



Policy Paper

No Policy Change expected on EU-Turkey Relations: A new German Government with old established Narratives

An Analysis of the Coalition Agreement 2021

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Olaf Scholz, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Angela Merkel on G20 Summit 2021 in Rome. Source: Murat Çetinmührüdar/ TCCB.

Takeaways

(1) The new coalition agreement between the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), the Free Democratic Party (FDP) and Alliance 90/The Greens is of major importance for Germany and for Europe. The new leaders aim at ambitious and courageous reforms, but likewise offer vague and ambiguous statements in this paper: There are few sentences regarding Turkey within the subchapter on bilateral and regional relations, that arguably can be seen as an example for a type of unspecific compromise with no clear direction for future actions.

(2) The document repeats an established master narrative out of the coalition paper of 2018 (see paragraph 7116 of the 2018 coalition agreement).¹ By that dominant narrative, which merges different narratives of the last decade, Turkey remains an “important neighbor of the EU and partner within NATO” but creates worries due to “domestic political developments and foreign policy tensions” (see paragraph 5226-5227 of the 2021 coalition agreement).²

(3) Additionally, this narrative does stress, that because of the “massive erosion” of democracy, rule of law, human, women’s and minority rights” the accession process is frozen.

(4) Further established parts of such master narrative are the aim to “breathe life into the EU dialogue agenda and expand changes with civil society and youth exchange programs”.

(5) A different narrative, which might be linked to the discussion of a Turkish diaspora states, that the large number of people with “biographical roots in Turkey” living in Germany “creates a special closeness between our countries”. Further, that narrative acknowledges the Turkish rooted people as integral part of Germany. The lessons to be drawn from such statement remain unclear.

(6) It is conspicuous which key words the new leaders do not include in this part: Turkey is not mentioned in the chapter on EU accession, further we do not see key words like *positive agenda, upgrading the Customs Union, of the ill-fated formulation of a privileged partnership*. Concerning the issue of Foreign Policy tension, no further explanations are given.

(7) Overall, we analyze a very cautious, compromised position among the three parties, which does not document any strong push towards framing and forming the EU - Turkey relationship and ends up being contrary to the overall motto and mantra of the document to dare more progress.

The Coalition Agreement on Turkey (2021):

“Turkey remains an important neighbor of the EU and a partner in NATO for us, despite worrying domestic political developments and foreign policy tensions. The large number of people with biographical roots in Turkey creates a special closeness between our countries and is naturally part of German society.

Democracy, the rule of law and human, women's and minority rights in Turkey have been massively eroded. We will therefore not close any chapters or open any new ones in the accession negotiations. We will breathe life into the EU-Turkey dialogue agenda and expand exchanges with civil society and youth exchange programs”.

The paragraphs 5226-5234 in the “coalition agreement 2021-2025 of SPD, Alliance90/ The Greens and FDP” were translated by the authors.

The Coalition Agreement

As outcome of the German election in September of this year, the anticipated coalition of SPD, The Greens and FDP held several talks to develop a common governing strategy for the legislative period from 2021 to 2025. On the 24th of November these talks resulted in a shared coalition agreement with the name “Mehr Fortschritt wagen” (“*Dare more Progress*”). The coalition agreement traditionally not only presents a catalogue of compromises between the parties for several policy as well as personnel issues, but also further displays the will of these parties to form a government for the next four years and portrays the last step before formally building the German Government.

The relations with Turkey have -as many other foreign policy issues- not played any role in the elections campaign. The party election manifestos of the three coalition partners and of the CDU showed common positions,³ as well as some differences. Analyzing the mentioning's of Turkey in the paper, we find several classic terminologies used in German narratives regarding Turkey.

Narrative: Turkey as a partner

One key narrative, mentioned in the coalition paper, is the description of Turkey as an important NATO partner and European Neighbor: “Turkey remains an important neighbor of the EU and a partner in NATO”. That is not particularly a new narrative and is used in nearly the same fashion in the coalition paper of the last Government, which was led by the CDU: “Turkey is an important partner of Germany and a neighbor of the EU” (see coalition agreement 2018).

Narrative: Human Rights and Rule of Law

A second narrative that is used frequently in German discussions regarding Turkey is the critique of the condition of human rights and rule of law in Turkey. We find that in the new coalition paper, as well as in the old one: “Democracy, the rule of law and human, women's and minority rights in Turkey have been massively eroded” and “The situation of democracy, rule of law and human rights in Turkey has been deteriorating for some time”.

The Coalition Agreement on Turkey (2018):

“We are putting thoroughness before speed in EU enlargement: Clear Expectation of criteria compliance before EU accession of Western Balkan states. In the EU accession process, Turkey should not close any chapters or open any new ones. No visa liberalization for Turkey until preconditions are met.

Turkey is an important partner of Germany and a neighbor of the EU, with which we have we have multifaceted relations. We therefore have a particular interest in a good relationship with Turkey. The situation of democracy, the rule of rule of law and human rights in Turkey has deteriorated for some time. deteriorated for some time. That is why we do not want to close any chapters in the accession negotiations and not to open any new ones. Visa liberalization or an expansion of the customs union are only possible if Turkey fulfills the necessary conditions” (p. 7116-7125).

The paragraphs 639-642 and 7116-7125 in the “coalition agreement 2018-2021 of CDU, CSU and SPD” were translated by the authors.

Party program of SPD

- Turkey must respect the rule of law, democracy and comply with principles of international law
- Intensification of the EU-Turkey Dialogue

Party program of FDP

- Stop of EU accession negotiations
- Turkey “Indispensable partner” as NATO member and EU-Neighbor
- Security tensions need to be reduced
- Create perspective in relations with Turkey- with attention to period after President Erdogan
- New basis for close security and economic cooperation

Party program of The Greens

- Goal is to resume the talks on EU accession, but Turkey needs to make an “U-turn” back to democracy and the rule of law
- Immediate release of all political prisoners
- Political dialogue and peace process on the Kurdish question
- Initiate a new agreement that does not fight but improves the prospects of the people. Therefore, is financial and logistical support on the ground required

Party program of CDU

- No full EU-Membership for Turkey
- Turkey needs to contribute to collective security (as NATP Partner)
- “Close partnership” with Turkey
- Rapprochement and new agreements

References of the party programs of SPD, FDP, The Greens (coalition parties)⁴ and the CDU (ruled between 2005-2021)⁵ can be found in the Endnotes.

Narrative: Turkish Diaspora

This merged master narrative reads itself as a continuation of the fundamental narrative on EU-Turkey relations, being used in press and paper. Further, they resume the tenor of the old coalition paper and thus merely give the impression of a drastic policy change.

Nonetheless, new elements can be found in the agreement and slight changes in the tenor can be noticed. The paper is recognizing the large Turkish diaspora living in Germany and on that note is not only emphasizing the special status of Turkey as partner, but particularly stressing the belonging of the Turkish descendent people living in Germany: “The large number of people with biographical roots in Turkey creates a special closeness between our countries and is naturally part of German society”. That recognition can be found on a later note in the text again, whereas the importance of migration in building and shaping the country is emphasized and particularly the 60th anniversary of the recruitment agreement with Turkey is highlighted: “Migration has always been part of our country's history. Immigrants, their children, and grandchildren have helped build and shape our country. The 60th anniversary of the recruitment agreement with Turkey is symbolic of this”.

Narrative: Freeze Accession Negotiations

Addressing the EU- accession negotiations, the coalition agreement does not give a clear outlook on the new Government's position, whether Turkey should or should not be a member of the European Union. However, it is not mentioned in the chapter on EU accession. Further, the wording (“We will therefore not close any chapters or open any new ones in the accession negotiations”) is identical to the wording of the 2018 coalition agreement (“We will therefore not close any chapters or open any new ones in the accession negotiations”)

and by that does not indicate an obvious policy or strategy change. Nevertheless, even though there is no further evidence given in this paper, explaining the new Government's stance on the issue, we find possible explanation in the parties' programs. FDP and Alliance 90/ The Greens both do attach Turkey's EU-Membership on conditions concerning the rule of law and human rights issues.

While the Green Party was listing conditions for the continuation of the negotiations ("We [...] demand the immediate release of all political prisoners and the return to a political dialogue and peace process on the Kurdish question")⁶ the FDP's position was it to stop negotiations ("A Turkey ruled authoritarian by President Erdogan Turkey cannot be a candidate [...] for membership in the EU"), but particularly hinted on a "Turkey after President Erdogan".⁷ With that said, there is a possibility here, that the coalition agreed to wait for the development of the Turkish State – also in view of the presidential elections in 2021 (or earlier) - and thus does not want to position itself at this time being. With an overall view of "conflictual cooperation",⁸ the document emphasizes 'foreign policy tensions' which confirms the narrative on conflicts in the regional neighborhood, which the European Council put forward in several of its conclusions regarding to the Eastern Mediterranean, Syria, and Cyprus.⁹

Narrative: Strengthening Civil Society

As part of the master narrative, the coalition agreement underlines the importance of good bi-lateral relations between Turkey and Germany and promises, that the new German Government "will breathe life into the EU-Turkey dialogue agenda and expand exchanges with civil society and youth exchange programs". Even though it is unclear to what extent these promised exchanges with civil

society and youth programs are planned to be expanded, this particular point is a new one, in comparison to the coalition agreement of 2018. Adding it to the emphasis of the importance of the Turkish diaspora and the strong critique on human rights, as well as the rule of law, it can be expected that the new Government wants to showcase their unwillingness to continue negotiations due to the ongoing situation in Turkey, but opposingly wants to portray their willingness to strengthen and support Turkish civil society in order to 'not close the door' to future Governments or generations.

Nothing on Visa Liberalization and Customs Union

In comparison to the coalition agreement of 2018, the new agreement does not contain statements regarding Visa Liberalization and the Customs Union. 2018 the CDU-led coalition ruled out Visa Liberalization and clearly attached the expansion of the Customs Union on certain demands: "Visa liberalization or an expansion of the Customs Union are only possible, if Turkey fulfills the necessary conditions". That these issues are not addressed in the new Coalition Agreement, further nourishes the argument of the new Government wanting to hold off with clear statements regarding the position towards Turkey and instead is waiting for further development of the country.

Outcome: No push forward

The passages concerning Turkey are rather short and quite vague in this coalition paper. Many of the statements in the agreement obtain the same tenor and phrasing like the agreement of 2018. Even though there are new elements -the emphasis on the importance of the Turkish diaspora and the announced expansion of cultural and educational

exchanges- the agreement hardly reveals anything about the course of the new Government regarding Turkey. By looking at the parties' program papers, as well as the old and the new agreement, we can get the idea of the Government trying to not rule out any future negotiations with Turkey but staying cautious on the current development while acknowledging the strategical and cultural importance of Turkey as partner.

With a look at this analysis and assessment there will be the demand to observe concrete steps of the new government also in the future.

Endnotes

- 1 | Koalitionsvertrag zwischen CDU, CSU und SPD: Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa. Eine neue Dynamik für Deutschland. Ein neuer Zusammenhalt für unser Land. Berlin, 2018.
- 2 | Koalitionsvertrag zwischen SPD, Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen, FDP. Mehr Fortschritt wagen. Bündnis für Freiheit, Gerechtigkeit und Nachhaltigkeit. Berlin, 2021.
- 3 | See Tekin, Funda. EU-Turkey Relations and General Elections in Germany – Headwinds for Turkey? Berlin Bosphorus Initiative (BBI). Policy Paper - InBrief Series. Berlin, April 2021.
- 4 | Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD). Aus Respekt vor deiner Zukunft. Das Zukunftsprogramm der SPD. Berlin 2021, S.60.
- 5 | Christlich Demokratische Union (CDU). Das Programm für Stabilität und Erneuerung. Gemeinsam für ein modernes Deutschland. Berlin, 2021, S.20.
- 6 | Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen: Deutschland. Alles ist drin. Bundestagswahlprogramm 2021. Berlin, 2021, S. 230.
- 7 | Freie Demokratische Partei (FDP). Nie gab es mehr zu tun. Wahlprogramm der Freien Demokraten. Berlin, 2021, S. 49.
- 8 | Saatçioğlu, Beken et al. The Future of EU-Turkey Relations: A Dynamic Association Framework amidst Conflictual Cooperation. Future Synthesis Paper. Cologne, March 2019.
- 9 | See Suratlı, Harun/ Wessels, Wolfgang. The EU's Attitude towards Turkey - Shift of Narratives with Limited Actions? An Analysis of the Leader's Narratives. VIADUCT Policy Paper, Issue No. 5. Cologne, December 2020; Wessels, Wolfgang/ Suratlı, Harun. How to understand the EU's Policy towards Turkey? A dual track strategy without effective results? - An Analysis of the Leader's Narratives. TRACK Special Policy Brief, Issue No. 4., Cologne, May 2021.