

## FRENCH IMPACT ON TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY SINCE 2012

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### Abstract

Türkiye and France have had good relations since 1921. But interests of Türkiye and France do not mostly align and does even conflict in many cases since 2012. Even that France is at the very center of many problematic issues that Türkiye has to deal with. The two parties are on the opposite sides of each of many foreign policy issues -namely relations in the EU framework, the events of 1915, Mediterranean, Syrian question, possession of influence in Africa and the positions in the Caucasians- and Türkiye has to cope with French foreign policy to achieve its aims because France as a great power can not be disregarded easily for its capability to affect the course of events. The competition in foreign policy between two countries can be interpreted in terms of status quoism and revisionism. In some policy areas France is a status quo state while Türkiye is a revisionist and in some other areas, the roles are exchanged. This study aims to reveal the positions of two sides in the selected policy areas and display the challenging impact of France in Turkish Foreign Policy by using case study approach.

**Keywords:** France, Türkiye, Turkish Foreign Policy, status quoism, revisionism

**JEL Classification:** F50, F51, F52

## 2012' DEN İTİBAREN TÜRK DIŞ POLİTİKASINDA FRANSIZ ETKİSİ

### Öz

Türkiye ve Fransa 1921' den beri iyi ilişkilere sahip olmuştur fakat Türkiye ve Fransa' nın çıkarları her zaman uyuşmamakta hatta 2012' den beri pek çok konuda çatışmaktadır. Hatta Fransa, Türkiye' nin uğraşmak durumunda olduğu pek çok problemleri konunun merkezinde yer almaktadır. Avrupa Birliği çerçevesinde ilişkiler, 1915 Olayları, Akdeniz, Suriye meselesi, Afrika' da nüfuz elde etme ve Kafkaslar' daki pozisyonlar gibi pek çok dış politika meselesinde iki taraf sorunun karşı taraflarında yer almakta ve Türkiye, büyük bir güç olarak Fransa' nın olayların seyrini değiştirebilme kabiliyeti nedeniyle kolayca görmezden gelemeyeceği için Fransız dış politikası ile mücadele etmek durumunda kalmaktadır. İki ülke arasındaki bu dış politika yarışı statükoculuk ve revizyonizm kavramları ile yorumlanabilir. Bazı politika alanlarında Fransa statükocu iken Türkiye revizyonist olmakta, bazı diğer alanlarda roller değişebilmektedir. Bu çalışma vaka analizi yaklaşımı ile iki tarafın seçilen politika alanlarındaki pozisyonlarını ortaya koyma ve Türk Dış Politikası' ndaki Fransa' nın zorlayıcı etkisini gösterme amacındadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Fransa, Türkiye, Türk Dış Politikası, Statükoculuk, Revizyonculuk

**JEL Sınıflandırması:** F50, F51, F52

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## 1. Introduction

Türkiye<sup>2</sup> and France has had good relations since 1921. The signing of the Treaty of Ankara (or Franklin-Bouillon Agreement) in 1921 ushered in a new era of relations between the two countries. Moreover, Türkiye signed the alliance treaty with Britain and France in October 1939 right before World War II. After the war both France and Türkiye were in the Western Bloc. They both were members of the Organization for European Economic Co-operation. Türkiye joined the Council of Europe in 1949 and North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1952 and applied for membership to the European Economic Community of which France was one of the founders. Today France is one of the most important members of the European Union to which Türkiye became a part of the customs union in 1996 and a candidate country in 1999. And as for today, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, based on the presence of more than 650 thousand Turks in France and their long-standing relationship, France is a significant economic and trading partner as well as one of Türkiye's top allies (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic Türkiye a). And French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs states about Turkey that converging views on a number of significant international issues and close bilateral cooperation in the fight against terrorism and in economic affairs (within the framework of the JETCO - Joint Economic and Trade Committee) have been major factors in the strengthening of bilateral dialogue since 2012 (French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs a). Indeed two developments in 2012 made it significant year for bilateral relations between two countries. First one was the transfer of French presidency by elections from Nicolas Sarkozy to François Hollande. Second one was the French Senate's adoption of a law titled "The Law to punish the Denial of the Existence of Genocides Recognized as such by the Law" on 23 January 2012.

More information in line with what has been told until here can be augmented and that would picture a panorama where two countries had close friendly ties. But this also could be deceiving. What the diplomats avoid saying is that the interests of Türkiye and France do not mostly align and do even conflict in many cases. Even that France is at the very center of many problematic issues that Türkiye has to deal with. Adding some exaggeration, it can be said that France is both a friend and a foe to Turkey; a friend for being "*an important trade and economic partner*" and a foe for restraining Türkiye reach its foreign policy goals.

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<sup>2</sup> The country name "Türkiye" replaced "Turkey" at the UN at the request of Türkiye in 2022.

This study aims to display the problematic interactions between France and Türkiye and support the hypothesis that France has a much more challenging impact on Türkiye's foreign policy than it is paid attention to and is among the primary adversaries that Türkiye has to compete with to realize its interests.

## 2. Methodology

A hint was given in the previous paragraph about the methodology of the study. Examining the interests of Türkiye and France in more than one case demands case-study approach. So six cases -being in order: relations in the EU framework, the events of 1915, Mediterranean question, Syrian question, possession of influence in Africa and positions in the Caucasians- were selected to this end. Two countries' positions in those cases in terms of status quoist and revisionist on the mentioned cases are going to be pictured to determine whether the two countries' policies align or conflict. If both sides are status quoist in one policy are it means that they are both satisfied with the current situation and therefore their policies align. If one is status quoist while the other one is revisionist this means conflict. If both sides are revisionists than it can be tricky because two parties' revisionist policies may differ and it can mean conflict again. According to this formulation the study should come to a conclusion where there is not any case that both Türkiye and France are status quoist or their revisionist policies are in the same direction.

## 3. The basis of incongruity

As mentioned above foreign policies of the two states contradict many grave areas. There are key concepts in international relations that can help us to clarify the reason why the two states contend with each other: revisionism and status quosim.

Revisionism, as it is commonly used in international relations literature, is willing to change the prevalent international order while status quosim is preserving the established order (Oran, 2001, 46). In other words, "*revisionists seek to change the way things are in international politics, status-quo seekers strive to preserve things as they are*" (Davidson, 2006, 1). In this study, revisionism is going to be referred as being willing to make changes in international politics and status quoism as being willing to maintain the established order whether it is fair, lawful, illicit, or not.

In *Türk Dış Politikası Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar Cilt II: 1980-2001* (Turkish Foreign Policy: Events, Documents, Comments from the War of Independence to Present), one of the major course books of international relations programs

in almost all Turkish universities, status quoism is presented as one of the two pillars of Turkish foreign policy (the other one is Westernism) (Oran, 2001, 46). In this study main arguments are going to be built on the idea that Türkiye is revisionist in some policy areas against France. But it does not mean this study is challenging the rooted view because the concepts status quosim and revisionism can be elusive. Further, in the mentioned book Türkiye's status quoism is elaborated as maintaining the existing borders and balances. Maintaining the existing borders means being satisfied with the existing borders and not being willing to make any changes. Maintaining the existing balances means ensuring and/or sustaining balances in the framework of established order (Oran, 2001, 46-49). This study does not disaffirm this view and only aims to manifest that the bilateral relations of Türkiye and France comprise of antagonism besides cooperation and when it comes to certain major policy areas Türkiye takes a revisionist stance and France a status quoist and vice versa. It means that while one state strives to defend and/or maintain the status quo, the other one endeavors to change the existing situation.

Davidson infers that “*rising states tend toward revisionism and declining states tend toward status-quo seeking*” (2006, 1). As mentioned above in the framework of Türkiye- France relations, for most policy areas- like Africa or the Mediterranean- France's stance is status quoist while Türkiye seems revisionist. Does that mean France is a declining state and Türkiye is one that rises? The answer to that question is not intended to be given in this study. And Davidson's postulate may not be necessarily valid through this study as it is going to strive to display that in some policy areas France is status quo state while Türkiye is revisionist and in some other areas the roles are exchanged.

#### **4. What Türkiye wants**

Before looking over the mentioned cases, a little perspective on the Turkish foreign policy may be fruitful.

Baskın Oran defines medium power/middle power which he considers Türkiye to be one, as a state that affects the international system marginally but can influence regional policy – especially small neighbors-, but more importantly can resist coercion from great powers, bargain with them and even emperce their behaviors by utilizing the conjuncture (2003, 30). Indeed, in different periods of its history Türkiye's foreign policy was determined in parallel with its capabilities. So what Türkiye wants is what it can do; it wants to influence regional policy and wants to resist coercion from great powers as long as it is possible.

This is also true that it wants to influence small neighbors; but the phrase should be modified to "destabilized neighbors". Türkiye wants to have control over and change the course of events occurring in destabilized regions near its borders. That is why Türkiye has conducted military operations in northern Iraq and Syria, gets involved in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and strives to be active in the Mediterranean and Libya.

### **5. French Impediment on Türkiye's Path to EU**

Türkiye's efforts to engage the European integration began with its application to European Economic Community in 1959 and carried on with Ankara Agreement, "Agreement creating an association between the European Economic Community (EEC) and Turkey" in 1963. In 1995 Customs Union between European Union (EU) and Türkiye was established and became effective as of January 1<sup>st</sup> of 1996. And 36 years later from Ankara Agreement Türkiye was granted candidate status to European Union in 1999. Accession negotiations have begun in 2005 and have not concluded yet as of 2022 (furthermore it is not expected to be concluded soon).

Although recently Türkiye seems to stray away from the EU path and as some MEPs of the European Parliament put in 2021 EU-Turkey relations are at a historic low point, the EU is still among Türkiye's foreign policy priorities. And French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs' website declares that "*France supports Turkey's rapprochement with Europe through its bilateral cooperation (cf. France-Turkey relations) and its involvement in projects financed with Community financial assistance: technical assistance, institutional twinings between French and Turkish administrations, involvement of French organizations in projects concerning civil society*" (French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs b). But this always has been not the case. Shortly after the negotiations started Türkiye faced continuous vetoes blocking chapters both with regard to their openings and their provisional closures that came from a different member but mostly from Cyprus and France (Müftüler-Baç and Cicek, 2016, 10). Based on its belief that "opening these chapters would prejudice the conclusion of discussions concerning accession", France opposed the opening of 5 Chapters between 2007 and 2013, varying from economics and financial affairs to regional policy. Similarly to this, Nicolas Sarkozy argued in 2007 that a "Union for the Mediterranean" may be a better approach for Türkiye's relations with the EU than full membership because Türkiye's participation in this Union would be significant (Müftüler-Baç, 2016, 98-99). France's attitude towards Türkiye was put to use as negative propaganda by The Anti-EU fractions in Türkiye and made Turks lose their trust in the EU (Baykal and Arat, 2013, 373).

It was in 2013 when France lifted its veto on “Regional policy”, which had no opening benchmarks (Müftüler-Baç and Cicek, 2016, 189). And in the context of the refugee “agreement”, two negotiation chapters (Chapters 17 and 33) that France had previously vetoed were opened in 2015 and 2016 (Lippert, 2021, 284).

Which one was status quoist and which one was revisionist in this process? Obviously, France was the status quoist against Türkiye. Bearing in mind that the EU is not static as it experienced and is still experiencing many phases of widening and deepening, how can we introduce France as status quoist in such a vicissitudinous structure?

What makes France status quoist, in this case, is its effort –blocking negotiation chapters- to keep EU Türkiye-free. There may be a raft of reasons behind France’s Türkiye-free EU policy, ranging from a negative image of Türkiye among the people to the reluctance to make changes that would be made in EU policy-making and decision-taking processes if Türkiye was ever to become a member. These several reasons led French administrations to make an effort to keep Türkiye out of EU enlargement while Türkiye was striving for membership. In sum, France was defending the status quo: EU without Türkiye.

## 6. Meds Yeghern?

As it is in the title, the year 2012 was selected obviously for a reason. As like mentioned above French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs propounds that *bilateral dialogue* (between France and Türkiye) *has strengthened since 2012*. That means 2012 can be perceived as a breaking point for the bilateral relations between the two countries.

On 23 January 2012 French Senate adopted a law titled “The Law to punish the Denial of the Existence of Genocides Recognized as such by the Law (Loi visant à réprimer la contestation de l’existence des génocides reconnus par la loi)”. Although President Sarkozy and the proposer of the law Valerie Boyer made efforts to explain the law does not target Türkiye, the press and media insistently referred to the law as The Law Punishing the Denial of the Armenian Genocide (Loi pénalisant la contestation du génocide arménien) (Yakış, 2012, 289-290). The press and media were partly true because there was another bill that was adopted in 2001 composed of one sentence "France recognizes the Armenian genocide of 1915" (Yakış, 2012, 303). Türkiye considers the allegations of genocide a threat to its national honor.

When the Lower House of Parliament of France approved the bill in the last month of 2011, Türkiye suspended military, economic and political ties and briefly recalled its ambassador (Willsher and Jones, 2012) and then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan enunciated France perpetrated “genocide” during the war against Algerian independence in the 1950s and 1960s (CNN, 2012). The law was taken to France’s Constitutional Council in 2012 and The Council concluded that the measure, which would have subjected genocide deniers to a 45,000-euro fine, a year in prison, or both, violated the norms of free speech (Vinocur and Hemming, 2012). On 22 December 2016 French Parliament adopted an amendment to the Law on Equality and Citizenship that expands the scope of the law to criminalize the denial of genocides in the absence of a court decision. In cohesion with its previous decisions, The Constitutional Council of France annulled the relevant amendment on the basis that the relevant Article violated the right to freedom of expression and was in breach of the French Constitution (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye b). Yet this did not stop France from holding national day of commemoration of the Armenian genocide for the first time 2019.

The Events of 1915 are one of the main issues that Türkiye has to deal with. Obviously, Türkiye does not desire to be labeled as a genocide perpetrator. Turkish diplomats do overtime every year as 24 April approaches. Is the president of the USA going to use the term genocide or meds yeghern? It is a big deal that Türkiye faces every year. Türkiye’s stance is it *“does not deny the suffering of Armenians, including the loss of many innocent lives, during the First World War. However, greater numbers of Turks died or were killed in the years leading to and during the War. Without belittling the tragic consequences for any group, Türkiye objects to the one-sided presentation of this tragedy as a genocide by one group against another.”* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye c). So this is noted as another issue that the two sides confront. Türkiye is status quoist in terms of this issue. Many countries are recognizing The Events of 1915 as genocide but there is no global consensus on accusing Türkiye of perpetrating genocide and clearly, Türkiye wants this situation unchanged.

## **7. Brawl in the Mediterranean**

As known, there has been a list of disputes between Türkiye and Greece in the Aegean Sea, and on top of that, the Cyprus issue remains unsolved. When hydrocarbon reserves were discovered in the Mediterranean in the early 2000s, a new chapter of the dispute was added to Turkish-Greek conflicts. Soon the Mediterranean dispute amplified and became multilateral. This day all littoral states and some foreign players are parties to this conflict.

There are two key factors of the brawl in the Mediterranean. One is the situation on Cyprus Island and the other one is the delamination of maritime boundaries. There are two states on Cyprus Island. Republic of Cyprus (RoC), or as Türkiye sees it Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus (GASC), enjoys international recognition while the other state Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) lacks it. Considering itself the only legitimate entity, RoC set out to sign agreements on exclusive economic zones (EEZ) with littoral states. The first of these agreements was the one with Egypt in 2003. Then came the agreement with Lebanon in 2007 and with Israel in 2010. Based upon these agreements which Türkiye contested, RoC gave licenses for the exploration of hydrocarbon resources to many international corporations including the French energy giant TOTAL. Meantime Türkiye made its moves and signed an agreement delineating a part of Türkiye's and the TRNC's continental shelves in the Eastern Mediterranean in 2011. Shortly after the agreement, TRNC gave licenses for the exploration and exploitation of oil and gas reserves around the Island to the Turkish Petroleum Corporation. After that, many incidents occurred in the Mediterranean where Turkish naval forces and other states' ships faced off. Soon *the struggle for influence over the Eastern Mediterranean* started to dwell *at the core of Franco-Turkish tensions* (Jabbour, 2022, 127). France's strong support for Greece and Cyprus's claims frustrated Türkiye. France did not settle only for verbal support. *France sold Rafale fighter jets to Greece, dispatched the Charles de Gaulle nuclear-powered aircraft carrier to the Eastern Mediterranean, and participated in joint military exercises with Nicosia and Athens* (Jabbour, 2022, 128).

As Örmeci puts it, one of Macron's policies towards the East Mediterranean is counterbalancing Türkiye, *by establishing close relations with the Republic of Cyprus, Greece, and Israel and protecting the interests of French energy giant TOTAL.* (2021, 103). Thus France did not hesitate to join the *coalition between Israel-RoC-Greece-Egypt which is a prominent counter to Turkey and the TRNC* (2022, 213). This coalition, joined by Italy, Jordan, and Palestine established the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF). The formation of EMGF displayed the intention to exclude Türkiye and TRNC from the Mediterranean energy question.

What to say about Türkiye-France relations in the Mediterranean in terms of revisionism and status quoism? Jabbour gives a concentrated answer: *The Turkish-French standoff is, therefore, at its core, a power rivalry between a traditional, well-entrenched power in the Mediterranean – France – and an emergent middle power that acts as a contender and*

*challenger to the old regional order. In this sense, the Turkish-French confrontation is to be placed in the framework of the global power shift and the rise of middle powers who take a revisionist stand towards the status quo ante by questioning the European-centric order* (Jabbour, 2021, 2).

## **8. Conflicting Positions In Syria**

Since the Arab Spring spilled over Syria, demonstrations against the Assad regime began in 2011. Soon the situation transformed into a multi-sided turmoil throughout the country where many power focals -like Free Syrian Army, Syrian Democratic Forces, al-Nusra Front, and Islamic State- claiming legitimacy emerged. External actors -two of them being Türkiye and France- also got involved in the Syrian civil war.

Turkish administration had good ties with the Assad regime before Arab Spring but this did not last long after the demonstrations began. Even Turkish President Erdogan who had close ties to Assad before Arab Spring started to call Assad a killer/murderer.

As the Assad regime lost control over some regions in Syria, the vacuum was filled by diverse actors. External actors backed these diverse internal actors in line with their Syrian policies. The involvement of other countries in the Syrian civil war by giving support to different groups stirred up people to call it a proxy war. Generally speaking Russia and Iran gave support to the Assad regime; the US, UK, and France provided support for the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) as they perceive them as “moderate” rebel groups (BBC, 2022). Türkiye backed the formerly Free Syrian Army (FSA) -now the Syrian National Army (SNA)-. This is where Türkiye and France came across again.

SDF is dominated by the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) which has links to PKK (Wilgenburg, 2020). PKK is a terrorist organization responsible for thousands of deaths in Türkiye. Its separatist goals are unacceptable so any development that can lead to its empowerment has been and is being watched closely by Türkiye. So the empowerment of SDF in Syrian regions near the Türkiye border is a major concern and Türkiye tries to block the advancement of the SDF. In this context, France's support of SDF is perceived as a hostile stance against Türkiye's integrity. PYD/YPG is a national security threat to Türkiye but *France has established direct contacts with these groups mainly because it views them as an asset and a partner in the fight against ISIS* (Jabbour, 2022, 132). As the cliché goes, “one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter”.

Türkiye not only backed opposition groups but also conducted military operations in Syrian regions near its border. With Operation Euphrates Shield in 2016, Operation Olive Branch in 2018, and Operation Peace Spring in 2019, Türkiye eliminated most of IS and YPG-PKK threats. And as of 2022 Türkiye's position against the Assad regime began to alter. In October Turkish President Erdoğan stated that he can meet Assad when the right time comes (Reuters, 2022). France's stance is unlike that. From the French point of view, the administration of Bashar Al-Assad has repeatedly violated the most basic rights, some of which may qualify as war crimes and crimes against humanity and France has pledged to make sure that those responsible for these murders are brought to justice (French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs c).

Although Türkiye's stance towards the Assad regime seems to be changed Türkiye's status quoist policy towards Syria remains intact. Türkiye does not wish to see a dismembered Syria as it can lead to a Kurdish state which could affect the separatist elements in Türkiye. An integrated and consolidated Syria means stability in the region and a front against separatists, needless to mention the negative effects of illegal migration. At first, Türkiye reckoned a new Syria without Assad but the developments since 2011 showed that it may not be real and Assad may not be gone. An integrated Syria with Assad is considered more favorable than a severed Syria without Assad because the latter may have the potential to materialize Türkiye's fear of disruption that can stem from a Kurdish state in the region. In sum from Türkiye's point of view status quo of the territorial integrity of Syria is desirable for it leaves no space for Kurdish separatists.

## **9. Scramble for Africa**

In brief "scramble for Africa" refers to the struggle between European powers for the colonization of Africa in the last quarter of 1800s. In todays, people talk about the "new scramble for Africa". Since the age of colonialism passed into history, the new scramble is different than the old one. The new scramble of Africa is about establishing political, diplomatic, and economic ties with African countries and gaining influence over them. Türkiye embarked on that mission in the early 2000s and once again, like the other political issues mentioned above, came across France which has strong ties and influence over some African countries like Algeria, Senegal, Mali, and Niger because of the colonial past. Some indicators display that this trend can shift. Results of 2021 Africaleads survey point to France's decline in popularity while Türkiye and the Gulf countries are on the rise (Marbot, Toulemonde, 2021).

Turkish efforts to take on a larger role in an area that has traditionally been under French influence have recently accelerated in the French-Turkish rivalry in the Sahel (Grigoriadis, Fusiek, 2022, 5). Türkiye's engagement with African countries which are parts of *Françafrique* is not welcomed by France.

Türkiye strives to establish diverse ties throughout the African continent. Numerous bilateral economic, diplomatic, and military agreements were signed between Türkiye and African countries. Türkiye's initiatives towards Niger are significant for the Türkiye-France competition in Africa. Türkiye was not confined to signing economic and defense agreements in 2021 but also Türkiye's *entrance into Niger's mining industry had a serious impact on Turkey-French competition in the economic area* (Örmeci and Yılmaz, 2022, 104). Türkiye's growing export to Algeria is another challenge for France because France is the second largest exporter to Algeria and Türkiye is moving towards being one of Algeria's top foreign investors (Tanchum, 2020). Another country that Türkiye takes the initiative to establish good relations with is Mali which is deemed to be under the French sphere of influence. Türkiye also managed to maintain good relations and sign agreements with Somalia, Ethiopia, and Sudan in recent years.

Another aspect of Türkiye's African orientation includes drones. Drones were also employed by Türkiye to create important facets of its African policy. With what is called "drone diplomacy", Türkiye has improved high-level ties with Morocco and Ethiopia; two nations in which Türkiye has significant economic and geopolitical interests (Borsari, 2022).

So it is clear Türkiye is revisionist in Africa. France relies on its strong historical, cultural, economic, and military ties with African countries which used to be former colonies. On the other hand, Türkiye is taking bold steps and making serious efforts to exert its influence using anti-colonial discourse. While France is endeavoring to retain its ties strong as a status quoist, Türkiye is striving to make room for itself challenging France's strong position in Africa.

#### **10. What about Caucasians?**

Caucasians is another region where Türkiye's and France's aspects do not align. 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War unearthed the rupture of Turkish and French policies in Caucasians and became a backdrop to competition.

Nagorno-Karabakh conflict arouse amid the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Both Armenia and Azerbaijan emerged as sovereign states in 1991 and when Nagorno-Karabakh officially declared independence while internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan, clashes erupted between Azerbaijan and Armenia. As a result of the war, Armenia gained control of Nagorno-Karabakh. Bishkek Protocol was signed in 1994 by Russian efforts leaving Nagorno-Karabakh *de facto* independent, with a self-proclaimed government in Stepanakert, but still heavily reliant on close economic, political, and military ties with Armenia (The Council on Foreign Relations, 2022). Ignoring some sporadic clashes that did not cause major changes in the region, this was the status quo until 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War.

Türkiye and France are on opposite sides of this conflict. While France reiterated its diplomatic support to Armenia, Türkiye not only gave diplomatic support but also armed and equipped Azerbaijan leading Azerbaijani forces to reclaim a significant part of Nagorno-Karabakh from Armenia (Weiss, 2022, 323). Furthermore, France accused Türkiye of sending jihadists from northern Syria to Nagorno-Karabakh to fight on the Azerbaijani side also Armenia's ambassador to Moscow opined the same (Irish, Rose, 2020). Whether the last claim was true or not, Türkiye's intervention in the conflict changed the course of events.

French presence is essential in this conflict because France is one of the three co-chairmen of the Minsk Group, a group constituted in 1992 in the framework of OSCE – the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe for finding a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Minsk Group has been existing for nearly 30 years but could not achieve any progress in finding a peaceful solution. Many consider Minsk Group as ineffective, unhelpful, and even *bankrupt and dead* (Cutler, 2021). Yet France insisted on the Minsk Group to play its role in defining the surveillance after the ceasefire agreement signed between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia because of the *concerns in Paris that Russia and Turkey could strike a deal to cut out Western powers from future peace talks* (Irish, 2020).

Türkiye has been revisionist from the start in Nagorno-Karabakh issue as a loyal ally of Azerbaijan. Therefore Türkiye has always supported Azerbaijan's claims and tried to make efforts to change the status quo of Armenia's invasion of Nagorno-Karabakh. France can be seen as status quoist in the same subject because of its support to Armenia and its role in the Minsk Group that could not make any change in this conflict.

## 11. Conclusion

According to the results of a survey conducted in Türkiye in 2022, participants consider the USA, Israel, Armenia, and Greece respectively a threat to Türkiye where France holds the 8<sup>th</sup> place after England, Iran and Iraq. In addition slightly more than %60 of the participants do not see France as a friend of Türkiye (Aydın et al., 2022, 44-45). These results are compatible with the claims of this study about France having a much more negative impact on Türkiye's foreign policy than it is paid attention to. There are certain conflicts between Türkiye and Armenia, Greece, Iraq, and Iran. But all of them can be considered bilateral and regional issues. Türkiye's relations with Israel have been generally positive since its foundation leaving some specific incidents aside. Thus considering Israel a threat to Türkiye should be related to some other sociological context. So Turkish people envisage France as the least threatening one among the great powers in question (that are USA and England). But as seen above in all major policy areas Türkiye has to face French contestation.

As quoted in the introduction, French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs conveys that (referring to Türkiye) *bilateral dialogue has strengthened since 2012, due largely to converging views on several major international issues*. But this may not necessarily be true as it was argued throughout the study. On the contrary, there are remarkable divergences and contesting policy exercises on many issues.

It was claimed that "France is at the very center of many problematic issues that Türkiye has to deal with" and as can be observed throughout the study, this claim is valid for the six major foreign issues Türkiye is facing. The two parties are on opposite sides of each of these issues and Türkiye has to cope with French foreign policy to achieve its interests because France as a great power cannot be disregarded easily for its capability to affect the course of events.

Turkish-French contradiction can be interpreted in the context of status quoism and revisionism. In most policy areas, France is status quoist as a pattern of great power and Türkiye is revisionist as revisionism is generally a pattern of rising powers. Yet, in two of six policy areas which are 1915 Events and Syria questions, Türkiye's stance is revisionist bolstering the enunciation in the introduction that sometimes the roles are exchanged. This does not mean that the two countries are enemies but it is obvious that there is a competition for realizing interests; a competition that is not going to vanish in short term.

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