 2019, Russia invited Türkiye to participate in the Russian-led Astana peace process for Syria. However, Türkiye's rapprochement with Russia and its purchase of the country's S-400 missile system also had a downside. In response to its 'balancing act' policy within NATO, which was perceived as opportunistic, the US Congress banned the delivery of F-35 combat aircraft to Türkiye.²⁶

Türkiye's increasingly transactional relationship and deal with the EU

Türkiye had already pressed Western countries for a more transactional relationship on a previous occasion. That opportunity presented itself in 2016, when the EU was weakened by the chaos at its external and internal borders and sought to negotiate a 'migration deal' with Türkiye under the informal leadership of the Dutch and German governments, resulting in the adoption of the EU-Turkey Statement. By 2015, large numbers of Syrians had already fled their country as a result of the war, of whom hundreds at a time drowned in the sea between Türkiye and Greece, on their way to Europe. This migration deal ushered in a phase characterised by a more transactional relationship between Türkiye and the EU, which did little to improve their relations.

Mutual trust continued to decline. In 2017, a diplomatic incident involving the Netherlands occurred as a result of the Turkish government's attempt to engage in political campaigning among the local Turkish community – in the run-up to a referendum on whether Türkiye should replace its existing parliamentary system with a presidential one – during a ministerial visit to the Netherlands. The Netherlands had banned such campaigning, but in spite of this a political event was held in Rotterdam under the guise of an 'information meeting'. A Turkish government minister almost managed to reach the location of the meeting by car via Germany thanks to a diversionary manoeuvre. The incident between Türkiye and the Netherlands continued to escalate, and the Dutch ambassador at the time, who happened to be outside Türkiye at the moment in question, was prevented from returning to his post in Ankara.²⁷ The aforementioned referendum ushered in a period of power consolidation in Türkiye. As a result of the constitutional amendment approved by a narrow majority in the referendum, Türkiye transitioned from a parliamentary system to a presidential one. The bilateral relationship between the Netherlands and Türkiye was only restored in 2018.



In 2019, oil-poor Türkiye decided to support Libya's UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA). With the help of Turkish-made Bayraktar drones, GNA forces were able to prevent the capital Tripoli from falling into the hands of opposition warlord Khalifa Haftar. Türkiye waited for the West to endorse its rescue operation, but the EU was ambivalent. France, in particular, provided Haftar with weapons and intelligence to defend himself against jihadist militias. The Libyan authorities were grateful to Türkiye, and the GNA granted it a concession for an offshore oil field. Ankara continued to supply the GNA with weapons, ignoring the UN arms embargo. This led to a run-in between Türkiye and France when a French ship attempted to inspect a Turkish ship for weapons in the framework of EU Operation Irini.²⁸ Türkiye still refuses to cooperate with such inspections. It also refused to comply with the UN ultimatum for withdrawal from Libya as long as fighters from Russia's notorious Wagner Group remained there.

The hastily built Turkish military bases in the Libyan towns of Tajura and Misrata had an intimidatory effect on Greece and Cyprus. The Greek island of Crete is located only about 300 kilometres from the Libyan coast. Türkiye put its 'forward defence' doctrine into practice here.²⁹ In 2019, Türkiye, which has almost no oil and gas of its own, conducted exploratory gas drills in the Eastern Mediterranean near Cyprus, and later also in Cyprus's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), in total disregard of established maritime law. The justification for these actions supposedly lies in the *Mavi Vatan* (Blue Homeland) doctrine, on the basis of which Türkiye lays claim to the continental shelf and seeks to redefine maritime boundaries. The country recognises neither established maritime law nor the International Court of Justice's jurisdiction in this area.

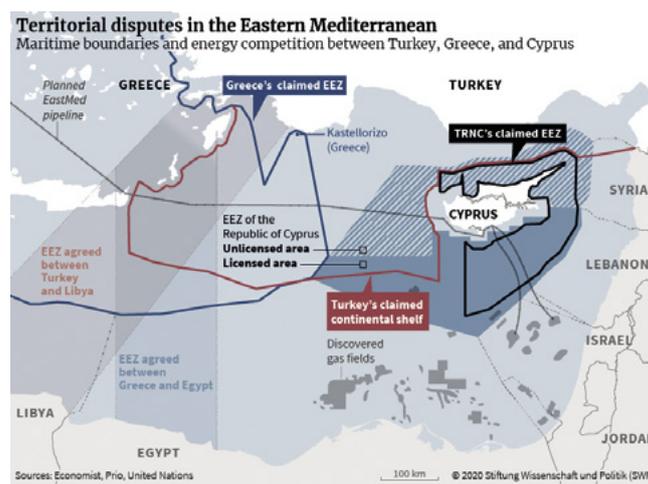


Figure 4 - Territorial disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean

Source - Centre for Applied Turkey Studies, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), 2020

Meanwhile, the Turkish economy was on a downhill trajectory, and the government continued to look for new alliances. In 2017, various Turkish ministries invited China to cooperate with Türkiye in the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative. This did not go very smoothly, but in 2019 the government began to receive Chinese loans (see chapter 5). A similar goal informed Türkiye's rapprochement with many other countries, such as the Gulf states, from 2021 onwards. These countries included former adversaries that were now vital to halting the decline of the Turkish economy. Türkiye also strengthened its ties with Armenia, Israel and Egypt and sought rapprochement with Greece.³¹

Previously, Türkiye had helped oil-rich Azerbaijan defeat Russian-backed Armenia on the battlefield of Nagorno-Karabakh, once again with the help of its drones. In 2021, Türkiye launched the Organization of Turkic States³² as a successor to the earlier Turkic Council, which had been

established in 2009. The organisation brings Türkiye together with the Central Asian oil-rich countries of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, with Turkmenistan and Hungary as observers.

In the meantime, Türkiye expanded its business, diplomatic and military network in Africa, becoming a major player with 43 embassies, 3 military bases, defence cooperation agreements with 30 countries, growing drone exports and Turkish Airlines flights to 60 African destinations.³³ Although the EU, China and India are much bigger players when it comes to trade, and Russia and the Gulf states are key players in the field of security, Türkiye has positioned itself as a humanitarian partner that is intent on establishing win-win relationships with African countries.³⁴

At the same time, the human rights situation in Türkiye was deteriorating. In 2021, President Erdoğan announced Türkiye's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). The EU and the Council of Europe strongly condemned this decision. At the end of April 2022, Turkish philanthropist and businessman Osman Kavala was sentenced to life imprisonment by a Turkish court for his alleged involvement in the 2016 coup attempt in Türkiye. The Council of Europe has launched infringement proceedings against Türkiye in this case. There is a steady stream of measures that undermine the rule of law, and this continues to affect all kinds of groups in Turkish society. In 2021, for example, prominent Turkish-Kurdish politician Selahattin Demirtaş was sentenced to three and a half years in prison for allegedly insulting the Turkish president. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has repeatedly called for Demirtaş's release on the grounds that his rights are being violated.

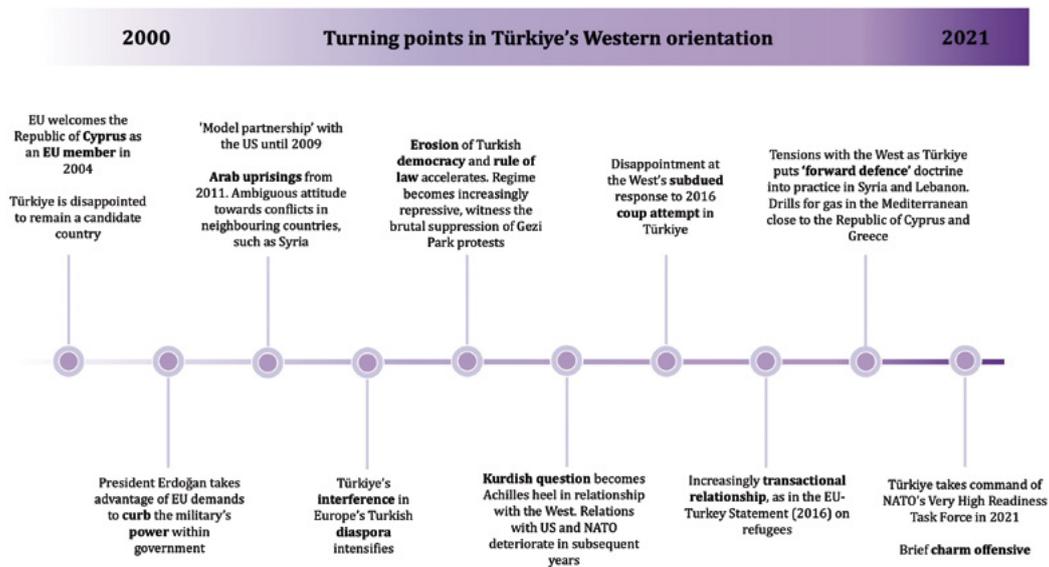


Figure 5 - Turning points in Türkiye's Western orientation, 2000-2021

2022

The global order was upended when Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. The West united behind Ukraine and against Russia. The war also changed the perspective of the EU, which granted Ukraine candidate status and even used the term 'accelerated accession'. Elsewhere in the world, however, the response was less clear-cut, for example among emerging powers in Asia. Türkiye joined the West in condemning the war and denied Russian warships access to the Black Sea on the basis of the 1936 Montreux Convention.

However, Türkiye did not participate in the West's far-reaching sanctions against Russia. President Erdoğan positioned himself as a mediator – successfully in the case of the grain export deal concluded in the summer of 2022. On the other hand, Türkiye did adhere to various agreements with Western countries, including the Netherlands, on counterterrorism efforts against ISIS and al Qa'ida and migration cooperation in the framework of the EU-Turkey Statement. After the fall of Kabul to the Taliban in Afghanistan, Türkiye was one of the few Allies to stand its ground and help NATO partners repatriate their citizens and personnel. Meanwhile, the threat of conflict continued to emanate from regions that the West is withdrawing from, such as the Middle East and Afghanistan, and many flee these regions in the face of ongoing violence and hopelessness.



Türkiye's current foreign and security policy

This chapter examines the more recent domestic and economic factors that are key to understanding changes in Türkiye's foreign and security policy. Today's policy is influenced not only by the aforementioned constants but also by many variables, such as economic needs, domestic political changes and type of leadership – in this case of President Erdoğan.

► 4.1 Domestic and policy challenges for the Netherlands

The economy is a key driver of Türkiye's foreign and security policy. It once served as the engine of foreign policy, enabling Türkiye to establish trade links with far-off regions and set up important networks. The so-called 'Golden Years' (2010-2015) are now long gone. In 2022, thanks to its high inflation rate (83% in October 2022³⁵), the Turkish economy is actually a constraint on policy, and the government is looking for opportunities to boost the economy through foreign policy. Exports are regarded as the engine of growth, but so far Türkiye mostly faces trade deficits. Current and future Turkish governments must show that the country can return to growth and prosperity. Mere rhetoric about the nation's greatness will not suffice in this regard.

Economic development, raw materials and new alliances

Türkiye is investing in interregional connectivity in order to enhance its position as an emerging nexus of commercial and energy routes, an ambition that is manifest in the enormous new airport near Istanbul. As a resource-poor country, Türkiye is trying to forge new alliances that will secure supply and facilitate transit. Countries that are rich in oil and gas, such as Libya and Azerbaijan, therefore have priority. In 2021, Türkiye revitalised its ties with Central Asian countries by launching the Organization of Turkic States. Alternative alliances are proving very useful now that the TurkStream and BlueStream pipelines, which target consumers in southeastern and central Europe and were inaugurated by President Erdoğan and President Putin in January 2020, are less profitable due to the sanctions on Russian natural gas. Türkiye normalised ties with former adversaries Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, initially in order to obtain loans but subsequently also for the purpose of securing raw materials. In order to attract direct investment, however, Türkiye will first have to implement a number of reforms, as its investment climate leaves much to be desired. At present, there is hardly any transparency and no level playing field. A lack of access to decision-makers and a bureaucracy with little power act as barriers to potential investors. There is accordingly no rush of new players seeking to enter the Turkish market.

Strategic autonomy in relation to the EU and the West

Supply chain disruption and the destabilisation of the global trading system have prompted many countries to adapt their industrial policies in an effort to achieve greater strategic autonomy. Türkiye was already doing so, driven in part by the aforementioned constants in Turkish foreign and security policy, such as mistrust of the West. If the blame for the current malaise has to be shifted, it is often pinned on the West or otherwise on Syrian refugees.

Türkiye is dependent on the EU as its largest investor. However, in order to continue trading with the EU, it must also make rapid progress on the energy transition. The Turkish parliament ratified the Paris Agreement in October 2021. The country is now trying to qualify as a 'developing country' in order to receive funds from the UN's Green Climate Fund (GCF).



Sanctions: yes or no?

Türkiye is highly dependent on exports to the European market, but many of its imports come from Russia. Export products such as pasta were usually made using Russian (and Ukrainian) grain. The country is also dependent on the Russian market for fossil fuels (see chapter 5 for an analysis of Russia's strategic interests and dependencies vis-à-vis Türkiye). Türkiye has no intention of participating in sanctions against Russia. Although it fears Western sanctions, the country is more autonomous than before. It has recently diversified its trade contacts, and after so many tough setbacks its population has proved highly resilient and has even adopted a siege mentality. People continue to work and trade, if necessary circumventing the official monetary system. At the same time, there is a widespread belief among Turkish entrepreneurs and companies that Türkiye should not antagonise the West due to the dollarisation of its economy.

Exporting its way out of the crisis: the military industry

The EU remains Türkiye's largest export market, especially for cars, motorcycles and textile products. Germany is Türkiye's largest national export market. For many years, Türkiye has been focusing on export markets elsewhere and exploring new opportunities to the east and south. This started in the 1990s in the construction industry, where the country continues to offer competitive prices.

Turkish policy is currently focused on harnessing the earning potential of the military and arms industry, for example by selling drones. A weak Turkish lira is beneficial for exports. Türkiye's export-driven strategy is most visible on the African continent, where it presents itself as a neutral, humanitarian actor. It also differentiates itself from the West, which it accuses of harbouring colonial attitudes. Türkiye advocates on behalf of African countries on contemporary issues, such as the establishment of safe corridors for Ukrainian grain shipments to poor countries, which it coordinated with the African Union at the highest level during the preparatory process.



Since becoming active in Somalia in 2011, Türkiye has been involved in post-conflict reconstruction in war-affected regions. During this period, President Erdoğan cast the net wider and wider to strengthen Türkiye's historical ties with distant countries. These efforts were driven by the country's relative economic prosperity, while the West was weighed down by the financial crisis. The AKP government forged links with like-minded leaders in the Middle East, the Gulf region and Africa.

Türkiye is now predominantly regarded as a security actor by African countries. It distinguishes itself by offering a wide range of armoured vehicles and more affordable unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) manufactured by Turkish Aerospace Industries, which have proven successful on the battlefield in Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh and Ukraine. Turkish companies have not only secured their position in this market within a few years but have also established overseas military bases and installations on the continent. This has helped Türkiye build up its own military-industrial complex, with the goal of reducing its dependence on its Western allies.

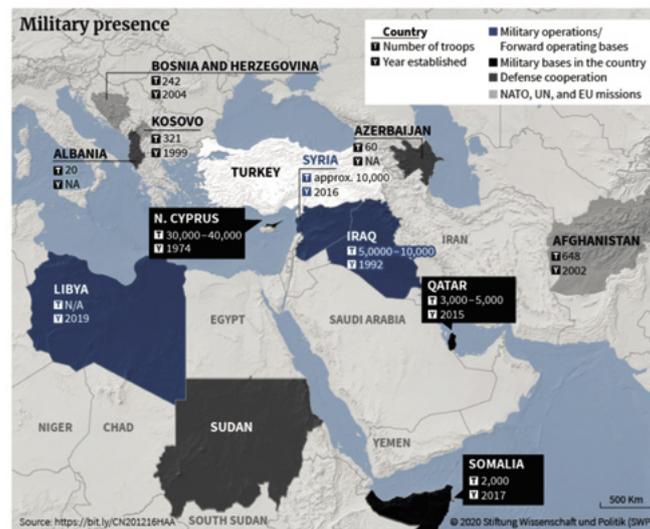


Figure 6 - Türkiye's military presence

Source - Centre for Applied Turkey Studies, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), 2020

► 4.2 Domestic drivers of policy

Türkiye is rapidly becoming more autocratic. It is not unique in this regard. In *The Will of the People? The Erosion of Democracy under the Rule of Law in Europe* (AIV advisory report no. 104), the AIV previously concluded that even in the EU – and especially in Poland and Hungary – the democratic process itself has led to situations in which majorities have chosen a more authoritarian form of government that curtails safeguards for members of the opposition, dissidents and cultural minorities.³⁶ Within this broad, global trend, authoritarian and populist leaders watch each other and share certain characteristics and behaviours. This is also true of President Erdoğan in the Turkish political context.

Foreign policy = domestic policy

It goes without saying that foreign policy is driven by domestic politics, but in Türkiye the relationship between the two is very direct. The country's foreign and security policy cannot be properly understood without considering the domestic dimension. This is due to the high level of political division among the Turkish population. The political mandate of any party or coalition is based on a delicate balance, so its supporters need to be mobilised on a permanent basis. Foreign and security policy is an instrument to achieve this. This involves exploiting a variety of sentiments that are harboured within the population, such as 'the need to guard and protect Türkiye against all manner of foreign forces and powers'. This is one of the constants of policy and is described in chapter 2.

The geopolitical narrative in the run-up to the 2023 elections

In addition to celebrating its centenary, Türkiye will hold parliamentary and presidential elections in 2023. President Erdoğan hopes to be re-elected as the candidate for the AKP. He has led three different governments as prime minister since 2003, and a fourth as president since 2014. Obtaining a mandate from the Turkish electorate is not easy. A high turnout is expected, as the country has great faith in the democratic process, but it remains to be seen whether this also applies to new voters. According to Eurostat, Türkiye has the youngest population in Europe.³⁷ When it comes to political preferences, it is often said that Türkiye is split down the middle, although the current president Erdoğan has managed to win re-election on multiple occasions.³⁸ In theory, he can serve until 2028.³⁹ Under a constitutional amendment that came into force in 2018, the president is allowed to serve two five-year terms.

The outcome of the parliamentary and presidential elections is definitely not a foregone conclusion. The key electoral issue is the country's dire economic situation, which is at the centre of the election campaign of the coalition of opposition parties. The governing party emphasises other issues, including foreign policy, and seeks to mobilise its own supporters by presenting Türkiye as a key player in the international arena. Careful diplomatic choreography lies behind every Turkish action relating to the war in Ukraine. Mediation efforts aimed at ending the war are popular with many Turkish voters, who according to opinion polls would prefer Türkiye to remain neutral.⁴⁰

Türkiye's ties with countries in the Middle East and other Muslim-majority countries are hardly mentioned in the political debate. In the past, this was a popular theme with voters of the newly established AKP, which stood up for the common man in Türkiye.⁴¹ The reorientation of policy towards the Middle East and Muslim regions was popular with this group. Values from the distant past, such as pan-Ottomanism, pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism, were woven into the political discourse.⁴² This approach also appealed – and continues to appeal – to Turkish diaspora communities in Europe, which have the right to vote in Turkish elections, making them an important political target group. These communities scarcely feel the pain of Türkiye's economic downturn. Within the Turkish community in the Netherlands, Turkish leaders mostly employ the same narrative, which relies on accusations of Islamophobia and discrimination. Campaign rhetoric about Islam is taken very literally in Europe. However, it has largely escaped notice that the ideology of political Islam no longer dominates Turkish government policy to the same extent.

The belief that Türkiye's existence is under threat is cited as a justification for the country's current foreign and security policy, which includes interventions in the Aegean and the Mediterranean Sea and interference in Turkish communities in Europe. Interventions in neighbouring countries and military action against armed Kurdish groups are also guaranteed to attract a significant number of votes.⁴³ In the current geopolitical narrative, Türkiye is portrayed as a regional power with global influence. However, it appears that it increasingly needs to back up its foreign policy with military power. For some time now, Türkiye has been projecting its military power across neighbouring areas, such as the Eastern Mediterranean, while also engaging in territorial intimidation and the violation of Greek and Cypriot airspace. This is a thorny issue: when it comes to the Aegean Sea and the airspace above it, Türkiye does not regard its actions as violations because it does not recognise the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.⁴⁴

Consequences of Türkiye's autocratisation for the West

In recent decades, as Türkiye's EU accession has faltered, the AKP government's initially pro-European stance has given way to resentment. The government has started to tailor its approach to the latent mistrust of Europe that exists within certain sections of Turkish society. This rhetoric will intensify during election year, and is primarily for show. As on previous occasions, the resulting deterioration in relations between Türkiye and the West is likely to be only temporary.

Nevertheless, it is becoming increasingly difficult to gain access to the Turkish leadership. As a result of the president's autocratic style of government, there is limited scope to discuss the above and maintain ties with the Turkish authorities through diplomacy. Since the introduction of the presidential system, decision-making is increasingly concentrated in the hands of the president. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has less influence than before, but the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, and his diplomats play an important role in some areas, such as Türkiye's mediation efforts between Ukraine and Russia regarding the grain deal at the end of July 2022. However, the ministry no longer serves as the main source of policy advice. It has been replaced in this role by the new Presidential Security and Foreign Policy Council, which advises the president on foreign and security policy.⁴⁵ The council consists of about twenty advisers from various fields whose recommendations are transmitted to the president either directly or through the chief adviser. This institutional structure makes it increasingly difficult for those who are neither part of nor have access to the council to anticipate Turkish policy.

A realistic approach

Türkiye's current charm offensive towards the West is likely to be temporary in nature. It is not a status quo power and will seek to expand its power wherever possible. Its charm offensive is motivated by financial need, and its headstrong militaristic approach has left it in a more isolated position within NATO and vis-à-vis the EU. Türkiye's current foreign and security policy is doing considerable damage to its image in the West. There are few signs of a thaw. If anything, the government's rhetoric is getting fiercer, especially concerning the opposition.

For now, both NATO and the EU will need to work on the premise that the Turkish leadership is operating on a transactional basis rather than on the basis of a shared value system. The West can no longer assume that Turkish leaders want to adhere to the Western model and the values it encompasses. Instead, it will have to approach Türkiye from a more realistic perspective, as it is today.



Geopolitical relations with and strategic interests vis-à-vis Türkiye

Following on from the variables discussed above, such as domestic politics and economic needs, this chapter describes how the international system – that is to say, geopolitical relations – influences Türkiye’s foreign and security policy. For a country that sees itself as a regional leader with global influence, it is hard to accept that major powers keep manifesting themselves in the surrounding region and restricting its room for manoeuvre. Although Türkiye has carved out an independent position, it is unclear how much leeway it has and how dependent it really is in relation to the major powers in the region. At the same time, Türkiye makes use of actors that have interests in the region and are physically present there. The following sections discuss the geopolitical forces affecting Türkiye and the strategic interests of NATO, the United States, China, Russia and the EU.

► 5.1 NATO

Türkiye has been a NATO Ally since 1952. Thanks to its sizeable armed forces, the country is a provider of collective security and a crucial deterrent against Russia. However, it is also a potential consumer of collective security that cannot manage without NATO, given the insecurity in the surrounding region. Türkiye also occupies a strategic position based on its ‘forward defence’ doctrine and activist approach to neighbouring countries, which have already led to confrontations with Allies in the past, for example in and around the Mediterranean. In addition, the country regularly uses NATO to bring bilateral issues with other Allies to a head. NATO’s main strategic interests vis-à-vis Türkiye include deterring Russia, enhancing capabilities, maintaining unity, minimising other threats and keeping Türkiye under NATO’s security umbrella.

Deterring Russia

Within the NATO framework, Türkiye helps guarantee collective security. Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, this involves deterrence on the Alliance’s eastern flank and preventing escalation with Russia. Türkiye is one of the few countries on the southeastern border of NATO territory that has the power to curb President Putin’s expansionism, not only in the Black Sea region but also on other fronts. The EU is not yet able to defend its own territory, as Europe is dependent on NATO, and Türkiye’s military strength, on its eastern and southern flanks. Türkiye has the capacity to deter Russia, but is demanding an increasingly high price for doing so, given its pattern of navigating between Russia and the West.

Enhancing capabilities

With the second-largest army in the Alliance, Türkiye provides NATO with significant military capabilities and strength. Due to its geographical location and the size of its armed forces, the country is not only crucial to the security of the Alliance's entire territory but also plays a vital role in the external environment by countering security threats emanating from the Middle East and Afghanistan. Türkiye spends more than 2% of GNP on defence. The trend is for this expenditure to be ramped up considerably in absolute terms, with the increase being used mainly to strengthen the armed forces.⁴⁶ In 2021, Türkiye commanded NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF). It also complies with key agreements concluded within the NATO framework and with other international organisations, for example by supplying troops for NATO missions (in Afghanistan and Kosovo), acting as a counterweight to Russia on several fronts, combating terrorist groups such as ISIS and al Qa'ida, implementing the Montreux Convention and cooperating on migration control. In addition, Türkiye's visible military presence in Afghanistan was key to securing Kabul airport and even vital in facilitating outgoing flights.

Maintaining unity

At this juncture, NATO wishes to project unity. However, Türkiye's response to the applications of Sweden and Finland in May 2022 to join the Alliance put NATO in a difficult position. Specifically, it indicated that it would not approve the applications if Sweden did not agree to extradite certain Turkish nationals who had been accused of terrorism by Türkiye. The country thus engaged in linkage: the practice of connecting certain issues that at first sight have nothing to do with each other in order to obtain a number of concessions. Türkiye blocked the talks on the applications on the grounds of 'concerns whether the accession of Finland and Sweden would actually strengthen security'.⁴⁷ At the end of June 2022, Türkiye, Finland and Sweden finally came to an agreement, which referred to 'organisations affiliated with the PKK'. Türkiye thus obtained explicit recognition of its own threat assessment. The agreement enabled the accession process to continue, but there is still a long way to go (for more on this process, see the chapter on the Netherlands' strategic interests and dilemmas). The importance of keeping Türkiye on board is apparent from NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg's reaction to the country's position, which was sympathetic to Türkiye's concerns regarding insecurity in the region.⁴⁸

NATO is also concerned about tensions between Türkiye, Greece and Cyprus in the Aegean Sea. The Alliance has a dispute resolution system for the most serious disagreements, but in the event of skirmishes it lacks the resources and power to separate the parties. In recent years, moreover, several NATO countries have launched or increased bilateral military cooperation with Greece. Examples include the sale of Rafale combat aircraft by France to Greece, the conclusion of a bilateral Franco-Greek military assistance pact and the development by the United States of a military base in Alexandroupolis on the Aegean Sea. Such developments arouse suspicion in Türkiye, which then invests more in its own military capabilities. The fact that Türkiye is developing its own military-industrial complex presents NATO with a dilemma: Türkiye must be able to defend itself against Russia, but further militarisation is risky for Greece and Cyprus and increases Türkiye's capacity to potentially engage in territorial intimidation.

Minimising other threats

Due in part to the war in Ukraine, NATO's focus is no longer directed primarily towards the terrorist threat emanating from the Middle East. Although the nature of this threat has changed to a certain extent, it has still not abated in those regions that the West is withdrawing from. In addition, there is a constant threat of conflict in the Middle East and Afghanistan. New migration flows have now emerged as a result of conflicts and climate-related crises. In parts of South Asia – on the border between Iran and Türkiye where a wall is being built – a few million refugees are also said to be waiting to cross the border. Iran itself is also re-emerging a potential threat. The drones that are being

used against Ukrainian cities appear to be Iranian-made. To cut a long story short, Iran can once again act as a spoiler that thwarts the West on various fronts.



Türkiye plays an ambivalent role in neighbouring regions. On the one hand, it acts as an important buffer and keeper of the peace on the Alliance's southeastern flank, which to some extent fills the vacuum caused by the withdrawal of NATO Allies from the region's still weak or even failing states. However, it continues to carefully weigh the participation of the Turkish armed forces in NATO missions. In fact, the Alliance cannot rule out that Türkiye also seeks to promote its own existential interests through such missions, for example vis-à-vis Kurdish groups in the region that it suspects of having ties to the PKK. Because of its activist and interventionist security policy, Türkiye has quite a few enemies in the region and has occasionally even contributed to fragility. In the event of an attack or counterattack by one of these states, NATO would be in a difficult position because of article 5 of the NATO Treaty.

Keeping Türkiye under NATO's security umbrella

As a result of its acquisition of Russia's S-400 missile system, Türkiye's systems can no longer be part of NATO's integrated missile and air defence system or other forms of allied military cooperation. This is the very backbone of the Alliance: weapon systems that are interconnected to jointly counter threats. At the Madrid Summit in June 2022, NATO set a new baseline for its deterrence and defence posture, in line with its 360-degree approach, across the land, air, maritime, cyber and space domains.⁴⁹ However, Türkiye is no longer participating in a host of adaptations that the rest of the Allies are jointly implementing. It thus risks becoming increasingly isolated, while war continues to rage in Ukraine.

► 5.2 United States

Relations between Türkiye and the United States date back to 1831, with an interruption between 1917 and 1927. The quality of the relationship with the United States is indicative of Türkiye's position within NATO. In the 1990s, the United States granted it the status of a 'frontline state', tasked with playing a stabilising role in the region's many conflict zones. This led to various other strategic assignments during the Gulf War against Saddam Hussein, in the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo and in a supporting role in the Middle East peace process. Bilateral trade relations have also intensified. Total trade between the United States and Türkiye has risen from €7.4 billion in 2009 to €17.3 billion in 2020,⁵⁰ although the overall volume of trade remains modest compared to the country's trade volume with its European trading partners.⁵¹ Türkiye has a trade deficit with the United States and is the seventh largest consumer of US liquefied natural gas.

The United States' main strategic interests vis-à-vis Türkiye include preserving their counterterrorism partnership, ensuring that Türkiye remains loyal to NATO and jointly winning the battle against an autocratic and revisionist Russia (and China).

Partners in counterterrorism

Until 2009, the United States was enthusiastic about President Erdoğan's leadership, and President Obama once described the relationship between the United States and Türkiye as a 'model partnership' based on shared values. In the post-9/11 period, the United States intervened in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. Washington regarded Türkiye as a security actor and as a potential replacement as it withdrew its troops from the Middle East, but friction between the countries gradually increased. The inclusion of the Syrian Kurds in the Western coalition against IS proved to be the ultimate stumbling block in their relations. Türkiye's intentions in the field of counterterrorism have sometimes been called into doubt. This is linked to the existence of different threat perceptions. The United States came to regard IS and al Qa'ida as the greatest threats, while for Türkiye it was the Kurdish groups that it accused of having links to the PKK. When the United States started working

with the Kurds in Syria (both the PYD and the YPG), Türkiye invaded Syria to prevent the power vacuum on its southern border from being filled by a Kurdish entity. Following attacks by IS, however, Türkiye is committed to apprehending its fighters.



At present, counterterrorism cooperation remains a complex issue in the Middle East. The United States and Türkiye are nevertheless seeking rapprochement in Africa, where the United States is examining whether Türkiye could promote certain security interests, such as counterterrorism, at local level, especially in the Sahel. This would need to be a bilateral arrangement, as such rapprochement is more challenging for NATO given that certain Allies with security interests in the African region, such as France, are sceptical about granting Türkiye a greater role there.

Ensuring that Türkiye remains a loyal ally

The United States' relationship with its ally Türkiye has entered troubled waters, making cooperation within NATO more difficult. This is due to a number of political and military factors. The aforementioned search for Gülenists leads to the United States, where Fethullah Gülen is said to have resided since 1999. Following the election of President Trump in 2016, Türkiye hoped that he would be extradited, but this did not happen.⁵² Türkiye's acquisition of Russia's S-400 missile system increased tensions between the two countries. There were rumours that the United States was thinking about relocating materiel from its Incirlik airbase elsewhere. Since then, Congress has brought Türkiye under the scope of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), which has already given rise to various restrictive measures. The delivery of F-35 and upgraded F-16 combat aircraft has been suspended. Even if Türkiye were to satisfy all the necessary conditions again, it would be difficult for the United States to resume deliveries⁵³ – starting with the F-16s – because of the powerful anti-Turkish (i.e. pro-Greek) lobby in Congress.⁵⁴ This lobby will continue to block the delivery of advanced combat aircraft to Türkiye as long as tensions persist in the Aegean Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean. In Washington, resentment is growing over Türkiye's unpredictability as an ally. Despite these challenging circumstances, the countries have good diplomatic relations, both bilaterally and multilaterally, and President Biden regularly makes visible efforts to ensure Türkiye's continued involvement in NATO.



Winning the battle against an autocratic Russia (and China)

Even before the war in Ukraine, the United States was working to reinforce the southern flank of NATO's European territory. To this end, it has established a military base in the northern Greek port of Alexandroupolis, which is located on the Aegean Sea. Türkiye views these developments with suspicion.

The Turkish authorities hoped that relations with the United States would improve during the Trump administration, in part because President Trump placed less emphasis on values such as human rights, the rule of law and democracy. Türkiye's current leadership, which is authoritarian in nature but nevertheless enjoys democratic legitimacy, does not easily fit into the Biden administration's current 'democracy versus autocracy' narrative and the perceived need to tackle autocratic states (such as Russia and China).

► 5.3 Russia

Relations between Russia and Türkiye date back to 1699. Türkiye has a large trade deficit with Russia too. Trade volume between Türkiye and Russia amounted to €23.6 billion in 2019, with exports to Russia accounting for just €3.46 billion and imports from Russia for €20.1 billion.⁵⁵ According to the *Financial Times*, however, Turkish exports to Russia have soared since the start of the war in Ukraine. By mid-2022, the value of Turkish exports had more than doubled compared to August 2021.⁵⁶ Russia

also has a lot of influence on Türkiye's foreign and security policy, both as an adversary and as a partner. Russia's main strategic interests vis-à-vis Türkiye include the creation of dependencies, global power projection and territorial intimidation and, ultimately, NATO's destabilisation.



Destabilising NATO

The war in Ukraine appears to demonstrate that Russia's ultimate aim is to destabilise NATO. Russia regards Türkiye as a weak link within the Alliance. Türkiye is vulnerable from an economic and security perspective owing to a number of significant dependencies that cannot be tackled quickly or easily. Russia knows that Türkiye is economically weak and cannot afford to turn away Russian tourists or wealthy investors. Capital flight from Russia is welcomed in an ailing Turkish economy, including by the incumbent administration in Ankara with next year's elections approaching. The Kremlin is presumably aware of this.

Türkiye's dependencies

Within a short period of time, Russia has succeeded in creating a number of dependencies on the part of Türkiye.⁵⁷ Although Türkiye sees Russia as a threat, and despite the fact that they have fought many wars over the centuries, relations between the two countries improved following the 2016 coup attempt. Russian President Putin openly supported Turkish President Erdoğan, while the West remained silent for too long in Ankara's view.⁵⁸ Russia filled this vacuum and satisfied Türkiye's long-held desire to not be overly dependent on the West for its security. After all, the United States had previously refused to provide the country with components of the Patriot missile system, which it had wanted to assemble independently. Türkiye purchased Russia's S-400 missile system instead.

In addition, Russia anticipated that the West would not assist Türkiye in its fight against the Assad regime in northeastern Syria. Russia knew that the West would not intervene in Syria. As a result, it was able to force Türkiye to accept unfavourable ceasefire terms. Thanks to Russia's presence, the Assad regime is still in control. Millions of Syrians who want to flee to Türkiye or the West are still trapped in the Idlib region. By threatening to trigger an exodus of refugees from Idlib, Putin can blackmail Erdoğan in the run-up to the 2023 elections.⁵⁹

Türkiye is economically dependent on Russian imports. In fact, Russia tops the list of countries from which Türkiye gets its imports.⁶⁰ This applies not only to gas, oil, grain and the trade in goods but also to the tourism industry, which is dependent on Russians attracted to the country's combination of climate and nature, as well as its proximity to Russia. Russia has also been granted a concession to build a nuclear power plant at Akkuyu in Türkiye's Mersin Province. When the plant has been completed, a subsidiary of Rosatom will be allowed to operate it.⁶¹ In Western eyes, what makes Türkiye's stance seem ambivalent is that it is a NATO Ally and a candidate for EU membership that cooperates and trades with Russia and even facilitates Russian investment in Turkish real estate and other money flows. This causes tension between Türkiye and the West.

Projecting global power and territorial intimidation

Russia has exploited the geopolitical leeway left by the United States and European actors – not just in the region around Türkiye but also in the Caucasus, Central Asia, Syria, Libya and parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Under the banner of the fight against terrorism, Russian groups such as the Wagner Group are violently intervening in the Sahel, often at the behest of African leaders. While Türkiye has a military presence in many of these arenas, the West sometimes finds itself in difficult circumstances there, witness the withdrawal of French troops from Mali from March 2022 onwards. Russian territorial intimidation and expansionism may increase globally, further affecting the balance of power in surrounding regions, particularly around the Black Sea. Russia is already putting pressure on Türkiye regarding its task to regulate shipping in the Bosphorus in accordance with the 1936 Montreux Convention.

In short, relations between Türkiye and Russia are compartmentalised and require a high level of vigilance on the West's part. On the one hand, Türkiye is a good ally that honours its commitments regarding Russia and enables Ukraine to repel Russia by supplying it with advanced Turkish drones, while simultaneously offering resistance to Russia in the Caucasus and Libya. On the other hand, Türkiye is playing both sides by accommodating Russia and partially ignoring EU sanctions against it. This ambivalent relationship with Moscow makes Türkiye an unpredictable ally.

► 5.4 China

In his book *The Future is Asian*, Parag Khanna suggests that Eurasian countries such as Türkiye are increasingly turning towards the East and adopting 'distinctly Asian ideas about world order' founded upon geopolitical stability, economic growth and technocratic pragmatism.⁶² China and Türkiye have had official relations since 1971, but their relationship is not very dynamic. Türkiye currently has a large trade deficit with China. Trade volume between the two countries amounted to €18.94 billion in 2019, with exports to China accounting for just €2.32 billion and imports from China totalling €16.98 billion.⁶³

China's three main interests vis-à-vis Türkiye include securing strategic positions, creating dependencies and finding partners to create an alternative global order.

Securing strategic positions

Through its Belt and Road Initiative, China has secured a strong position in the region, for example in Greece and in the Balkans. What makes Türkiye particularly interesting for China is its geographical location. In addition to being a potential nexus for interregional commercial and energy routes, the country has a long coastline. This is attractive to China, which is especially interested in maritime locations. Nevertheless, the relationship between the two countries is not running smoothly. China has made several infrastructure investments in Türkiye, for example in the port of Istanbul, that have not become profitable. Like many other new entrants to the Turkish market, China has run up against the country's unattractive investment climate, which is not transparent. China is used to operating in difficult environments, but it needs a point of contact within the government to obtain the necessary permits and support in the event of problems. Türkiye's state bureaucracy seems to lack the necessary authority, and seeking legal redress through the courts on the basis of contracts is proving increasingly difficult.

Creating dependencies

Although Türkiye regards itself as an export economy with a focus on the industrial processing of raw materials, it is reliant on imported machinery and technology. The country hardly benefits at all from the transfer of Chinese technology, which is one of the AKP government's main goals. In contrast, China has taken several initiatives that may have created certain dependencies on the part of the Turkish government. In 2019, for example, it granted unconditional loans under the budget heading 'other funds'. These funds were deposited in a national sovereign fund administered by the office of the Turkish president.⁶⁴ No further information is available on the status of these funds. This appears to be a common way for the Chinese government to gain influence with governments of countries that are potentially of interest to China in the context of its plans. However, it is unclear at this stage exactly what kind of dependency such loans create.

Seeking partners to create an alternative global order

Despite the authoritarian style of government shared by leaders Xi Jinping and Erdoğan, China does not regard Türkiye as an important partner.⁶⁵ On the Eurasian continent, Türkiye is rather seen as a rival due to its interest in the Uighurs, who are ethnically and linguistically related to the Turks. Moreover, Türkiye is once again penetrating deeper into what China regards as its own backyard by

means of the recently established Organization of Turkic States. China does not trust Türkiye but is interested in increasing its influence in the Turkish economy, as evidenced by a currency swap agreement⁶⁶ and the above-mentioned unconditional loans recently provided by China.⁶⁷ This could potentially lead to investment, provided that Türkiye improves its investment climate. At the same time, the fact that Türkiye is not yet firmly tied to the Belt and Road initiative and is not yet regarded as a partner by Beijing presents the United States and the West with an opportunity to keep Türkiye in their camp.

► 5.5 European Union

The EU has had relations with Türkiye since 1959. An association agreement, also known as the Ankara Agreement, was signed in 1963. In 1987, Türkiye applied for membership of the European Community. A customs union has existed between Türkiye and the EU since 1995, resulting in a substantial increase in trade. The EU is Türkiye's largest trading partner, and Türkiye is the EU's sixth largest trading partner (accounting for 3.6% of EU exports and 3.7% of EU imports).⁶⁸ Germany is the largest exporter of goods to and the largest importer of goods from Türkiye. Türkiye has been an EU candidate country since 1999.

The EU's main strategic interests vis-à-vis Türkiye include ensuring the country remains engaged despite delays in the accession negotiations, maintaining the status quo and the internal consensus on Türkiye and continuing to cooperate with Türkiye on migration.

Ensuring Türkiye's continued engagement despite delays in the accession negotiations

It is not easy for the European Commission to maintain the engagement of a country that has wanted to join the EU for 60 years and has been passed over in several enlargement rounds. The accession negotiations came to a standstill – but were not suspended – in 2018. In order to maintain a dialogue, the EU subsequently re-embarked on the existing 'positive agenda' to engage with Türkiye in a phased, proportionate and reversible manner. This agenda provides scope for closer economic cooperation and high-level dialogue on regional issues, public health, climate change, counterterrorism and other issues. This is conditional on several factors, such as improving the human rights situation and restoring the rule of law.

There are concerns within the EU regarding Türkiye's divergence from respect for human rights and the rule of law. The EU could exert pressure in this regard, as it finds itself in a strong negotiating position on trade. This is because Türkiye is in the middle of an economic crisis and has to contend with several structural trade deficits. There are various concessions that could be put on the table. Trade and aid are the EU's main sources of leverage as regards Türkiye. Opportunities could be offered in such areas as innovation, incorporation of the Green Deal and policy opt-ins, including the approval of EU legislation on electricity, telecommunications and education.

Maintaining the status quo and internal consensus on Türkiye

At the moment, however, Brussels is adopting a wait-and-see attitude. In 2023, elections are scheduled to take place not only in Türkiye but also in EU member states Greece and Cyprus. Given the tensions between these countries, the EU is currently striving to maintain the consensus in support of the status quo on Türkiye: a continuation of ties with Türkiye without taking steps towards membership or measures aimed at terminating the benefits of candidate status. As in the case of NATO, all efforts within the EU are aimed at preserving internal unity and stability. The last thing it needs is conflict with Türkiye. Within the EU, the political landscape regarding the country is polarised.

Ensuring Türkiye's continued involvement in security-related matters

The EU used to invite Türkiye to participate in informal consultations on foreign and security

policy. From 2002, it was regularly invited to participate in the informal Gymnich meetings of EU foreign ministers. The country also co-signed political statements issued by the EU. After accession negotiations came to a standstill in 2018, Türkiye was barely involved in EU foreign policy. For example, there was no more high-level dialogue on cooperation in the field of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Türkiye is keen to resume this process. In fact, it would like to have summit meetings with the EU at least twice a year.

An EU summit took place in 2022, but not exclusively with Türkiye. The European Political Community (EPC), which held its first meeting in Brussels on 6 October 2022, also invited non-candidate countries, such as Azerbaijan and Armenia. The European Council's aim was 'to offer a platform for political coordination for European countries across the continent' and 'to foster political dialogue and cooperation to address issues of common interest so as to strengthen the security, stability and prosperity of the European continent'.⁶⁹

It is unsure whether Türkiye now qualifies for greater rapprochement in the field of foreign policy. The reality is that the country's foreign and security policy – and especially its implementation of such policy – is not always in line with EU policy. Türkiye's CFSP alignment rate is just 7%, according to a 2022 report.⁷⁰ While that might improve in light of Türkiye's assistance to Ukraine and its mediating role in the crisis, the country's failure to comply with the sanctions against Russia detracts from any such improvement.

When it comes to security policy, the situation is even more complicated. In the area of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), cooperation with Türkiye has proved impossible. The core of the problem is Ankara's policy of non-recognition in respect of the Republic of Cyprus. Decisions concerning the participation of third countries in Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and other forms of CSDP cooperation require unanimity in the Council. Such unanimity exists with regard to the participation of Canada, Norway and the United States in PESCO's Military Mobility project, but not when it comes to the participation of Türkiye. The country's application to participate in the project has been kept on ice for a long time. And to date there has been no mention of Türkiye having been invited to participate in the EU Security and Defence Partnership Forum, a yet to be established mechanism referred to in the EU's Strategic Compass for Security and Defence.

The Cyprus question also continues to have a negative impact on EU-NATO relations. In 2020, when the EU and various member states, such as Germany, were in talks with Turkish and Cypriot parties, there was still momentum to find a solution. In the end, however, the meeting in Crans-Montana did not yield significant results. For now, the EU and NATO cannot formally exchange documents. Cooperation between the two organisations takes place mainly through and between staff members who reach out to each other and via 'informal' meetings attended by member states from both organisations.

Continuing to cooperate on migration and working on alternatives

A key EU interest is to continue cooperating with Türkiye on migration on the basis of, or as a follow-up to, the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, also known as the 'migration deal'. According to the Council of the European Union, the statement sets out the following two principles:

- 'all new irregular migrants arriving on the Greek islands will be returned to Turkey if they do not apply for asylum or if their claim is rejected'
- 'for every Syrian returned to Turkey from the Greek islands, another Syrian will be resettled in the EU'⁷¹

In return, Turkey will receive additional funding from the EU, and agreements have been reached regarding the lifting of visa requirements for Turkish citizens travelling to the EU.

Although the deal attracted criticism from several quarters, it has so far been extended multiple times. The number of migrants or refugees who travel on from Türkiye to the EU fell sharply after

the deal was concluded and has not returned to 2016 levels. The criticism focuses mainly on how the EU-Turkey Statement is being implemented by both sides, due to human rights violations.⁷² In some cases, asylum seekers spend years living in appalling conditions in camps on the Greek islands. On the other hand, Syrian refugees are not always safe in Türkiye, as apparent from the violence in Istanbul in 2021, which met with little intervention from the Turkish authorities. The Dutch government is also struggling with this problem. The next chapter discusses some of the risks involved, including the potential instrumentalisation of migration by Türkiye, risks surrounding the current deal on which migration cooperation is based and why alternatives to current forms of cooperation should be actively sought.



Strategic interests and dilemmas for the Netherlands

Türkiye's current geopolitical role and the policies to which it gives rise create various strategic advantages and vulnerabilities that can affect Dutch interests. This chapter begins by examining the interests that are at stake in the Netherlands' bilateral relationship with Türkiye, such as trade, the Turkish community in the Netherlands and the impact of Türkiye's political and human rights situation on the Netherlands. Next, it explores the Netherlands' interests and concerns from an EU perspective, with migration cooperation being the most complex issue. Finally, the discussion turns to the Netherlands' interests in the context of NATO and the strategic issues that arise there in relation to Türkiye.

► 6.1 Bilateral relations between and shared interests of Türkiye and the Netherlands

Relations between the Netherlands and Türkiye, and before that the Ottoman Empire, go back more than four hundred years, to 1612. Its ties with Western countries focused mainly on trade, but security concerns were what brought Türkiye and the Netherlands together in the NATO Alliance after the Second World War. The two countries have established a special platform for their bilateral relations: the Wittenburg conferences. These Dutch-Turkish meetings at ministerial and civil service level, which are meant to improve mutual cooperation, are held alternately in the Netherlands and Türkiye. The discussions focus on social, economic, cultural and security issues. The first Wittenburg conference was held at Kasteel de Wittenburg (Wittenburg Castle) in Wassenaar in 2008. At the 2019 edition of the conference, after they had once again rekindled their relations, the countries voiced a desire to start meeting on an annual basis, but this ultimately did not happen due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, the countries renewed their ties at ministerial and civil service level at a meeting in Ankara in June 2022, where they discussed topics such as the Turkish community in the Netherlands, counterterrorism, EU-Türkiye relations, climate change and energy.

Dutch-Turkish trade and investment

Alongside Germany, the Netherlands has become an important trade and investment partner for Türkiye. Trade volume between the Netherlands and Türkiye amounted to €8.06 billion in 2019, with Turkish exports to the Netherlands accounting for €5.18 billion and Turkish imports from the Netherlands for €2.88 billion.⁷³ In nominal terms, the Netherlands is the country's most important investor, but in some cases this relates to companies that for tax reasons are merely registered in the Netherlands but not located there. Companies in which Dutch citizens of Turkish origin are involved, either as founders or as employees, form the backbone of trade between the two countries.⁷⁴ Trade with, and in particular exports to, the Netherlands is very important for Türkiye as a means to counteract the economic downturn and mitigate the effects of rampant inflation. The weakness of the Turkish lira makes it cheaper to invest in Türkiye, but at the same time the country is barely able to provide a level playing field for entrepreneurs. In the past, Dutch investors have found that Türkiye's judiciary is not independent. For those who do not have a local network, investing in Türkiye can thus be a precarious undertaking.

Integration of Dutch citizens of Turkish origin and the Turkish diaspora

The Netherlands has a relatively large and diverse Turkish community that numbers over 439,000 people.⁷⁵ This amounts to roughly 2.5% of the entire Dutch population.⁷⁶ Most people with a migration background in the Netherlands are of Turkish origin. Trade relations between the Netherlands and Türkiye have become closer thanks to the efforts of Dutch citizens of Turkish origin, more than half of whom are Dutch born.

Europeans of Turkish ⁷⁷ origin	Netherlands ⁷⁸	Germany ⁷⁹	France ⁸⁰	Austria ⁸¹	Belgium ⁸²
Number	439,206 ⁸³	2.7 million ⁸⁴	600,000-800,000 (estimate)	447,200 (2021)	200,000 (estimate)
% of entire population	2.5%	3.2%	0.9-1%	5%	1.8%

Figure 7 – Overview of number of Europeans of Turkish origin in the Netherlands, Germany, France, Austria and Belgium

The Turkish community in the Netherlands is characterised by great diversity in a wide range of areas: ethnic origin, socioeconomic position, age, cultural orientation, political affiliation and religious observance. About 86% of its members identify as Muslim. The vast majority of Dutch Muslims of Turkish origin belong to the Sunni branch of Islam. Some are adherents of Alevism, an undogmatic branch of Islam with a religious-humanist inclination. Reports of their number vary, but according to the *Kennisplatform Inclusief Samenleven* [Knowledge Platform on Inclusive Coexistence] (KIS) they potentially account for a quarter of all Dutch citizens of Turkish origin. A relatively large group consists of Turkish Kurds who came to the Netherlands from the 1960s onwards as labour migrants and later also as refugees of the conflict between Kurdish fighters and the Turkish armed forces.⁸⁵

There are many professional and social networks between the Netherlands and Türkiye. The Turkish community in the Netherlands also has a strong presence in the Dutch political landscape. In addition, there are many direct partnerships at the level of local politics, for example between Turkish and Dutch municipalities.

Security cooperation

For reasons of national security, the Dutch government has instigated a policy of prosecuting jihadist travellers who join IS and this objective was reiterated in its coalition agreement. Türkiye plays a crucial role in this area. In recent years, the government has intensified its cooperation with Türkiye on counterterrorism and crime prevention. The National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTV) coordinates cooperation with Türkiye in consultation with other EU member states. The Netherlands is also in contact with Kurdish groups in Syria and Iraq. According to Türkiye, these groups have ties to the PKK. This continues to be a sensitive issue for Türkiye, which frequently raises the matter in its bilateral dialogue with the Netherlands. In such cases, the parties normally conclude that the Netherlands and Türkiye do not share the same priorities because their threat assessments differ. The same applies to several other issues that are discussed below.

Issues in the Netherlands relating to Turkish politics and human rights

The recent wave of immigration from Türkiye to the Netherlands presents the Dutch government with several dilemmas. Lately, Turkish refugees have been in the top 3 of nationalities seeking asylum in the Netherlands.⁸⁶ Other European countries are also facing an influx of Turkish asylum seekers. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs country report on Türkiye of 2022⁸⁷ discusses the various reasons for

their political persecution. For instance, it notes that the Turkish authorities are going after alleged Gülenists in Türkiye and abroad and that they believe that the Gülen movement only survives as an organised community outside Türkiye and also that Gülenists in the diaspora are a constant source of public criticism of the current Turkish government. In the eyes of the Turkish authorities, they therefore constitute a threat.⁸⁸ This leads to fear both inside and outside Türkiye and to considerable pressure on European governments to extradite individuals to Türkiye, as in a demand recently addressed to Sweden by the Turkish authorities. The Netherlands also faces such pressure.

The Dutch government devotes constant attention to undesirable foreign interference⁸⁹ by Türkiye. In 2021, the NCTV concluded in its (revised) report that the Turkish government is involved in undesirable interference in the Netherlands. This generally takes the form of fierce anti-Western rhetoric by the Turkish government, which can have a negative impact in the Netherlands. The Turkish government and organisations affiliated with it systematically report on the disadvantaged position of and discrimination against Muslims in Europe. These messages also reach many Dutch citizens of Turkish origin through the traditional and digital Turkish-language media.

The debate in the Netherlands on the role of religion among Dutch citizens of Turkish origin has become polarised. There is consensus among academics, Turkish religious institutions in the Netherlands and experts that political-religious radicalisation is a marginal phenomenon among Dutch citizens of Turkish origin.⁹⁰ However, because radical agitators seek to leverage sentiment surrounding Islamophobia and discrimination, they also benefit from the occasionally fierce anti-Western narrative of President Erdoğan and other Turkish politicians.⁹¹ Negative feelings inspired by discrimination and Islamophobia – and the prevailing rhetoric on these issues – appear to be particularly strong among young people of Turkish origin, possibly more so than among previous generations. The run-up to the upcoming elections may witness renewed attempts at interference, potentially undermining social cohesion in the Netherlands.



► 6.2 Strategic dilemmas for the Netherlands

When faced with an issue relating to Türkiye, the Netherlands usually joins forces with other EU member states and like-minded countries that are represented in Ankara. As Türkiye's largest trading partner, the EU can back up its words with actions, but in practice this rarely has the desired effect in terms of improving the human rights situation. Much of the current political persecution stems from a long-standing pattern in Türkiye, namely the leadership's vigilance against the possibility of a coup, as discussed in the chapter on historical constants in Türkiye's geopolitical role. Another factor is the long-standing mistrust of the West and the EU. To a sober observer, the success of the conspiracy theories that are used as an excuse to continue persecuting political opponents and not give in to European pressure is hard to comprehend. In short, as the AIV previously noted in its advisory report *Human Rights: A Core Interest in a Constellation of Geopolitical Forces*, 'the human rights narrative of autocratic states, or the lack thereof, differs so substantially from that of the Netherlands that it will often be difficult to reach agreement or achieve results on the basis of a rational dialogue.'⁹² It is thus important to be realistic about the EU's ability to influence these motives.

Moreover, the EU is currently in an awkward position when it comes to Türkiye. Tensions between Greece, Cyprus and Türkiye are running higher than ever.⁹³ This stems from various factors, including the fact that all three countries plan to hold elections in 2023. Since polemic about the conflict plays well with their more nationalistic supporters, politicians in Greece, Cyprus and Türkiye benefit from inflaming tensions.

This makes it difficult for the EU to act towards Türkiye in a geopolitically strategic manner. Inside the EU, the political landscape regarding Türkiye is polarised. The position of Greece, which

previously ensured that Cyprus was able to join the EU even though the conflict over its status remained unresolved, is still a thorn in Türkiye's side. As long as it refuses to recognise the Republic of Cyprus, there is little scope for progress or development in Türkiye's relationship with the EU. A – partly unnoticed – dynamic in the EU could ultimately even lead to the further estrangement of Türkiye. That would not be in the Netherlands' interests, as there are other issues at stake within an EU context, such as migration cooperation with transit countries, including Türkiye, which hosts a large number of refugees in the region.

Issues relating to migration cooperation with Türkiye

The Dutch and German governments played an important informal role in the adoption of the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, which includes agreements on Syrian and other refugees. The coalition agreement of 2022 articulates the government's ambition to increase cooperation with third countries at EU level: 'In the area of EU migration policy, we will press for migration partnerships with third countries that satisfy the material preconditions of the Refugee Convention to manage migration flows and ensure return. In exchange for undertakings concerning, for example, trade, aid, support for reception, and temporary legal, circular labour migration, we will make agreements with countries of origin on taking back failed asylum seekers and combating irregular migration.' The EU-Turkey Statement appears to have served as a model here, despite its many complexities, especially regarding its implementation.

First, public support for hosting Syrian refugees in Türkiye is rapidly eroding, accelerated by the economic downturn. The presence of these refugees in Türkiye is a sensitive issue. They are treated as scapegoats for the country's dire economic situation and figure prominently in the election campaigns of the opposition, which wants to send the approximately 3,5 million Syrians residing in Türkiye back to Syria, threatening the EU's migration deal with President Erdoğan. There is a threat of a new influx of refugees from Syria, or at least this is a prospect that can be leveraged by the Assad regime in order to put pressure on Türkiye, with President Putin's support. That is the last thing the Turkish government wants in the run-up to the parliamentary and presidential elections. In order to avert this scenario, it is possible that Türkiye will resort to the forced return of refugees to Syria in the coming months, even though the conditions for return are not yet in place according to the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Second, Türkiye can transfer refugees and migrants across its western border to Greece, as well as to the island of Cyprus, as a means of exerting political pressure. This instrumentalisation of migration already occurred in early 2020, when the Turkish government stated that the country would no longer stop refugees and migrants from crossing the border into the EU, and even brought groups to the border. This could happen again if Türkiye wants to force the EU's hand. The EU is not adhering to the implementation of its own agreements; EU member states have many objections. For example, the Dutch government recently announced that it would no longer be able to take in refugees from Türkiye. This concerns 1,000 asylum seekers per year. Another agreement relates to visa liberalisation with Türkiye,⁹⁴ which has a population of over 84 million. A large number of member states have reservations on this point. There is a risk that Türkiye will view their failure to resettle refugees and make progress on visa liberalisation as non-compliance with existing agreements. Third, there is a risk that Türkiye will stop hosting refugees if too little funding is made available for the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey for the period from 2023 onwards.

The EU must therefore look for alternatives to this kind of migration cooperation. The member states can play a key role here. In 2020, in its advisory report *European Asylum Policy: Two Major Accords to Break the Impasse*, the AIV provided the government with several pertinent suggestions.⁹⁵ The coalition agreement builds on this by articulating the ambition to work 'for a fundamental revision of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), as proposed by the European Commission and set out in the government assessment. However, if this revision does not progress quickly enough, we will continue to work on it with a leading group of like-minded countries.' The EU should also invest more in tackling the root causes of irregular migration and conflict in the region.

The need to expand NATO

For the Netherlands, a strong NATO has long been the cornerstone of our collective defence. At the same time, European countries must take more responsibility for their own security. In 2022, the Netherlands increased its spending to strengthen the armed forces, as envisaged in the coalition agreement. According to the most recent Defence White Paper, the Netherlands will accordingly meet NATO's target of 2% of GDP in 2024 and 2025.⁹⁶

Expanding NATO to include Finland and Sweden is of great importance to the Netherlands. This is not just because both countries have well-trained armies that have conducted joint exercises with the Netherlands many times; due to their geographical location the Baltic Sea and the Arctic region will also be much better protected. The fact that Türkiye blocked the start of the expansion talks in the middle of 2022 was contrary to the Netherlands' interests. For its part, the Dutch government has initiated an accelerated approval procedure.⁹⁷ A similar procedure is also under way in Türkiye. Accession is not a done deal: Finland and Sweden can only complete the process after all Allies have ratified their accession.

Agreement on shared interests, disagreement on certain values and principles

The political call from Dutch politics and society to use leverage to exert pressure on Türkiye is loud and constant. The Dutch government is always quick to respond to Türkiye's position and rightly adopts a principled stance. In the run-up to the 2023 elections, Turkish politics is expected to give rise to political polarisation and fierce rhetoric. This could have direct consequences for social cohesion with and between different groups of Dutch citizens of Turkish origin, as in the aftermath of the diplomatic incident between the Netherlands in Türkiye in 2017.⁹⁸

Efforts to maintain good relations with Türkiye are in the Netherlands' interest. Despite Türkiye's estrangement within NATO and vis-à-vis the EU, the Netherlands has managed to continue cooperating with the country. The Netherlands regularly expresses its dissatisfaction regarding the deterioration of the human rights situation, the erosion of the rule of law and the restriction of freedoms in Türkiye. At the same time, the government appears to be realistic about the potential maximum impact of its leverage.⁹⁹ In order to be able to assess the effectiveness of specific means of exerting pressure and determine where there may be room for improvement, it is thus important to have a good understanding of the background of Türkiye's human rights violations.

In the short term

The relationship between the Netherlands and Türkiye is complex and involves major interests. In the next chapter, the AIV will discuss possible future developments and their impact on Dutch interests. It will also present a range of policy options. In the short term, however, all these scenarios have one option in common, namely that the Netherlands could work more closely with like-minded countries, both for the promotion of bilateral interests and in an EU or NATO context. Germany is the most suitable candidate in this regard.

The Netherlands and Germany both have large Turkish communities that have a political voice but are also regarded as a useful support base by Ankara. Both countries have excellent economic relations with Türkiye: Germany as the largest trading partner and the Netherlands as the largest investor. Moreover, the two countries previously worked together in the negotiations on the EU-Turkey Statement. At the same time, they can jointly focus on such issues as climate change, energy and migration.

In the EU, in particular, the Netherlands needs coalitions of member states that have shared interests vis-à-vis Türkiye. Closer cooperation therefore seems appropriate at this time. The Wittenburg

conference format could be expanded at short notice to include Germany, with a view to consulting with Türkiye on matters of common interest. As progress is made, it could be converted into a more permanent tripartite consultation mechanism. In preparation, more can be invested in available knowledge and diplomatic and social networks. The Netherlands is already coordinating this with other like-minded EU member states in Brussels. Such knowledge and networks will make it possible to better anticipate Türkiye's strategic thinking.

Due the unpredictable nature of Türkiye's policy, it is important to be prepared for different situations and developments and to have contingency plans in place. It is also important to build an early warning system into Dutch policy in order to indicate when the Netherlands' interests are at stake and identify new vulnerabilities. The next chapter on future scenarios and policy options provides a first step in this direction.





Future scenarios and policy options

The present advisory report cannot predict how politics in Türkiye and the geopolitical forces surrounding the country will develop, but scenarios can help paint a credible picture by describing potential future directions. The four scenarios presented in this report are based on the two greatest uncertainties regarding Türkiye's future. As reflected in the graph below, they emerge from the contrast between autocratisation and democratisation (represented by the y-axis) and the contrast between geopolitical stability and fragmentation (represented by the x-axis). The reasoning behind this is as follows. Autocratisation (characterised in this case by the monopolisation of decision-making and a lack of democratic control) has a major influence on policy, but the future level of autocratisation in Türkiye is highly uncertain due to the upcoming elections. The outcome of these elections will largely determine the future direction of the Turkish system: further autocratisation or the restoration of democracy and the rule of law.

The level of geopolitical tension and fragmentation is also very important for the future of Türkiye and the region. The question whether the country as a geopolitical actor will steer a more independent, competitive course on the geopolitical stage will have a major impact on the kind of tensions that could potentially arise. The matrix below provides a rough sketch of the four situations that we can envisage for the future. It is important to note that these scenarios are not intended as forecasts of future developments. Instead, they are meant to help policymakers be better prepared – and potentially have contingency plans in place – for unexpected situations.

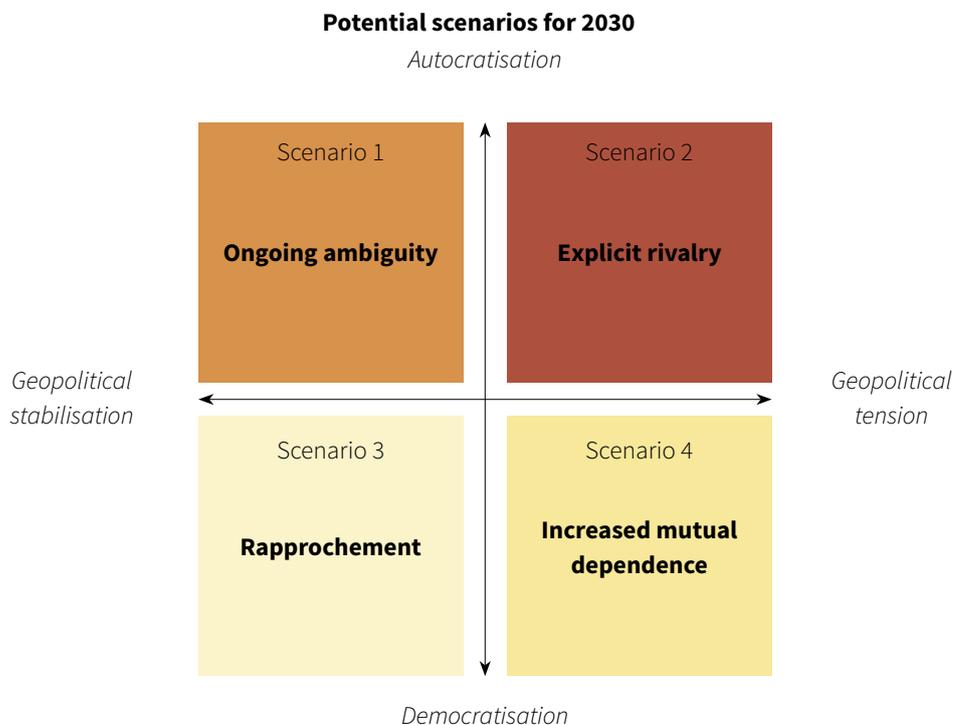


Figure 8 – Four potential scenarios for 2030: relations with Türkiye and implications for Dutch interests

► 7.1 Scenario 1: Ongoing ambiguity

In this scenario, the ruling party wins the elections and the current leadership continues to set policy. Political survival, vigilance against potential coup plotters and conspiracy theories about Western interference continue to influence foreign policy. The Turkish authorities continue to repress certain groups, and Türkiye continues to put pressure on European countries to extradite political refugees from Türkiye who they have taken in.

The war in Ukraine has weakened Russia, and geopolitical tensions decrease. NATO is stronger and united, while the United States is more committed and continues to look for openings with Türkiye. The Alliance goes to great lengths to keep Türkiye under NATO's security umbrella and persuade it not to activate its Russian-made S-400 missile system. Türkiye asks for explicit recognition of and compensation for its role as a mediator in the war in Ukraine, as a counterweight to Russia and as the keeper of the peace in the Middle East.

In spite of this, Türkiye stubbornly continues to navigate between NATO, Russia and the East. It also continues to pursue relations with non-liberal leaders, mainly in the Balkans, Africa and the Eurasian region. At the same time, however, it wants to remain a member of NATO, in order to secure protection against Russia. Türkiye is still bound up with Russia in various strategically sensitive areas, making it susceptible to a range of Russian threats. Within the Alliance, Türkiye uses its dissenting vote to force the Allies into making concessions.

Türkiye borrows from countries such as China and the Gulf states out of economic necessity, but also wishes to continue trading with the EU. Drone exports to fragile states continue to grow. In the framework of its economic recovery, Türkiye is able to attract much needed Dutch investment, provided that it improves its investment climate. Cooperation on trade, migration and counterterrorism is able to continue. At bilateral level, it is possible to do business with the Turkish government, which honours agreements on a transactional basis, albeit for an increasingly higher price. For example, it needs substantial financial guarantees to continue cooperating on the domestically sensitive issue of migration.

2023 is a turbulent year. When Türkiye backs up its rhetoric on its claims to parts of the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas with an activist policy, or when Greece and Cyprus, which are also in an election year, take provocative steps of their own, tensions between Türkiye and the EU rise. In this scenario, the EU must do its best to exercise restraint and maintain the status quo in the face of pressure to expel Türkiye from the club of EU candidate countries. Such an irreversible step – unanimous support among EU member states is unlikely to be repeated – would not just remove the prospect of EU membership but would also reduce the EU's leverage. In contrast, NATO provides a good platform for maintaining the dialogue between Greece and Türkiye. Türkiye's relations with the United States improve once the country distances itself from Russia, but the voice of the anti-Turkish lobby remains strong.

In short, this scenario produces a mix of positive and negative implications for Dutch interests and offers scope for action.

Potential courses of action and options for the Netherlands under scenario 1: ongoing ambiguity

In this scenario, the game of cat and mouse with Türkiye continues, as do the waves of optimism and pessimism, cooperation and conflict, that have alternated with each other in a process of steady decline over the past two decades. Türkiye can give the impression of wanting to normalise ties, only to revert to an activist policy at unpredictable moments. As a result of its desire for autonomy, the country will continue to put pressure on its relations with NATO and the EU. Nevertheless, the Netherlands has several potential courses of action, options and opportunities at its disposal.

In the short term, it is crucial for the Netherlands to reach out to the Turkish population and focus on shared interests. In doing so, it is important to always put the Turkish leadership's rhetoric towards the Netherlands in perspective. It is also important to anticipate opportunities for policy changes that can benefit the Turkish population, for example by intensifying bilateral cooperation on climate change, energy, education, science, agriculture and infrastructure. Cooperation with civil society is essential in this context.

The Netherlands needs the EU to adhere to certain basic requirements and act decisively, with a view to solving problems. At the same time, in the interests of reciprocity, the EU and the Netherlands must honour their commitments, such as those contained in the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, including voluntary resettlement from Türkiye.

Once the elections in Cyprus, Greece and Türkiye are over and tensions with Türkiye have subsided, the EU will be able to act from a more geopolitically strategic perspective and return to a more value- and norm-based approach vis-à-vis Türkiye. The Netherlands must continue to do all it can, both locally and multilaterally, in the framework of infringement procedures at the Council of Europe, to put pressure on Türkiye to improve its human rights situation. The EU and the Netherlands have an opportunity to play on Türkiye's urgent need for economic prosperity as a way to advance human rights and the rule of law. Using trade as a form of leverage – both bilaterally and at EU level – to improve the human rights situation and protect freedoms can be effective, in line with the concept of 'principled transactionalism'.

However, it should first be considered whether means of exerting pressure, such as cutting the pre-accession budget in response to Türkiye's drilling in the territorial waters of Cyprus (the budget was intended in part for Turkish NGOs), are effective for improving the human rights situation in Türkiye. Such measures may work in certain areas. One treaty that is in any case essential is the Istanbul Convention on women's rights. Although conservatism is the main motive behind Türkiye's withdrawal from this convention, momentum towards re-accession may be built up. The Netherlands should push for such a process and can provide expertise on the steps needed to achieve this goal.

When it comes to making progress on important issues, modernising the EU-Türkiye Customs Union can serve as the first step. The European Council conclusions of 24-25 June 2021 refer to 'the start of work at technical level towards a mandate' for this purpose.¹⁰⁰ They also refer to preparatory work for high-level dialogues on issues of mutual interest, such as public health, climate, counterterrorism and regional issues. Given the consequences of the war in Ukraine, energy will also have to be added to this list. These issues all fall under the scope of 'principled transactionalism'. At the same time, Türkiye and the EU both need to invest more in tackling the root causes of irregular migration and conflict in the region.

Further steps to strengthen Türkiye's ties with the EU – the country's participation in the recent European Political Community (EPC) meeting being one of the first – can be taken in exchange for a number of conditions that have yet to be specified. In this context, the EU should adopt the transactional approach practised by Türkiye, but proceeding on a principled basis. Although that sounds like an oxymoron, it is appropriate in a situation characterised by constructive ambiguity. Examples of this approach include the adoption of confidence-building measures by Türkiye in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Netherlands can provide expertise in the fields of international law and mediation via the network of organisations and institutions that has arisen in The Hague as a consequence of its role as the city of justice and peace. That being said, if Türkiye engages in territorial intimidation of EU member states, it must be stopped.



▶ 7.2 Scenario 2: Explicit rivalry



In this scenario, the incumbent government wins the elections. Against a backdrop of rising geopolitical tensions with Russia and China, the Turkish state-led narrative portrays the West as an infiltrator with malicious intentions. This inspires a more rapid process of autocratisation than under scenario 1. The absolute rule that follows from the retention of Türkiye's presidential system leads to the further deterioration of the human rights situation. Inspired by Sèvres phobia, all this takes place under the guise of dealing with 'enemies of the state', who face a severe crackdown. Interference in European countries takes on a truly hostile character. The Turkish government tries to manipulate the diaspora in countries with a relatively large Turkish population, such as the Netherlands.

Türkiye's relationship with the United States is more tense than ever. The United States nevertheless goes to great lengths to keep Türkiye in NATO but is preoccupied with its geopolitical struggle with China. NATO unity is at stake in this scenario. Putin's ultimate strategic interest is to destabilise the Alliance internally. Russia and the Assad regime give Türkiye the go-ahead for military action against Western-backed Kurdish groups in Syria.

Counterterrorism cooperation with Türkiye is suspended. Previously captured and detained former IS fighters, including from the Netherlands, are no longer prevented from returning to their home countries, where they pose a threat to national security. Conflicts reignite on several fronts, such as in Nagorno-Karabakh. Türkiye is no longer impartial in its control of access to the Black Sea under the Montreux Convention, potentially granting Russia free passage. The country also becomes an important channel for evading sanctions, enabling Russia to acquire spare parts from or via Türkiye once its supplies run out.

NATO can no longer count on Türkiye to contribute to missions, while the Middle East continues to destabilise owing to rising geopolitical tensions. As a result, Western countries are faced with a vacuum in missions in the region. Russia puts pressure on Türkiye to activate its Russian-made S-400 missile system. From that moment, Türkiye effectively no longer falls under NATO's integrated air defence umbrella.

As a result of Türkiye's withdrawal from NATO, the EU risks being drawn into conflicts involving the country. This is because the dampening effect of NATO membership has disappeared. Türkiye pursues an increasingly activist foreign policy and engages in provocative actions, including in the Mediterranean. Escalation vis-à-vis Cyprus and Greece risks igniting conflict with the EU.

Türkiye's decision to end migration cooperation leads to a crisis at its borders with Greece and Cyprus, with negative consequences for the entire Common European Asylum System. The EU considers imposing sanctions against Türkiye, although earlier measures proved largely ineffective, except for pushing the Turkish economy closer to the abyss. The EU considers revoking Türkiye's candidate status.

In short, this scenario has extremely negative implications for Dutch interests and offers limited scope for action.

Potential courses of action for the Netherlands and how to mitigate risks under scenario 2: explicit rivalry

This is a risky scenario for the Netherlands, as Türkiye is in danger of turning away from the West under these circumstances, undermining the protection of European security on the continent's southeastern flank. In this case, the Netherlands has little scope for action but could nonetheless suffer a great deal of harm. Under this scenario, if tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean increase and if a member state such as Greece or Cyprus is the victim of armed

aggression on its territory, there is a theoretical possibility that it would invoke the military assistance clause laid down in Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) against Türkiye. However, this is very unlikely to happen as long as Türkiye formally remains a member of the Alliance.

In this scenario, the Turkish authorities need to be made aware of where the boundary is. In cooperation with – and within – the EU and NATO, the Netherlands must draw a clear line regarding Türkiye’s participation in the international legal order. Values and norms in the field of human rights and the rule of law are not bargaining chips.

At the same time, irreversible decisions, such as expelling Türkiye from NATO or terminating its EU candidate status, should only be considered as an *ultimum remedium* (last resort). It is vital to prevent Türkiye’s isolation within and by multilateral organisations. The Netherlands should make every effort to keep the lines of communication open and maintain a dialogue. This will obviously be impossible without reciprocal efforts on the Turkish side.

In the case of explicit rivalry, it is even more important than in other scenarios to understand the systemic factors influencing Türkiye’s foreign and security policy and strategic thinking. The country’s leadership sometimes plays hardball, but much of its behaviour is motivated by the non-recognition of the country’s unique role. It is also important to be aware that Türkiye commingles different types of security interests, ranging from existential interests of a domestic nature (e.g. relating to the PKK and the Gülenists) to interests of a more general nature (e.g. relating to threats arising from regional instability and failed states). Finally, a distinction should be made between rhetoric that is employed for domestic purposes and messages from Türkiye that are intended for external consumption.



► 7.3 Scenario 3: Rapprochement

Türkiye gets a new government that wants to swiftly ramp up cooperation with the EU in order to restore economic growth and negotiate membership. The country works hard to restore the rule of law. Its foreign and security policy is once again more predictable for the West and is pro-European in orientation. Decision-making is no longer monopolised by the leader and his followers, since the country wishes to return to a more democratic – and therefore parliamentary – system. Political prisoners such as Kurdish politician Selahattin Demirtaş are released and are free to participate in the political system to promote equal rights for all citizens, including Kurds. Dutch citizens of Turkish origin play a constructive role in improving relations between the Netherlands and Türkiye.

Türkiye is back in the Western camp but continues to navigate between the West, Russia and the East due to its geographical location. Instead of activating its Russian-made S-400 weapon system, it gets rid of the system and remains active in Western military cooperation. Now that geopolitical tensions have eased, Türkiye no longer needs to provide as much counterweight to Russia on various fronts. The country positions itself as a trusted anchor and bastion of security in a geographically important corner of Europe and as the guardian of access of the Black Sea. Türkiye continues to regard Kurdish groups in neighbouring countries as potential sources of terrorism, but concludes good agreements in this regard and continues to supply troops for NATO missions and serve as a substitute in the Middle East and Afghanistan as the West withdraws from these regions. To improve relations with the United States, Türkiye offers the services of its diplomatic and security network to help stabilisation efforts in Africa, in particular the Sahel.

Migration cooperation with the EU is a topic of political and public debate in Türkiye. The new government invests in tackling the causes of irregular migration and conflict in the region. It also

starts negotiating with countries in the region to create conditions for the return of refugees, so that the need to continue cooperating with the EU on migration becomes less pressing.

In general, the decision-making process on the Turkish side is slower than under the previous government due to the restoration of democratic control. However, cooperation with the EU has political priority due to Türkiye's desire for rapprochement. The prospect of EU membership is once again considered attractive, and the country takes its candidate status seriously. Türkiye makes significant progress in meeting the EU's basic requirements, such as improving the human rights situation and restoring the rule of law.

In short, this scenario has very positive implications for Dutch interests and offers ample scope for action.

Potential courses of action and opportunities for the Netherlands under scenario 3: rapprochement

This is the most favourable scenario, in which the things that bring Türkiye and the Netherlands closer together – namely trade and people-to-people contacts – can once again gain the upper hand in the relationship. This provides the Netherlands, the Dutch government and the multilateral organisations with the greatest scope for action. Rapprochement with the EU and the US is possible in this context but requires much effort and a long cooling-off period involving gradual steps.

Under this scenario, the scope for action is broad and encompasses a large number of options and opportunities. The EU must be able to present a package of stimulus measures as soon as the new government takes office. To this end, the European Commission should already start preparing a sample package of measures designed to promote Türkiye's economic recovery. Visa liberalisation between Türkiye and the EU is also back on the table.

In this scenario, the concept of 'principled transactionalism' can be implemented to the fullest extent possible, on the basis of shared interests. Most opportunities are linked to the modernisation of the customs union – an initial step towards improving relations – with an emphasis on promoting digital cooperation, and to visa liberalisation between Türkiye and the EU. In addition, as a basis for deeper cooperation, the EU can offer Türkiye openings in such areas as innovation, energy, climate change, incorporation of the Green Deal and policy opt-ins, including the approval of EU legislation on electricity, telecommunications and education.

In order to stimulate and facilitate this process, the Netherlands must join forces with Germany. Potential areas of cooperation include dealing with political challenges at member-state level, such as jointly overcoming scepticism within the EU regarding visa liberalisation with Türkiye, as well as promoting continued cooperation on migration and finding alternatives to the 'migration deal'.

The EU must swiftly match Türkiye's determination to invest more in tackling the causes of irregular migration and conflict in the region. In any case, it will require a concerted effort to continue cooperating on migration with the new government.

In this scenario, Türkiye also returns to the Western camp in the area of security. The country can be reintegrated into NATO and is able to take on certain tasks of the Alliance. In addition, its long-held ambition to be more involved in EU foreign and security policy can finally be fulfilled. Türkiye has already been part of the European Political Community (EPC) since October 2022, but the high-level dialogue on CFSP cooperation can now also be resumed.



Depending on the agenda, Türkiye can attend the informal Gymnich meetings of EU foreign ministers. Where appropriate, it can also be invited to join the EU Security and Defence Partnership Forum, a yet to be established mechanism that is mentioned in the EU's 'Strategic Compass' for security and defence.

Cooperation with Türkiye in the framework of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) will remain difficult. In the past, such cooperation has exacerbated political tensions in the EU (with Cyprus) and NATO (with Türkiye). This could harm relations with Türkiye. In order to make progress, the country will have to make serious concessions. Member states such as Cyprus and Greece will set a high bar in this regard.

► 7.4 Scenario 4: Increased mutual dependence

The new government has great ambitions regarding NATO and the EU, and works hard to restore the economy and the rule of law. Once in office, its political efforts focus on pro-European policies, such as reintroducing the more democratic parliamentary system and restoring the rule of law.

Türkiye pursues sound economic policies. Economic recovery nevertheless requires substantial efforts, as supply lines are still disrupted and the global system has been destabilised. The economic situation has an impact on the country's attitude towards refugee reception and migration cooperation with the EU. Some decisions that the Turkish authorities were previously able to adopt at a stroke are now subject to the democratic process. This can lead to delays in the adoption of decisions – or even to their cancellation – posing a risk for the Netherlands and the EU.

Against a backdrop of rising geopolitical tension, Türkiye seeks to comply with all its agreements with international partners and its commitments under treaties such as the Montreux Convention in order to regain trust. Domestically, however, the government is under considerable pressure to focus on the country's own security problems at home and in the region. Türkiye seeks understanding for its situation. It wants to be more firmly anchored in NATO as both a provider and a consumer of collective security in a mutually dependent relationship. The country deactivates its Russian-made S-400 missile system but is temporarily without air defences with a revisionist Russia on its doorstep.

Several competing blocs emerge, sparking geopolitical tensions. Motivated by anti-Western and opportunistic sentiments, some countries align themselves with an autocratic bloc. The new power balance around the Black Sea threatens Türkiye's territorial integrity, for example in the form of Russian support for Kurdish groups on the country's borders. The PKK becomes an increasingly serious security problem. Confrontations between Russia and Türkiye as a result of the revival of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict cannot be ruled out. Given the war on the other side of the Black Sea and the region's instability, Türkiye and the West badly need each other in this scenario. The fact that the country's foreign and security policy is becoming more predictable is a major advantage in this regard.

In short, this scenario has reasonably positive implications for Dutch interests.

Potential courses of action and opportunities for the Netherlands under scenario 4: increased mutual dependence

This scenario offers opportunities for rapprochement and the removal of obstacles to cooperation, providing the Dutch government and the multilateral organisations with adequate scope for action. At the same time, as in other scenarios, domestic political sentiment will have a major impact on the political agenda. On the other hand, attitudes will be less confrontational, leaving room for negotiation.

When it comes to security, NATO must be willing in this scenario to come to Türkiye's defence on the basis of international legal principles and related obligations. The prospect that the country wants to go back to being a reliable partner on Europe's southern flank is to be welcomed. Türkiye needs to defend itself against threats emanating from an unstable environment and requires NATO's assistance to do so. In this scenario, it is important to provide Türkiye with swift access to Western, NATO-compatible systems.

If the conflict on the eastern border continues, not all Allies will be willing to do so. An incremental approach is therefore required. European partners with air defence systems can create a coalition as an alternative to the S-400. Such an initiative would promote Türkiye's participation in NATO's deterrence and defence mechanisms, and in the adaptation of those mechanisms, in exchange for the stationing of air and missile defence systems in Türkiye by the European NATO countries. This could be done on a rotational basis in the framework of the Alliance's Enhanced Forward Presence. As a result, Türkiye would qualify for a central role in NATO's efforts to strengthen its defences in the Black Sea region.

From a strategic perspective, the Netherlands can make a case for involving Türkiye in strengthening Europe's own security architecture. An improvement in the relationship with EU member states Greece and Cyprus will require effort from all sides. Together with Germany, the Netherlands can encourage multilateral efforts to bring Greece, Cyprus and Türkiye closer together, in the interests of the EU, so that the UN has a basis for resolving the Cyprus question, thereby improving the prospects for the settlement of disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean. In this context, the Netherlands can offer its services for the resolution of territorial and maritime law issues in the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas via the network of organisations and institutions based in The Hague, known as the city of peace and justice.

Since it will be difficult to return Syrian refugees, especially if Russia continues to support the Assad regime on Türkiye's southern border, tough negotiations on a successor to the migration deal with the EU will ensue, due in part to domestic pressure and Turkish scepticism. The EU must offer more generous assistance to tackle the root causes of irregular migration and conflict in the region. In doing so, it will need to work hard to come up with enough benefits to overcome the scepticism of a new Turkish government (and parliament). A Dutch-German coalition could once again play a facilitating role in this area.



Epilogue

This advisory report concerns a country that has spent its entire – albeit relatively short – existence searching for its identity. Located on the border between Asia and Europe, it has been able to take advantage of its unique geographical position but has also been exposed to the siren calls of both continents.

A hundred years ago, the founder of modern-day Türkiye, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, made a radical choice in favour of a secular state and Europe. He opted to emulate the countries that had just defeated Türkiye in the First World War and whose religion Türkiye did not share. Now, a hundred years later, that choice is no longer unchallenged in Türkiye and will undoubtedly be a topic of discussion when the republic celebrates its centenary next year.

Türkiye is a country of contrasts: a proud nation that is keen to remind the world of its predecessors' important role over the centuries, but also one that frequently feels misunderstood; a country that claims to play an important role on the world stage, but also one that has not yet been allowed to join the EU; a country that stays behind at Kabul airport during the withdrawal from Afghanistan and so covers the departure of its NATO partners, but also one that purchases S-400 missiles from Russia, thus placing itself outside NATO's collective air defence system; a country that is both a bridge and a barrier between East and West – a bridge for businesspeople but a barrier for migrants and refugees seeking asylum in Europe; a country that takes in 3,5 million Syrian refugees and sends at least 650,000 refugee children to school, but also one that uses refugee protection as leverage to extract concessions from the West.

In next year's elections, the Turkish people will decide whether to grant another term to President Erdoğan, who has turned into an autocrat. Since the outcome of the elections is unpredictable, the AIV has chosen to outline four potential scenarios for the future of the country and its relations with Europe, NATO and the Netherlands. As a result, the AIV is able to provide the government with a range of options that will hopefully enable it to formulate a proactive, future-oriented policy vis-à-vis Türkiye.

Because one thing is clear: the pursuit of an active foreign policy towards Türkiye is essential. The war in Ukraine has demonstrated once again how strategically important the country is. It is the guardian of access to the Black Sea that does not hesitate to block this access, the country whose drones were crucial to Ukraine's survival at the beginning of the war, the country that does not participate in Western sanctions against Russia and allows Russian tourists to use their credit cards on the beaches of Antalya, but also the country that mediated the deal facilitating the resumption of grain shipments from Ukraine.

In the countless discussions that the AIV conducted in preparing this advisory report, there was much – justified – criticism of Türkiye, especially of its human rights policy, but not one denial of its importance to the West and the Netherlands. This awareness already existed in the Netherlands in 1612, when it established diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire, and Türkiye continues to be important 410 years later.

Endnotes



- ¹ According to Aydin, the factors influencing Türkiye's foreign and security policy at a systemic level also include 'cultural inclinations', which may be understood to include cultural characteristics and attitudes. See M. Aydin, 'Foreign Policy, 1923-2018', in A. Özerdem and M. Whiting (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Turkish Politics* (Routledge, 2019), pp. 367-377.
- ² This advisory report makes extensive use of the term 'the West'. This is not simply a compass point but a geopolitical concept based on the idea of a common civilisation. According to some readings, this concept implies a certain detachment from the rest of the world or one or more other 'zones' of the world, but that is not the interpretation employed by this report.
- ³ B. Moser and M. Weithmann, *Landeskunde Türkei: Geschichte, Gesellschaft und Kultur* [Country study – Turkey: history, society and culture] (Helmut Buske Verlag, 2008).
- ⁴ See the explanation in section 2.2 on the way in which certain constants recur in Turkey's foreign and security policy, under the heading 'Mistrust of the West'.
- ⁵ The Sultan's government in Istanbul wanted to cooperate with Great Britain and France but had the door slammed in its face by the Treaty of Sèvres. This kick-started a resistance movement of Ottoman officers and administrators who wanted to prevent the country's partition. See E.J. Zürcher and Mazal Holocaust Collection, *Turkey: A Modern History* (I.B. Tauris, 1993).
- ⁶ At this time, the Republic of Türkiye did not recognise any minorities other than Christians and Jews, whose status and rights were enshrined in the Treaty of Lausanne. Its policy towards Kurds, Arabs, Lazi, Bosnians, Albanians, Roma and others was thus always one of assimilation. See E.J. Zürcher and Mazal Holocaust Collection, *Turkey: A Modern History* (I.B. Tauris, 1993).
- ⁷ B. Yeşilada, 'Turkey's Cyprus Policy in Transition', in A. Özerdem and M. Whiting (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Turkish Politics* (Routledge, 2019), ch. 34.
- ⁸ S. Cagaptay, *Erdoğan's Empire: Turkey and the Politics of the Middle East* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019).
- ⁹ After Türkiye applied for membership on 14 April 1987, the European Commission stated in its 'avis' (opinion) that the country was eligible for membership but that it would be better to wait for the right moment, as the EEC first needed to complete the single market. See F. Özerdem, 'Will You Marry Me? Who Proposes? Forgotten Promises and the Possibilities for Reviving Relations between Turkey and the EU', in A. Özerdem and M. Whiting (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Turkish Politics* (Routledge, 2019).
- ¹⁰ For a detailed analysis of variable factors and constants in Türkiye's foreign and security policy, see M. Aydin, 'Foreign Policy, 1923-2018', in A. Özerdem and M. Whiting (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Turkish Politics* (Routledge, 2019).
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² D. Isachenko, *Turkey and Russia: The Logic of Conflictual Cooperation*, SWP Research Paper no. 7 (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2021).
- ¹³ S. Neset, M. Aydin, E. Balta, K.K. Ataç, H.D. Bilgin and A. Strand, *Turkey as a Regional Security Actor in the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Levant Region*, CMI Report R 2021:2 (Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2021). Definition from the Concise Oxford English Dictionary.
- ¹⁴ M. Aydin, 'Grand Strategizing in and for Turkish Foreign Policy: Lessons Learned from History, Geography and Practice', *Perceptions* 25(2) (2020), pp. 203-226.
- ¹⁵ 'Introduction', in A. Özerdem and M. Whiting (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Turkish Politics* (Routledge, 2019), p. 15.
- ¹⁶ In Türkiye, pro-government forces repeatedly accused the US and NATO of involvement in the July 2016 coup attempt and called for the Alliance to be abandoned, thereby exacerbating existing tensions. See K. Kirişçi, 'US-Turkish Relations in Turmoil', in A. Özerdem and M. Whiting (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Turkish Politics* (Routledge, 2019).
- ¹⁷ 'Erdoğan Challenges Greece over Alleged Airspace Violations', *Aljazeera*, 3 September 2022.



- ¹⁸ For example, European powers demanded privileges for Christian populations – their protégés – in the Ottoman Empire. At least two historical factors are key to understanding Turkish sensibilities towards Europe: (1) The capitulations, the treaty-based legal advantages granted to Europeans in the Ottoman Empire, under which they paid much less in import duties and taxes and were untouchable by the Ottoman judiciary and police. (2) The rights of protection that the European powers insisted on having over large Christian populations in the Ottoman Empire. The French did so on behalf of Catholics, the British on behalf of Protestants and the Russians on behalf of the many millions of Orthodox faithful. Capitulations and rights of protection became entwined as the European powers demanded privileges for their protégés. This led to a profound mistrust of Europe – and especially of the Europe-minorities nexus – that persists to this day. For a detailed analysis, see E.J. Zürcher and Mazal Holocaust Collection, *Turkey: A Modern History* (I.B. Tauris, 1993).
- ¹⁹ This definitely does not apply to the entire population. See also the description of the political division in Türkiye in chapter 4, which discusses the domestic drivers of the country's current foreign and security policy.
- ²⁰ S. Neset, M. Aydin, E. Balta, K.K. Ataç, H.D. Bilgin and A. Strand, *Turkey as a Regional Security Actor in the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Levant Region*, CMI Report R 2021:2 (Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2021).
- ²¹ For a recent analysis of strategic thinking in Türkiye based on interviews with senior members of the establishment, see M. Aydin, 'Grand Strategizing in and for Turkish Foreign Policy: Lessons Learned from History, Geography and Practice', *Perceptions* 25(2) (2020), pp. 203-226.
- ²² See opinion poll conducted by the Turkish Metropoll polling agency: Ö. Sencar, *Turkey's Pulse March 2022: European Union & NATO* (Metropoll, 2022).
- ²³ H.A. Aksoy, S. Çevik and N.T. Yaşar, 'Visualizing Turkey's Activism in Africa', CATS Network, 3 June 2022.
- ²⁴ E. van Veen, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey's New Regional Militarism* (Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', 2020).
- ²⁵ Accession requires compliance with certain criteria, which are laid down in the Treaty on European Union. They were established by the Copenhagen European Council in 1993 and strengthened by the Madrid European Council in 1995. The first criterion, which is of particular relevance here, is stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities. See *Accession criteria (Copenhagen criteria)*, EUR-Lex, n.d., accessed on 12 September 2022.
- ²⁶ Türkiye has submitted a request to modernise and expand its fleet with F-16s. There are objections to this within the US Congress, but there is no official ban.
- ²⁷ F. Capone and A. de Guttry, 'An Analysis of the Diplomatic Crisis between Turkey and the Netherlands in Light of the Existing International Legal Framework Governing Diplomatic and Consular Relations', *European Journal of Legal Studies* 10(1) (2017), pp. 61-79.
- ²⁸ J. Harchaoui, *Why Turkey Intervened in Libya* (Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2020).
- ²⁹ The White Paper published by Türkiye's Ministry of Defence in 2000 identified four pillars of Turkish military strategy: deterrence; military contribution to crisis management and crisis intervention; forward defence; and collective security. The forward defence strategy was intensified after the 2016 coup attempt. See T.Y. Nebahat, *Syria and Libya's Contributions to the Evolution of the Turkish 'Forward Defence' Doctrine*, Research Project Report 7 (Geneva Centre for Security Policy, 2021).
- ³⁰ Türkiye is not a party to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Setting the limit of territorial waters at 12 miles would turn the Aegean Sea into a 'Greek lake' due to the large number of Greek islands it contains. This would effectively lock Türkiye out of the Aegean. It would also reduce the high seas, which are accessible to all, by half and significantly reduce Türkiye's economic zone and continental shelf. Türkiye is one of 16 countries that have not ratified or signed the convention. The country's arguments are set out in a paper by a former judge of the European Court of Human Rights, see R. Türmen, *Whose Sea? A Turkish International Law*



- Perspective on the Greek-Turkish Disputes* (Institut Montaigne, 2020).
- ³¹ 'At NATO, Turkey Hails Its Revival of Dialogue with Greece', *Independent*, 14 June 2021, accessed on 12 October 2022.
- ³² The term Turkic denotes a large group of languages of western and central Asia, including Turkish, Azerbaijani, Uighur and Tatar.
- ³³ H.A. Aksoy, S. Çevik and N.T. Yaşar, 'Visualizing Turkey's Activism in Africa', CATS Network, 3 June 2022.
- ³⁴ 'Turkey Reaffirms Win-Win Approach in Ties with African Countries', *Daily Sabah*, 22 October 2021.
- ³⁵ 'Turkse inflatie naar ruim 83%' [Turkish inflation rises above 83%], *Het Financieele Dagblad*, 3 October 2022.
- ³⁶ Advisory Council on International Affairs, *The Will of the People? The Erosion of Democracy under the Rule of Law in Europe*, Advisory Report no. 104 (AIV, 2017).
- ³⁷ In 2018, over 23% of the Turkish population was still under the age of 14. By way of comparison, the figure in Netherlands was only 17% at this time. See Eurostat, 'Population Age Structure By Major Age Groups, 2008 and 2018', accessed on 12 October 2022.
- ³⁸ For an analysis, see J. Lagendijk, *Erdoğan in een notendop* [Erdoğan in a nutshell] (Prometheus, 2016).
- ³⁹ In 2017, the Constitution was amended and a presidential system was introduced. This system came into effect in 2018 with the election of President Erdoğan for a five-year term. New elections will be held in 2023. If he is re-elected, Erdoğan's second term under the new system will end in 2028.
- ⁴⁰ A poll conducted by Metropoll in April 2022 shows that over 70% of the population want Türkiye to remain neutral in the war in Ukraine.
- ⁴¹ For an analysis, see J. Lagendijk, *Erdoğan in een notendop* [Erdoğan in a nutshell] (Prometheus, 2016).
- ⁴² This appealed to the so-called 'Black Turks', who lived in the Anatolian countryside and did not subscribe to Kemalism for reasons of identity and religion. For more on this, see C. Aydin, *The Politics of the Anti-Western World: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2007).
- ⁴³ For an analysis of the consolidation of domestic power, see S. Neset, M. Aydin, E. Balta, K.K. Ataç, H.D. Bilgin and A. Strand, *Turkey as a Regional Security Actor in the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Levant Region*, CMI Report R 2021:2 (Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2021), pp. 13-14.
- ⁴⁴ See note 30.
- ⁴⁵ S. Neset, M. Aydin, H.D. Bilgin, M. Güracan and A. Strand, *Turkish Foreign Policy: Structures and Decision-Making Processes*, CMI Report R 2019:3 (Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2019).
- ⁴⁶ In an unofficial military ranking of NATO countries, Türkiye still appears below Italy. See 'NATO Member States Military Ranking (2022)', Global Firepower, n.d., accessed on 29 September 2022.
- ⁴⁷ *NAVO-uitbreiding met Finland en Zweden: hoe gaat dat in zijn werk?* [NATO expansion to Finland and Sweden: how can it be accomplished?], government press release, 5 July 2022.
- ⁴⁸ Joint press point with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg and the President of Finland, Sauli Niinistö, NATO, 12 June 2022, accessed on 12 October 2022.
- ⁴⁹ Madrid Summit Declaration, issued by NATO Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Madrid 29 June 2022, NATO, 29 June 2022, accessed on 12 October 2022.
- ⁵⁰ In US dollars: from USD 10.8 billion in December 2009 to USD 21 billion in December 2020, at an exchange rate of 1.4614. For the EUR/USD exchange rate, see the exchange rates published by the central bank of the Netherlands at *Exchange rates*, De Nederlandsche Bank, n.d., accessed on 30 September 2022.
- ⁵¹ In 2019, Türkiye was the United States' 28th largest goods export market and its 32nd largest supplier of goods imports. See Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, *U.S. Relations with Turkey*, U.S. Department of State, 12 August 2021.



- ⁵² K. Kirişci, 'US-Turkish Relations in Turmoil', in A. Özerdem and M. Whiting (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Turkish Politics* (Routledge, 2019).
- ⁵³ J. Zanotti and C. Thomas, *Turkey: Background and U.S. Relations in Brief* (Congressional Research Service, 2022).
- ⁵⁴ L. Kelly, 'Greek Leader Warns Congress against Weapons Sales to Turkey', *The Hill*, 17 May 2022.
- ⁵⁵ Based on figures in US dollars (USD 26.3 billion) from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *Relations between Turkey and the Russian Federation*, n.d. For the EUR/USD exchange rate, see the exchange rates published by the central bank of the Netherlands at [Exchange rates](#), De Nederlandsche Bank, n.d., accessed on 30 September 2022.
- ⁵⁶ 'EU Presses Turkey to Align on Russia Sanctions', *Financial Times*, 11 October 2022, accessed on 17 October 2022. See also 'Why Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Need Each Other; Turkey's President Is Managing to Look Both East and West', *Economist*, 12 October 2022, accessed on 12 October 2022.
- ⁵⁷ See M. Pierini, 'Understanding the Putin-Erdoğan Duet', *Carnegie Europe*, 30 August 2022.
- ⁵⁸ Interview with expert in Ankara, March 2022.
- ⁵⁹ M. Chulov, 'Turkey's Rapprochement with Syria Leaves Regional Refugees Fearful', *Guardian*, 23 August 2022.
- ⁶⁰ Figures for 2019, see *Turkey Trade Balance, Exports and Imports by Country 2019*, data provided by the World Bank's World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS), n.d.
- ⁶¹ According to *The Economist*, Rosatom transferred an advance of USD 5 billion to Türkiye in mid-2022, in response to the country's growing need for energy (and capital). See 'Why Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Need Each Other; Turkey's President Is Managing to Look Both East and West', *Economist*, 12 October 2022, accessed on 12 October 2022. See also F. Kozok, 'Russia Is Wiring Dollars to Turkey for \$20 Billion Nuclear Plant', *Bloomberg*, 29 July 2022, accessed on 22 October 2022.
- ⁶² P. Khanna, *The Future is Asian: Global Order in the Twenty-First Century* (Orion Publishing Group, 2019).
- ⁶³ Based on figures in US dollars from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *Turkey-People's Republic of China Economic and Trade Relations*, n.d. For the EUR/USD exchange rate, see the exchange rates published by the central bank of the Netherlands at [Exchange rates](#), De Nederlandsche Bank, n.d., accessed on 30 September 2022.
- ⁶⁴ Interview with expert in Ankara, March 2022.
- ⁶⁵ Online interview with expert, June 2022.
- ⁶⁶ 'Erdoğan Says Turkey Has Raised FX Swap Deal with China to \$6 bln', *Reuters*, 13 June 2021, accessed on 12 October 2022.
- ⁶⁷ A. Alemdaroglu and S. Tepe 'Erdoğan is Turning Turkey into a Chinese Client State', *Foreign Policy*, 16 September 2020.
- ⁶⁸ *EU Trade Relations with Turkey: Facts, Figures and Latest Developments*, European Commission, n.d., accessed on 12 October 2022.
- ⁶⁹ European Council meeting (23 and 24 June 2022) – Conclusions, EUCO 24/22, 24 June 2022, accessed on 12 October 2022.
- ⁷⁰ For example, in its 2022 *Communication on EU Enlargement Policy*, the European Commission criticised Türkiye's foreign policy: '[Its] unilateral foreign policy continued to be at odds with the EU priorities under the common foreign and security policy (CFSP), notably due to its military action in Syria and Iraq and a lack of alignment with EU restrictive measures against Russia. Türkiye maintained a very low alignment rate with the EU stand on foreign and security policy of 7% (as of August 2022).' See also European Commission, *2022 Enlargement package: European Commission assesses reforms in the Western Balkans and Turkey*, 12 October 2022, accessed on 12 October 2022.
- ⁷¹ On EU migration policy in the Eastern Mediterranean, see European Council, *Migration flows in the Eastern Mediterranean route*, 31 August 2022, accessed on 14 October 2022.
- ⁷² Amnesty International, 'EU: Anniversary of Turkey Deal Offers Warning against Further



- Dangerous Migration Deals', press release, 12 March 2021.
- ⁷³ 'Commercial and Economic Relations between Turkey and the Netherlands', Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d., accessed on 2 September 2022.
- ⁷⁴ Possible trade talks between the Netherlands and Türkiye could affect this group specifically.
- ⁷⁵ Statistics Netherlands, *Hoeveel mensen met een migratieachtergrond wonen in Nederland?* [How many people with a migrant background live in the Netherlands?], n.d., accessed on 30 September 2022.
- ⁷⁶ Statistics Netherlands, *Population counter*, n.d., accessed on 30 September 2022.
- ⁷⁷ Refers to people originating from Türkiye of full or partial Turkish ethnicity.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid.
- ⁷⁹ Federal Statistical Office (Destatis), *Bevölkerung mit Migrationshintergrund – Ergebnisse des Mikrozensus 2021 – Fachserie 1 Reihe 2.2 – 2021 (Erstergebnisse)* [Population with a migration background – results of the 2021 microcensus – series 1 set 2.2 – 2021 (preliminary results)], 12 April 2022, accessed on 30 September 2022.
- ⁸⁰ Website of the Consulate General of Turkey in Paris, n.d., accessed on 30 September 2022.
- ⁸¹ Statistics Austria, *Migration (total)*, n.d., accessed on 30 September 2022.
- ⁸² Centre for Agrarian History, *50 jaar migratie* [50 years of migration], n.d., accessed on 30 September 2022.
- ⁸³ In 2014, 312,000 Dutch nationals also had Turkish nationality. Since 6 January 2014, if a person has Dutch nationality, their other nationality or nationalities are no longer listed in the population register. See Statistics Netherlands, '1.3 Million People in the Netherlands Hold Dual Citizenship', 6 August 2015, accessed on 30 September 2022.
- ⁸⁴ The number of people of Turkish origin living in Germany (i.e. people with current or former Turkish citizenship or at least one immigrant parent from Türkiye). In addition to being German nationals, half of these people also have Turkish nationality.
- ⁸⁵ KIS, *Groeperingen in de Turks-Nederlandse gemeenschap* [Groups in the Turkish-Dutch community], n.d., accessed on 30 September 2022.
- ⁸⁶ Statistics Netherlands, *How many asylum seekers enter the Netherlands?*, n.d., accessed on 30 September 2022.
- ⁸⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs country report on Turkey, March 2022 (in Dutch).
- ⁸⁸ Ibid., at p. 42.
- ⁸⁹ K. de Bruijne, C. Houtkamp and M. Sie Dhian Ho, *Concerns about Foreign Interference* (Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', 2020).
- ⁹⁰ NCTV, *Islamist Radicalisation among the Turkish Dutch: An Exploration*, July 2021, p. 5.
- ⁹¹ Ibid., at p. 8.
- ⁹² AIV, *Human Rights: A Core Interest in a Constellation of Geopolitical Forces*, advisory report no. 122 (2022).
- ⁹³ 'Recep Tayyip Erdoğan droht Griechenland erneut mit Krieg' [Recep Tayyip Erdoğan once again threatens Greece with war], *Die Zeit*, 7 October 2022, accessed on 12 October 2022.
- ⁹⁴ Following the signing of the readmission agreement between the EU and Türkiye, the visa liberalisation process was launched at the end of 2013. However, until Türkiye complies with the norms established by the EU authorities, Turkish citizens will not be granted visa-free access to the 26 countries of the Schengen area. For the findings of the most recent report on Türkiye published on 19 October 2021, see European Commission, 'Key findings of the 2021 report on Turkey', 19 October 2021.
- ⁹⁵ AIV, *European Asylum Policy: Two Major Accords to Break the Impasse*, advisory report no. 117 (2020).
- ⁹⁶ 2022 Defence White Paper: A Stronger Netherlands, a Safer Europe, government press release, 1 June 2022 (in Dutch).
- ⁹⁷ *NAVO-uitbreiding met Finland en Zweden: hoe gaat dat in zijn werk?* [NATO expansion to Finland and Sweden: how can it be accomplished?], government press release, 5 July 2022.
- ⁹⁸ Letter of 10 June 2020 from the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment to the House of Representatives on national security, integration policy and diaspora policy, *Parliamentary papers*



II, 3082I, no. 114 (in Dutch).

- ⁹⁹ Response by former Minister of Foreign Affairs Ben Knapen to questions from Kati Piri MP, in Report of a meeting between the foreign minister and the permanent parliamentary committee on foreign affairs on 4 October 2021 regarding the 2020 Human Rights Report, [Parliamentary Papers, Human Rights \(uncorrected transcript\)](#) (in Dutch).
- ¹⁰⁰ [European Council meeting \(24 and 25 June 2021\) – Conclusions](#), EUCO 7/21, 25 June 2021, accessed on 12 October 2022.



Request for advice



Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Professor Jaap de Hoop Scheffer
Chairman of the Advisory Council
on International Affairs
P.O. Box 20061
2500 EB The Hague

Date 19 May 2021
Re Request for advice on the geopolitical role of Turkey

Dear Professor De Hoop Scheffer,

I am writing in conjunction with the Minister of Defence to submit the following request for advice.

The balance of geopolitical forces is undergoing significant changes. Stability in the countries surrounding Europe regularly comes under pressure. Current geopolitical dynamics heighten the need for European countries, both individually and in concert, to stay alert in order to safeguard their interests. Mutual cooperation within NATO and the EU is crucial in this connection.

Turkey is a NATO Ally and a significant partner for the EU. The country has a strategic location, is a trading partner and forms an important link in the chain of cooperation where migration and counterterrorism are concerned. Changes are taking place in Turkey's domestic political and foreign policy spheres, as set out in the AIV's 2020-2022 Work Programme. Those changes are frequently raised during regular consultations with the Dutch House of Representatives.

For the above reasons, it is important to have a detailed picture of Turkey's current and future geopolitical role. There is also a need for an analysis of the possible consequences of that role for NATO and the EU. To this end, a number of questions need to be addressed:

- 1) What domestic, foreign-policy-related and economic factors and developments should be considered when identifying Turkey's geopolitical interests and role (and changes to them), and its resulting foreign and security policy?
- 2) What is Turkey's foreign and security policy expected to be in the next five to ten years?



What are the potential consequences of Turkey's geopolitical role for Dutch interests, the NATO Alliance and the EU?

- 3) What scope does the Netherlands have for taking action, both at bilateral level and through the EU and NATO? What policy choices may present themselves in the short and longer term?

We look forward with interest to reading your advisory report on these questions.

Yours sincerely,

Stef Blok
Minister of Foreign Affairs



List of persons consulted

- **Tony Agotha**
Member of Cabinet of the Executive Vice-President of the European Commission Frans Timmermans
- **James Appathurai**
Deputy Assistant Secretary-General for Emerging Security Challenges, NATO
- **Nilgün Arısan Eralp**
Director, Center for EU Studies, Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV), Ankara
- **Muhittin Ataman**
Editor-in-Chief, Insight Turkey, SETA Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research, Ankara
- **Mustafa Aydın**
Professor, President International Relations Council of Turkey, Istanbul
- **Hüseyin Bağcı**
Professor, President Foreign Policy Institute, Ankara
- **Joanneke Balfort**
Director Security and Defence Policy, European External Action Service, EU
- **Mustafa Başkara, LL.M.**
CEO, Ankara University National Center for the Sea and Maritime Law
- **Rob Bauer**
Admiral, Chair of the Military Committee, NATO
- **Bettina Cadenbach**
Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Security Policy, NATO
- **Mehmet Ali Çalışkan**
Executive Director, Reform Institute, Istanbul
- **Balkan Devlen**
Director, Centre in Modern Turkish Studies (MTS), Carleton University, Ottawa
- **Pieter van Donkersgoed**
Security and Defence Policy Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague
- **Angelina Eichhorst**
Managing Director Europe, European External Action Service, EU
- **Mehmet Ekinci**
Foreign policy researcher, SETA Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research, Ankara
- **Ruud van Enk**
Senior expert and team leader, Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, European Commission
- **Ali Serdar Erdurmaz**
Professor, Director of Security Studies, Foreign Policy Institute, Ankara
- **Ceren Ergenç**
Associate Professor, Department of China Studies, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, Suzhou
- **Peter Ericson**
Consul General, Consulate General of Sweden, Istanbul
- **Joost Flamand**
Director, Security Policy Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague
- **Joris Geeven**
Policy Directorate, Ministry of Defence, The Hague
- **Marisa Gerards**
Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to NATO
- **Nigar Göksel**
Turkey Project Director, International Crisis Group, Istanbul
- **Robert de Groot**
Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the EU



- **Numan Hazar**
Ambassador, Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies (EDAM), Istanbul
- **Robert Hilton**
Counselor for Public Affairs, Embassy of the United States, Ankara
- **Richard Holtzapple**
Deputy Permanent Representative of the United States to NATO
- **Tacan İldem**
Ambassador, Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies (EDAM), Istanbul
- **Stian Jenssen**
Director, Private Office of the NATO Secretary-General
- **Karin Jones-Schaper**
Deputy Consul General, Consulate General of the Netherlands, Istanbul
- **Omar Kadkoy**
Policy analyst, Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV), Ankara
- **Özgenur Kara Balcı**
Researcher, Ankara University National Center for the Sea and Maritime Law
- **Hakan Karan**
Professor, Chair of the Board of Directors, Ankara University National Center for the Sea and Maritime Law
- **Şaban Kardaş**
Professor, Department of International Relations, Center for Middle Eastern Studies (ORSAM), TOBB University of Economics and Technology, Ankara
- **Alev Kılıç**
Ambassador, Center for Eurasian Studies (AVIM), Ankara
- **Mehmet Akif Kireççi**
Member of the Presidential Security and Foreign Policy Council; Professor, Faculty of Political Science and International Relations, Social Sciences University of Ankara
- **Marjanne de Kwaasteniet**
Former ambassador of the Netherlands to Türkiye, Ankara
- **Michiel van der Laan**
Lieutenant General, Military Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the NATO & EU Military Committees
- **Joost Lagendijk**
Former member of the European Parliament
- **Dries Lesage**
Associate Professor of Globalisation and Global Governance, Ghent University
- **Carlijn Lubbinge**
First Secretary for Counterterrorism, Embassy of the Netherlands, Ankara
- **Joaquín Molina**
Senior Policy Advisor, NATO Countries and Security Policy, Political Affairs and Security Policy Division, NATO
- **Maria Olson**
Director of the Office of Southern European Affairs, US State Department
- **Scott Oudkirk**
Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of the United States, Ankara
- **Basat Öztürk**
Permanent Representative of Türkiye to NATO
- **Kati Piri**
Former Turkey rapporteur and member of the European Parliament
- **Maciej Popowski**
Deputy Director-General, Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, European Commission



- **Hélène Rekkers**
Head, Economic Section, Embassy of the Netherlands, Ankara
- **Kees van Rij**
Former ambassador of the Netherlands to Türkiye
- **Farbod Saatsaz**
Senior Policy Officer, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague
- **Güven Sak**
Programme Director, Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV), Ankara
- **Erica Schouten**
Director, Europe Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague
- **Jürgen Schulz**
Ambassador of Germany to Türkiye, Ankara
- **Özgehan Şenyuva**
Professor, Department of International Relations, Middle East Technical University, Ankara
- **Oktay Tanrısever**
Professor, Department of International Relations and Center for European Studies, Middle East Technical University, Ankara
- **Fatih Tayfur**
Vice Dean, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Middle East Technical University, Ankara
- **Gönül Tol**
Director, Center for Turkish Studies, Middle East Institute, Washington
- **Rıza Türmen**
Ambassador, former judge of the European Court of Human Rights
- **Arjen Uijterlinde**
Consul General, Consulate General of the Netherlands, Istanbul
- **Özgür Ünlühisarcıklı**
Director, Ankara Office, German Marshall Fund of the United States
- **İzel Varan**
Researcher, Ankara University National Center for the Sea and Maritime Law
- **David van Weel**
Assistant Secretary-General for Emerging Security Challenges, NATO
- **Erik Weststrate**
Director, Europe Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague, former deputy ambassador of the Netherlands to Türkiye
- **Joep Wijnands**
Ambassador of the Netherlands to Türkiye; former Director-General for Policy Affairs, Ministry of Defence, The Hague
- **Selim Yenel**
Ambassador, Global Relations Forum, Istanbul
- **Murat Yeşiltaş**
Foreign Affairs Research Adviser, SETA Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research, Ankara
- **Patty Zandstra**
Political Counsellor, Embassy of the Netherlands, Ankara
- **Erik-Jan Zürcher**
Professor Emeritus in Turkish Studies, Leiden University



List of figures

Figure 1	Extent of the Ottoman Empire in 1683,	11
Figure 2	Developments in Türkiye's Western orientation, 1923-2000,	14
Figure 3	Türkiye's new and renewed alliances, 2000-2021,	19
Figure 4	Territorial disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean (SWP, 2020),	21
Figure 5	Turning points in Türkiye's Western orientation, 2000-2021,	22
Figure 6	Türkiye's military presence (SWP, 2020),	26
Figure 7	Overview of number of Europeans of Turkish origin in the Netherlands, Germany, France, Austria and Belgium,	39
Figure 8	Four potential scenarios for 2030: relations with Türkiye and implications for Dutch interests,	45
Photo 1	Cover image: Shutterstock	
Photo 2	Luca Prestia/Shutterstock.com	9
Photo 3	Lacosteman/Shutterstock.com	44



List of abbreviations

AIV	Advisory Council on International Affairs
AKP	Justice and Development Party (<i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i>)
CAATSA	Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act
CEAS	Common European Asylum System
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
EEC	European Economic Community
EPC	European Political Community
EU	European Union
G20	Group of Twenty
GNA	Government of National Accord
GNP	Gross national product
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
KIS	<i>Kennisplatform Inclusief Samenleven</i> [Knowledge Platform on Inclusive Coexistence]
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCTV	National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party (<i>Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan</i>)
PYD	Democratic Union Party (<i>Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat</i>)
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
TSK	Turkish armed forces (<i>Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri</i>)
UAV	unmanned aerial vehicle
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
US	United States
YPG	People's Defence Units (<i>Yekîneyên Parastina Gel</i>)

