

Turkish-Egyptian Relations after 2011: Political Dynamics of Geopolitical Turbulence¹

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Abstract:

The Arab Spring process, which started in Tunisia in 2010 and soon spread throughout the entire Arab world, ended in 2011 with the resignation of Hosni Mubarak's government in Egypt. Subsequently, as a result of the parliamentary elections held on November 28, 2011, the election of Mohammed Morsi under the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood caused great enthusiasm in the Turkish public and marked a high point in the history of bilateral relations. However, in 2013, relations reached a breaking point and were reduced to a minimum after Morsi and his supporters were removed from power in a coup. On the other hand, in addition to the deep-rooted historical backgrounds of Turkey and Egypt, the presence of diplomatic opportunities in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean in a geopolitical context enabled the repeated development of bilateral relations. Thanks to all of this, relations between the two states began to normalize at the diplomatic level since the end of 2020.

This study examines reasons for the development of the turbulent relationship between the two countries, which quickly reached both the peak and the bottom, before it began to normalize due to its geopolitical importance. The first part of the study examines Turkey's foreign policy during the Arab Spring and its reflections on Egypt. The second part analyzes the reasons for the relations that peaked with the Morsi era. Then, it examines the causes of the negative impact of the military coup that took place in Egypt in 2013, which led to the breaking point in bilateral relations. Finally, it seeks to comprehensively explore the causes of turbulent relations by examining relations that have recently begun to normalize due to geopolitical concerns.

Keywords:

Arab Spring, Egypt, geopolitics, turbulent relations, Turkey

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Introduction

From the last period of the Ottoman Empire to the present day, Turkish–Egyptian relations have had a turbulent structure. Since the late 19th century, the Ottoman Empire had lost its de facto dominance over Egypt. Afterward, the attempts to re-dominate Egypt during the First World War were inconclusive. At the end of the war, first the Ottoman Empire renounced its sovereign rights over Egypt with the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres (Derecho Internacional, n. d.) and then its successor state, the Turkish Republic, with the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs (n.d a)).

Turkey's independence aspirations, which began after the First World War, were followed closely and sympathetically by Egyptian intellectuals (Baş, 2015, p. 39). Although the abolition of the Sultanate in 1922 was met with suspicion, relations were restored when Turkey renounced its sovereign rights over Egypt with the proclamation of the Republic. On the other hand, Turkey's pursuit of the modernization movement in the early years of the republic led to a break in relations (Köse, 2017, p. 81).

Subsequently, the Arab-Israeli conflicts had continued the negative trend in relations. Although Turkey's initial negative vote on the decision of 30 November 1947 to divide Palestine between Arabs and Jews had a positive effect on the Arab world, it lost this positive attitude when it took office in the Palestine Conciliation Commission in 1948. In addition, Turkey received financial support from the United States and the Western world in order to ensure its own security and develop its economy, and the recognition of the State of Israel provoked strong criticism from Arab countries, particularly Egypt (Tiryakioğlu, 1979, pp. 84–85).

From this period until 2002, when the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP*) came to power in Turkey, the fluctuating relations continued. With AKP's coming to power in 2002, Turkey's perspective on the Middle East took on a new dimension. During this period, AKP made intensive efforts to get closer to Islamic countries that had been shunned by the Kemalist governments (Efegil, 2016, p. 46). Thus, relations with Arab states, including Egypt, developed rapidly and reached the level of friendship and brotherhood. It was during this period that Turkey developed an understanding of the 'brother countries' towards the Arab states. Thus, AKP wanted to increase its influence in the Middle East by using its soft power (Ekşi, 2018, p. 77).

In the process from 2011 to the present day, which constitutes the main focus of this study, the relations have experienced and are still experiencing one of the most fluctuating periods in their history. Although the turbulent relations that began during the Arab Spring reached a peak with the Muslim Brotherhood's rise to power in 2012, they plummeted back to the lowest point with the coup in 2013. Even recent geopolitically motivated normalization efforts have been on a turbulent trajectory.

In the brief historical overview above, I showed that Turkish-Egyptian relations have had their ups and downs throughout the history. From the last period of the Ottoman Empire until the Arab Spring, relations were at times friendly and stagnant. However, with the Arab Spring, relations reached their historical peak and then declined. It is therefore very important to analyze the reasons why relations reached their peaks and troughs in such a short period of time. In fact, this analysis can also contribute to normalization work today. It is necessary for both countries to take rational decisions by putting their national interest first and emotional motivations second.

Besides, Turkey and Egypt are both Middle Eastern and Eastern Mediterranean countries. Consequently, they are inevitably and directly affected by the problems arising in these regions. In this respect, peace and stability that will prevail in the region are vital for Turkey and Egypt, which are obliged to solve their economic and social problems and to develop. This is also true for other Arab states in the region. Realistic and fruitful cooperation between the two countries is an important step towards ensuring peace and stability in the region. Therefore, there is no situation that can prevent this friendship. The historical, religious, and cultural ties between the two countries can lay the foundations for a strong friendship to pursue national and common interests. Through mutual visits and joint efforts to solve the problems, Turkey and Egypt must prevent imperialist states from causing unrest and destabilization in the region.

I consider the Arab Spring as a period in this study because its effects are also very much felt in today's normalization dynamics. For this reason, it is very important to provide a comprehensive analysis of the ups and downs of political relations that began with the Arab Spring process. It is essential to identify the root causes of the latter, so that the two states do not make the same mistake in the latest normalization phase, which began at the end of 2020 and is still ongoing.

1. General Policy of Turkey during the Arab Spring

After a young man set himself on fire in Tunisia in 2010, Tunisians revolted against the regime, which then had repercussions for the whole Arab world. This struggle against authoritarian regimes was then known as the Arab Spring (Teti and Gervasio, 2011, p. 1).

The policy pursued by the AKP in power during the Arab Spring has provided a very interesting framework for Turkish foreign policy. In the pre-Arab Spring period, the AKP government sought to create zero problems with its neighbours³, the

³ The AKP's foreign policy doctrine over a period of time. Accordingly, it has sought to resolve conflicts with its neighbors through diplomacy and to develop close relations. The core elements of the doctrine are based on the book *Strategic Depth* written by Ahmet Davutoğlu.



establishment of order in the Middle East, regional peace, stability, prosperity, and similar values (Gözen, 2011, p. 2). However, the Arab Spring has turned the region into a battlefield (Duran and Özdemir, 2012, p. 186). In Turkey's final position on the Arab Spring, it can be argued that it followed an increasingly escalating process and eventually became a concrete policy. This process can be divided into five stages.

The first is a cautious, anxious, timid, and hesitant attitude. From 2002, when the AKP government came to power, until 2011, the beginning of the Arab Spring, Turkey was able to build an increasingly positive image of itself in the whole Islamic world, and especially in the Arab countries. In parallel with this image, Turkey had developed good commercial, economic, social, political, diplomatic, and strategic relations with these countries. Turkey's initial hesitancy in this respect was basically due to concern that its direct or indirect, material or image benefits might be damaged (Gözen, 2011, p. 15).

Second, Turkey has mediated between the rebel opposition and the dictators and consulted with Western countries to resolve the crisis. Meetings with Egyptian, Libyan and Syrian actors, as well as impressions and assessments gained in telephone or face-to-face meetings with leaders of other Western countries, have had a huge impact on Turkey's decision (CNN, 2011). In this direction, with Western support for change, the understanding of a turn towards the West has once again dominated since the history of the republic. Turkey, with its Western identity, sided with the people demanding democracy. Thus, it advised the forces of regime change to implement first and foremost the necessary reforms (Balci, 2013, p. 310). Later, this position was gradually strengthened on the side of the dissidents.

Thirdly, the clear stand on the side of the rebels and against the dictators means that Turkey clearly started to support the Arab Spring process. I mentioned earlier that one of the important reasons for this change in Turkey was the tendency to continue along the path of westernization after the establishment of the republic. However, it should also be emphasized here that it would be wrong to explain Turkey's commitment to the opposition side of the Arab Spring solely in terms of its so-called Western identity. I believe that there are many other reasons for this situation. For example, the 'moderate Islam'⁴ orientation of the insurgents was an important factor in Turkey's desire to become a leader in the Middle East. Turkey, with its liberal right-wing democracy, which can co-exist with Islam and democracy, could have strengthened its "democratic gains" by setting an example as a guardian to these countries, and while doing so, consolidating its leadership in the Middle East. Indeed, according to the moderate Islamic ideology, which is in line with the Muslim Brotherhood, democracy is a phenomenon that exists at the very core of Islam (Ülger, 2016, p. 149). In this context, if the adherents of this

⁴ In the West, this is the name given to a modernist and democratic interpretation of Islam that rejects radical and jihadist views.

ideology had succeeded, they would presumably have looked to Turkey as their model for democracy rather than to Western democratic systems.

Moreover, Turkish support for opposition forces can also be understood from a social constructivist perspective. According to this approach, normative values such as identity, faith and historical ties are significantly constitutive in shaping the foreign policy preferences of decision-makers (Çelikcan, 2020, p. 29). At the same time, once the AKP came to power, it determined the policy of establishing close relations with the Middle East countries due to its historical background and strategic interests. In this spirit, it has proceeded along the lines of “conservative democrats”, both by preserving Islamic values and by embracing democratic values (Özkoç, 2017, p. 83; Kayalı, 2016, p. 208). In this context, from a constructivist perspective, the uprising for democracy by opposition groups espousing Islamic values, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, during the Arab Spring is quite similar to the AKP’s understanding of social values and identity.

Fourth, Turkey has become involved in the Arab Spring developments at an advanced level, even pursuing a strident policy from time to time (Gözen, 2011, p. 4). Ankara harshly condemned the Egyptian military coup against Morsi and subsequently reduced all diplomatic contacts with Egypt to the lowest level (Demirtaş, 2013). It supported the struggle of the Government of National Accord (GNA)⁵ in Libya against General Khalifa Haftar⁶ and sent troops to Libya following a decision by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (Euronews, 2020). In Syria, it has been involved in proxy wars by providing extensive support to the Free Syrian Army in the civil war (Anadolu Agency, 2018). At the same time, it has repeatedly intervened militarily in Syria in self-defence and in the name of national security (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, n. d.).

Fifthly, Turkey is pursuing a smart power politics aimed at getting out of the current situation with as little damage as possible. Accordingly, Turkey applies both hard and soft power elements. In this context, it seeks to maximize its political leverage by mixing its military presence in Syria and Libya with soft power elements. In Syria, for example, Turkey has complemented soft power with military operations and hard power policies by providing infrastructure services in the region, health, food, accommodation, and education services, and in this context has started to engage in smart power diplomacy (Ekşi, 2018, p. 88). While Libya maintained its military support to the GNA, it signed a maritime boundary agreement to protect energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean. It has also sought to legitimise its military presence by emphasising its support for the elected Libyan government in the international arena. Another example is Turkey’s support for the GNA government, maintaining its presence in Libya despite the Egyptian government’s discomfort and entering the normalization phase with Egypt. Even if this situation is detrimental to normalization efforts with

⁵ The legitimate Libyan government recognized by the United Nations.

⁶ Commander-in-Chief of the Libyan National Army and rival of the GNA in the civil war.



Egypt, Turkey is trying to strike a balance with the principle of least damage (Cumhuriyet, 2022). In this context, I can say that Turkey is trying to cover the devastating impact of the Arab Spring with minimum damage and maximum benefit.

1.1. Turkey's Policy towards Egypt during the Arab Spring

In 2011, the revolutionary movement that spread to Egypt led to the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak's regime. Turkey's policy in Egypt was no different from its policy towards other Arab states and supported the opposition movement (Özyürek, 2016, p. 4). As discussed in the previous part of this paper, the desire to serve as a role model for moderate Islamic movements that came to power through elections plays an important role in this. In particular, if we take into account the political dynamics of Egypt and Turkey, the political structure of the Muslim Brotherhood is quite similar to the political conception of the AKP. It should be noted here, however, that Turkey has a tradition of democracy, albeit not perfect, and the AKP also adheres to the limits of this tradition to a certain extent, even if it follows an authoritarian line. In my opinion, there is a similarity between the AKP and the Muslim Brotherhood; the AKP is a democratic and relatively secular version of the Muslim Brotherhood. In this similarity, the AKP's desire to create a leadership model is due to its relative development.

For these reasons, Turkey was one of the first countries to openly support the popular uprising that began in Egypt. In this regard, following the protests that spread to Egypt, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called for the resignation of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011 (İHA, 2011). For Ankara, whose relations with the Assad government deteriorated during this period, Cairo was critical for the integration of the region (Özyürek, 2016, p. 107).

A day after calling on Mubarak to resign, Erdoğan said *"we have no intention of interfering in Egypt's internal affairs, but we are not a country that watches the Middle East from the sidelines."* He linked this stance of Turkey to its vision of active participation in regional politics (Yeşilyurt, 2020, p. 345). A few days later, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu stressed that *"the change in Egypt, the heart of the Arab world, will have a positive domino effect in the region"* and explained how Egypt is vital to Turkey's regional vision. Then, Former Turkish President Abdullah Gül showed how important he considered Egypt to be, as he was the first head of state to visit Egypt after the uprising (BBC, 2013). These developments indicated that Turkey was developing a new Egypt-centric regional policy to fill the power vacuum created by the Arab uprisings in the Middle East (Yeşilyurt, 2020, p. 345).

2. The Morsi Era in Egypt: Political Relations between 2012-2013

After the Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohammed Morsi won the Egyptian presidential election in June 2012, Turkish-Egyptian relations entered a golden age in their history (Köse, 2017, p. 166). The rise to power of a political movement ideologically close to the AKP in Egypt created a unique opportunity for Turkey to increase its prestige and influence in the Middle East (Yeşilyurt, 2020, p. 348). After all, one of the main reasons for Turkey's support for the Egyptian rebellion was ideological affiliation (Taş, 2022, p. 723). The AKP's guidance on electoral strategies for the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the political branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in the post-revolutionary period, was a concrete sign of its desire to see a government in Egypt that was ideologically close to it (Yeşilyurt, 2020, p. 348).

The first example of harmony in regional policy during this period was in Syria. The Egyptian-led Syrian Quadrilateral Regional Contact Group, which was set up to bring together Egypt, Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, enjoyed the full support of Turkey. At the first official meeting of the Contact Group held in Cairo on 17 September 2012, former Foreign Minister Davutoğlu stated that Turkey and Egypt's perspectives on Syria were 100 per cent in agreement and declared that *"in cooperation with Egypt, we will build a new Middle East with the participation of other states."* (Yeşilyurt, 2020, p. 349). Davutoğlu further said, "it is symbolic that the meeting was held in Cairo. Because there has been a change in line with the wishes of the people here, and there is an administration that comes to power with the votes of the people", clearly expressing his confidence and support for the Morsi administration (İnat, 2012, p. 15).

On the other hand, Morsi, who visited Turkey a few months after his election, made a speech at the AKP Congress on Syria and Palestine and reaffirmed Turkey's role in the region. Erdoğan made a return visit to Cairo in November 2012, when the conflicts between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip escalated. This visit was prominent in the Turkish press and was reported under the headline *"Erdoğan and Morsi warned Israel"* (TRT, 2012). Erdoğan's speeches during this visit focused on the Palestinian issue and cooperation between Turkey and Egypt, stressing that the two countries can govern and create stability in the region without external mediators. After the visit, Turkey also joined Egypt's efforts to achieve a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, a contribution that Egypt appreciated (Yeşilyurt, 2020, p. 349). In my view, another notable message during the visit was Morsi's: *"Israel should know very well that the countries of the region are not the former regional countries, and the regional leaders are not the former leaders. If Israel makes a move, it must be prepared to be punished for it."* (TRT, 2012). First of all, this rhetoric was very similar to the one Erdoğan used against Israel. Second, the emphasis on the fact that regional leaders are not ex-leaders suggests that Turkey's perception that it is on the side of the Ummah with the AKP was also manifested in Egypt.



Finally, in the summer of 2013, while the Morsi opposition in Egypt was gaining strength, Turkey continued to provide political guidance and assistance to the Muslim Brotherhood government. Most significantly, a few weeks before the major anti-Morsi protests of 30 June 2013, Hakan Fidan, former Undersecretary of State of the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MIT), travelled to Egypt to make recommendations and met with Morsi. All these facts showed that the Morsi government was trying to take advantage of its alliance with Turkey to fight the growing domestic opposition. It should be stressed that in this difficult political environment, the Muslim Brotherhood government found the support and guidance of a regional power like Turkey valuable in countering elements of the old regime and opposition (Yeşilyurt, 2020, p. 352).

3. Impact of the 2013 Military Coup on Political Relations

Both Morsi and the uncompromising attitude of the opposition paved the way for the coup in Egypt. The whole policy of the Muslim Brotherhood was to fill the void left by the old regime. They did not put forward political and social projects that would have brought pluralist democracy to Egypt or eliminated social inequalities. Wages that remained below inflation, rising taxes and reduced government support worsened living conditions (Köse, 2017, p. 167). As the situation became increasingly unfavourable, Morsi lost public support and even started protests against him (Kingsley, 2013). Secondly, the Muslim Brotherhood was not welcomed by actors of the old regime such as the bureaucracy, the judiciary, the media and the business world. Opposition groups, who believed they would lose the privileges they had gained during the blessed period, did everything they could to bring down the Morsi government (Köse, 2017, p. 168). Finally, the most important reason for the military coup is that, in addition to the Mubarak-era actors, international actors in the country, such as Israel, the United States, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, were also disturbed by the ideology and foreign policy approach of the Muslim Brotherhood and its intention to normalize relations with Iran. These foreign states, which had cooperated with opposition groups within the country and with actors of the old regime, put an end to Morsi's rule. The support of Turkey, Qatar, Libya, and Tunisia proved insufficient for the Morsi government. The old regime managed to re-consolidate its power and eventually removed the Muslim Brotherhood from power in a military coup (Köse, 2017, p. 168).

On 3 July 2013, a military coup led by Egyptian Defence Minister Abdel Fattah es-Sisi was met with counter-demonstrations by pro-Muslim Brotherhood members and the general population against the military coup (Alsharif and Perry, 2013). The military administration's disproportionate response to the anti-coup protests triggered a period of crisis in relations between Ankara and Cairo. Erdoğan reacted very harshly to the military coup in Egypt, both on national and international platforms. Likewise, Turkey has strongly criticised the Western countries' lack of reaction to the coup (Reuters, 2013). Moreover, Turkey opened its doors to Muslim Brotherhood members such as Amr

Darrag⁷, Jamal Abdul-Sattar⁸, and Wagdi Ghoneim⁹ (Yeşilyurt, 2020, p. 353). Relations with Egypt were first briefly strained by the repeated public condemnation of the coup and the refusal of Turkey to recognise the coup government, as well as protests over investigations and punishments against the Muslim Brotherhood, and then clearly stalled in November 2013 when the ambassadors of the two countries were declared *persona non grata* (Yeşilyurt, 2020, p. 353). Turkey's rigid reaction, which led to the outbreak of the crisis in bilateral relations, in fact has several causes.

Turkey's most frequently voiced argument is that the removal of a government elected by popular vote by a coup undermines democracy, which it considers unacceptable (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, 2013). Throughout Turkey's history, conservative governments have at times been exposed to military intervention on the grounds that they have moved away from the line of secularism. In particular, the postmodern coup¹⁰ against the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi, RP*) in 1997, of which Erdoğan was a member, caused great sensitivity and concern among the AKP cadres that came to power in 2002 (BBC, 2021). Earlier in this paper, I mentioned the similarities in the political views of the AKP and the Muslim Brotherhood. In this context, it is understandable that the AKP perceives this coup as being organized against itself and reacts harshly accordingly. In fact, statements by AKP administrators indicate that they have internalized the coup.

In the previous part of the paper, I also referred to the AKP's potential to approach the Muslim Brotherhood as a kind of role model, almost a "guardian", in its conservative Islamist and democratic form. It also meant that Turkey had a very critical ally in the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean with whom it had 'a heart and soul bond'. Yet perhaps most importantly, Turkey had the opportunity to reassert its leadership in the Middle East as a role model for Egypt. However, Ankara's chances were dashed in one fell swoop by the Cairo coup, after which Egypt continued to pursue a secular dictatorship. For all these reasons, relations with Egypt quickly reached perhaps the lowest point in its history.

The deterioration of relations between Turkey and Egypt led to a change in Egypt's Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean policy (Grigoriadis, 2014, p. 130). Egypt has moved closer to Bashar Assad's Syria on the one hand and has allowed the YPG/PYD to open an office in Cairo on the other (Erol, 2020). It has even sent 150 soldiers to Syria to support President Assad (CNN, 2020). In addition, the opportunities for gas production in the Eastern Mediterranean bring with them different economic and diplomatic initiatives between different countries. In this process, two triple alliances have been formed, one between Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt, and the other between

⁷ The former Minister of Planning and International Cooperation during the Morsi era.

⁸ The former Deputy Head of the Egyptian Religious Affairs Directorate.

⁹ Member of Muslim Brotherhood and Islamist preacher.

¹⁰ The process of forcing the government to resign through the media without directly seizing the administration by the Turkish Armed Forces on February 28, 1997, on the grounds of reactionism.

Greece, Cyprus, and Israel. While these alliances and rapprochements have negatively affected Egyptian-Turkish relations, they have improved Egyptian-Israeli relations (Kalyoncuoğlu and Kalyoncuoğlu, 2022, p. 24). All this suggests that the deteriorated relations have negatively affected Turkey both in the Middle East and in the Eastern Mediterranean.

4. Normalization for Geopolitical Interest

The normalization process between Turkey and Egypt started in late 2020. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan signalled this in August 2020 with an announcement that the intelligence services of the two countries had held talks. During that period, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu noted that attempts had been made to normalize with Egypt and stated that he had held a face-to-face meeting with Egyptian Foreign Minister Samih Shukri at the 2020 Organization of the Islamic Conference meeting and offered to work together on normalization (Şener, 2022, pp. 33–34).

Following these developments, the first round of negotiations between the two countries' Deputy Foreign Ministers took place in May 2021. Turkey and Egypt, which are considered rivals in the Eastern Mediterranean, announced that they had agreed to resume negotiations to stabilize relations after the second round of talks. In a joint statement, they said that they agreed to extend the talks following a two-day meeting in Ankara, reaffirming the will to make progress in the areas discussed and the need for further steps to normalize bilateral relations. (Kalyoncuoğlu and Kalyoncuoğlu, 2022, p. 27).

Through its normalization efforts, Turkey welcomed Egypt's respect for the continental shelf announced by Turkey in its hydrocarbon exploration. Thus, despite the agreement signed with Greece, Egypt has not started exploration activities in the areas that intersect the continental shelf declared by Turkey. (Şener, 2022, p. 34).

The process of rapprochement and normalization between the parties was then accelerated when Turkey made a written statement that the Turkish-Egyptian talks in Cairo had been conducted in a friendly atmosphere and on a broad basis. Another positive influence was the statements made by the two countries on the creation of an environment of peace and security in the Eastern Mediterranean (Kalyoncuoğlu and Kalyoncuoğlu, 2022, p. 27). Commenting on these meetings, Turkish Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu said, *“As the two countries with the longest land and coastline in the Eastern Mediterranean, we can negotiate with Egypt tomorrow on maritime jurisdictions and sign an agreement between us in the future, depending on the development of our relations”* (BBC, 2021). All this reflected the level of rapprochement and normalization that has been achieved so far.

In response to this, Ankara intervened in the Egyptian media broadcasts from Turkey, leading some media outlets to significantly change their previously strong anti-

Sisi tone, which was met with satisfaction in Cairo (Deutsche Welle, 2021). In fact, these normalization efforts were also positively received by the Muslim Brotherhood (Hamsici, 2022). Ali Hamed, the Muslim Brotherhood's press spokesman in Turkey, stated that *"Relations between the two peoples are already continuous and now the greater the distance between the governments, the better, because the leaders are not permanent, but the countries are"* (Hamsici, 2022).

As I have mentioned above and repeatedly stressed in this study, an important reason for the rapprochement was the geopolitical interests of the two countries in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. In contrast to the reconciliation of the Morsi era, the parties approached each other not with 'ties of the heart' but with 'strategic ties.'

Another reason for political convergence is the economy. Economically, eight years have been wasted in relations between Turkey and Egypt. This negative state of relations between the two countries has been reflected on both sides. For Turkey alone, this has meant the loss of a two-billion-dollar investment region, in addition to the loss of trade volume of around five billion dollars, and the loss of transit trade through Egyptian ports to the Gulf region (Öztürk, 2021, p. 207). Despite previous political tensions, it is in the interest of both countries that trade relations between Turkey and Egypt continue to recover after the partial downturn. With a population of nearly 110 million, Egypt needs markets like Turkey where it can generate stable export volumes. Likewise, Turkey benefits from Egypt as a country with a large population and links to Africa. Therefore, considering the benefits they bring to each other, it seems a logical step for the parties to pay attention to their sensitivities, not only from an energy perspective, but also from a commercial and political perspective (Kalyoncuoğlu and Kalyoncuoğlu, 2022, pp. 27-28). In the normalization phase, economic relations and political relations are mutually reinforcing. In my view, while the importance of economic relations leads to political convergence, this political convergence is likely to be reflected more positively in economic relations in the future.

In October 2022, Egyptian Foreign Minister Samih Shukri announced that the normalization process had been unilaterally suspended by Cairo due to Turkey's failure to take any action on Libya (Cumhuriyet, 2022). However, when Erdoğan was asked about relations with Egypt and Syria when he attended the G20 summit in Indonesia in November 2022, he said, "There can be no resentment in politics forever. When the time comes, you sit down, evaluate it, and you can make a renewal accordingly" - showing that the normalization process is continuing. Likewise, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's greeting and handshake with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Es Sisi at the opening reception for leaders at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar is another example of the continuing normalization process (BBC, 2022).

Normalization has accelerated especially since the beginning of 2023. The tragic earthquake centred in Kahramanmaraş/Turkey on February 6 gave rise to earthquake

diplomacy (Deutsche Welle, 2023). Egypt conveyed a message of solidarity in response to the earthquake. Immediately after the catastrophe, Sisi phoned Erdoğan and wished mercy on the victims and a swift recovery for the injured (TRT, 2023). Subsequently, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry undertook a visit to Turkey, offering gestures of solidarity and condolences. This was Cairo's highest-level visit to Turkey in more than a decade (CNN, 2023). The disaster created an appropriate environment to further accelerate the normalization process between Turkey and Egypt (Bakır, 2023).

The rapprochement created by earthquake diplomacy continued with Çavuşoğlu's visit to Cairo. From Turkish side, this was the first ministerial visit after 11 years (Deveci, 2023). During this visit, Çavuşoğlu stated that they wanted to increase cooperation in military, energy, and commercial fields (BBC, 2023). The demand for increased cooperation in the military sense is an indication that normalization efforts are not only a commercial aspect. His recurrent use of the term 'brother' when referring to his counterpart indicated the potential for normalization extending beyond strategic ties. Additionally, he expressed the intention to promptly appoint an ambassador to Cairo (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, 2023). It is significant for the expediting of normalization process.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict could have both positive and negative effects on the rapprochement between the two countries. The Egyptian government, which has strategic relations with Israel and the United States and ideological differences with Hamas, wants to protect its diplomatic interests while at the same time avoiding public backlash (Telci, 2023; Taha, 2023). For this reason, it has often emphasized the interests of the Palestinian people, even though it has mostly acted as a mediator (Telci, 2023). On the Turkish side, Erdoğan stated that he did not consider Hamas as a terrorist organization (Gumrukcu and Hayatsever, 2023). Although it is unlikely that the two countries will agree on this issue, it seems that they will agree on in terms of the humanitarian perspective of civil losses and interests of the Palestinian people (Khazen et al., 2023). Concurrently, while in Ankara, Shoukry asserted that *"there exists a substantial consensus between Egypt and Turkey regarding the Palestinian issue, particularly in supporting the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people"* (Khazen et al., 2023).

Following this, Hakan Fidan, the new Foreign Minister of Turkey, visited Egypt, signalling that normalization would be a paramount focus of the government. It was also indicated that a consensus was reached on the immediate cessation of hostilities and intensified efforts to restore calm (Euronews, 2023). Gaza Diplomacy continued at the level of presidents of the two states. In the initial telephone conversation between presidents Erdoğan and Sisi in November 2023, discussions encompassed Israel's assaults on Gaza and potential measures to secure a ceasefire (Altaş, 2023). Subsequently, at the Extraordinary Joint Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Arab League, Erdoğan and Sisi delved into considerations regarding humanitarian aid and actions against conflict (NTV, 2023). Based on this, it can be said that by

emphasizing the issues on which the two states agree regarding the Gaza blockade, it has turned the normalization process perfectly into an advantage so far. Notably, the influences of earthquake diplomacy and Palestine diplomacy are evident in the hastening of the normalization trajectory. Although the differences of opinion regarding Hamas have not been emphasized so far, it remains unclear how they will affect the issue in the future. However, so far, leaders have chosen to expedite their normalization by conducting diplomacy on the issues they agree on.

Conclusion and Recommendations

At the heart of the turbulent relations are the changes in Egypt. Since the start of the Egyptian revolution in 2011, there have been several changes in the political forces. However, the AKP, in power in Turkey since 2002, has remained in power through all these internal dynamics. On the other hand, it would not be correct to claim that the AKP has pursued a stable policy towards Egypt. As the study shows, although the AKP has changed its policy mainly in line with the change of political power in Egypt, it has pursued a different policy. The best example of this is the normalization of relations, which reached its nadir with the Sisi administration, in line with current interests. The fact that there are challenges in the normalization phase brings with it some conclusions in order to avoid making the same mistakes in the future as in the past.

Recently, the Egyptian government announced that the normalization process has been suspended because Turkey has not taken any steps on Libya. However, both Erdoğan's statements at the G20 summit in Indonesia and the handshake between the two leaders at the opening of the World Cup in Qatar show that the normalization process is continuing. In this context, I would like to make some suggestions for a more effective way forward for normalization, which is in the national interest of both countries.

Turkey should not interfere in Egypt's internal political dynamics, as it did in the Arab Spring process. Democracy should not be a means for Turkey to gain influence in Egypt. If Egypt switches to democracy, it should do so because it believes it really needs to. Turkey's rhetoric will not speed up Egypt's transition to democracy; on the contrary, it will have a negative impact on relations. In the same way, Turkey is a country whose democratization process is continuing. However, the discourse of democratization coming from the West is generally not welcomed in Turkey and is perceived, on the contrary, as interference by the West in domestic affairs. This is also true for Egypt.

Moreover, Sisi's seizure of power in the coup and Turkey's response to it, i.e. the severing of ties, did not strengthen Turkey's leadership in the Middle East, in fact it did. On the contrary, Turkey has become even more isolated in the region. Similarly, the loss of a partner like Turkey has deprived Egypt of an important partner in the region



and in economic relations. The deterioration of bilateral relations is not in the interest of either party.

On Libya, Turkey supports the legitimate government recognized by the UN. Therefore, the presence of Turkish soldiers in Libya should be considered legitimate. Ankara should not make any concessions in this situation. However, the Turkish leadership must not use the presence in Libya as a threat to Egypt. Turkey's presence in Libya must be tailored to the Libyan GNA's request and must not infringe on Libya's sovereign rights.

The rapprochement between the two countries is of great importance for their national interests, as a result of normalization and the establishment of a strategic partnership. In contrast to the Morsi-era rapprochement, this rapprochement is not a "bond of the heart" but a strategic reconciliation because of geopolitical and economic interests. It is very important for the future that both sides take the step and establish a strategic partnership. Because the peoples of Turkey and Egypt are two nations that have been sincerely linked throughout history. This strategic rapprochement will bring with it a bond of hearts in the future, regardless of governments.

Conflict of Interest

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

Notes on Contributor

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