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CASE STUDY

EUPopLink Country report - Turkey

[version 1; peer review: 2 approved, 2 approved with reservations]

Günce Sabah Eryılmaz[1], Toygar Sinan Baykan[2]

[1]Political Science and International Relations, Bahcesehir University, Istanbul, Turkey
[2]Political Science and Public Administration, Kırklareli University, Kırklareli, Turkey

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Abstract

This report examines how populism and Euroscepticism intersect in Turkish politics. Turkey's relationship with Europe has long been shaped by ambivalence, and as EU accession stalled, Euroscepticism spread across the political spectrum. The ruling AKP initially championed EU membership to advance democratic reforms but later shifted toward a civilizational, anti-Western discourse. Other parties — from the Islamist YRP and nationalist ZP on the right to the socialist TİP on the left — also combine populist rhetoric with distinct forms of Euroscepticism. The report traces these positions historically and shows how the "Europe question" has served as a versatile tool for populist actors to redefine political alliances and frame domestic conflicts.

Plain Language summary

Turkey has long been characterized by a deep ambivalence toward Europe, and Euroscepticism has spread across its political spectrum as EU accession stalled. This country report, prepared as part of the EUPopLink COST Action, traces the relationship between populism and Euroscepticism in the Turkish party system. It introduces the main populist and Eurosceptic actors in Turkey, and examines the nexus between populism and Euroscepticism in the Turkish context. It also considers how the ruling party's shifting stance on Europe has shaped broader political dynamics and responses to Euroscepticism.

Keywords

populism, euroscepticism, Turkey

This article is included in the COST Actions gateway.

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1. **Orçun Selçuk**, Luther College, Decorah, USA
2. **Turkay Nefes**, Spanish National Research Council (CSIC), Madrid, Spain
3. **Tugce Ercetin**, Istanbul Bilgi University, Istanbul, Turkey
4. **Floris Vermeulen**, University of Twente, Enschede, The Netherlands

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Corresponding author: Günce Sabah Eryılmaz (gunce.eryilmaz@bau.edu.tr)

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1- Introduction

Euroscepticism in Turkey is deeply rooted in the country's long-standing and often ambivalent relationship with Europe. It is not merely a reaction to the European Union accession process, but rather a broader ideological posture that can be traced back to the late Ottoman modernization period. Europe has consistently appeared as both an admired and distrusted "Other" in intellectual and mass imagination (Berkes, 2015). The EU integration too, for a very long time, had been part and parcel of discussions around Turkey's democratization process. However, the EU has considerably lost its normative power in Turkey at least since the Brexit and especially due to the Union's pragmatic approach to Turkey based on the main strategic target of curbing the immigration. Populist or not, various degrees of euroscepticism grew in the discourses of political parties all over the political spectrum in contemporary Turkey. The present country report was prepared as part of the EUPopLink COST Action (Andreadis & Vasilopoulou, 2026) following the EUPopLink Theoretical Framework and guidelines (Lorimer et al., 2026).

2- Populism and populist political actors in Turkey

Since 2002, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's conservative and populist AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – the Justice and Development Party) has been in power in Turkey. Throughout this process it has become, first, a "dominant party" (Ayan-Musil, 2015), and then, a "hegemonic" force with clear autocratic proclivities (Çınar, 2019). During its time in office, the AKP has sidelined various elite veto players (most notably the army), colonized state institutions (most notably judicial institutions), exerted a tight control over media and started to suffocate party competition first, with coopting various smaller parties, and, ultimately, with a full-scale legal assault on the centre-left secular CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* – the Republican People's Party). All these developments have made it difficult to call current Turkish political regime even "competitive authoritarian" (Esen & Gümüşçü, 2016) since it has increasingly started to resemble a more closed autocracy. Populism and discussions around EU also had a crucial role in the transformation of party system and the political regime in Turkey. It is no surprise that rising Euroscepticism has accompanied democratic backsliding in Turkey.

Yet, the origins of populist politics in Turkey go back to much earlier periods of competitive politics, preceding the discussions around EU membership. In the absence of parties strictly representing social divides of Turkey (such as social class differences and ethnic and sectarian identities) populism -with its different ideational, discursive and stylistic reflections- has become a main tool for political elites on the right and left since the transition to a multiparty politics in mid-20th century (Baykan, 2018). Especially after the military coup d'etat in 1980, however, more strictly identity-based parties appeared in the Turkish party system. Islamist and pro-Kurdish parties created significant alternatives on the right and left to catch-all, mainstream, officeseeking parties. The rise of Islamist RP (*Refah Partisi* - the Welfare Party), the predecessor of Erdoğan's AKP, was the most notable event during 1990s, which embraced a strictly populist discourse, combined with religious fundamentalism (White, 2002). The RP was perhaps the most Eurosceptic force Turkish society had ever seen, the founder of which, time and again, had identified the European Union as a "union of Christian states" (Sayarı, 1996) and frontally rejected Turkey's attempts to join the EU. It was exactly the disagreement within the growing RP regarding the Turkey's ideal stance on the EU that paved the way to the rise of initially more moderate AKP from within the Islamist RP (Öniş, 2001).

The conservative AKP has been the most consistently populist force in Turkish party system since the beginning of 2000s. The party presented itself as the defender of the "humble, conservative, ordinary majority" against the oppression and contempt of "secular and Westernist Kemalist elites" (Baykan, 2018). In fact, Erdoğan's AKP has been one of the most important and emblematic cases of populism in the recent decades globally and cross-national studies have demonstrated the rise of populism in Erdoğan's discourse throughout his terms in office, almost approaching levels of populism that could be seen in Chavez's speeches (Hawkins et al., 2019). Also, among the Turkish parties, from a discursive point of view, Erdoğan's AKP has been the most populist force in Turkey's national parliament as demonstrated by work deploying quantitative content analysis (Elçi, 2019).

On the basis of a shared conservative outlook, in the last general and presidential elections in 2023, an Islamist offshoot from the Islamist National View movement (*Milli Görüş*), the YRP (*Yeniden Refah Partisi* - the New Welfare Party) led by Fatih Erbakan also supported Erdoğan's populist AKP. The YRP rapidly became a formidable political organization in recent years based on a widespread organization across Turkey including more than 600.000 members.[1] The YRP, which is also identified as a "conspiracy driven party" with a visible populist tone and style, embraced a strictly anti-vaccine, anti-gender equality and anti-LGBT stance and presented all the scientific and progressive measures regarding these issues as conspiracies staged by global Zionist elites (Oğuz, 2024). In addition, the YRP also constantly deployed a "nativist" language and relied upon a distinction between "native values" and those that are "alien" to Turkish-Islamic culture.

[1]The exact number is 622.847. https://www.yargitaycb.gov.tr/icerik/1481 accessed:12.5.2025.

While the main secular left-wing opposition to the AKP, the CHP, can hardly be considered a populist actor in the Turkish party system from a strictly discursive-ideational approach, the left-wing pro-Kurdish DEM Party (*Halkların Eşitlik ve Demokrasi Partisi* – People's Equality and Democracy Party- previously HDP - *Halkların Demokratik Partisi*) appears as a major populist actor opposing the AKP. DEM Party, in ideological terms, embraces a mix of ethnic identity politics and socialism. However, alongside embracing Kurdish identity politics, the party also puts emphasis on other marginalized and oppressed groups such as LGBT, women and poor communities across Turkey *vis-à-vis* an oppressive "establishment". In this respect, from a discourse-theoretical perspective, in various accounts, the HDP has been described as a left-populist entity (Kaya, 2019; Tekdemir, 2019).

At the opposition front, two remaining forces that should be seriously taken into account with regards to populism are TİP (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi* – Labour Party of Turkey) and ZP (*Zafer Partisi* – The Victory Party). The TİP is a left-wing force currently represented in the TBMM (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi* - Grand National Assembly of Turkey) (with 3 deputies) that aims the transformation of class-based capitalist order in line with socialism.[2] The TİP has been defined as a populist actor in various analyses (Aksoy, 2024).[3] TİP's program also testify the party's populist proclivity since it identifies the AKP-led regime in Turkey as the "palace regime"[4] that is based on "capitalist classes".[5] In addition, the TİP also states that the character of a future revolution in Turkey should be "populist" and should depend on the working classes supported by "popular sectors".[6]

On the radical right, currently, most notable actor in Turkish politics is the ZP led by a former academic Ümit Özdağ (who was, for several months, remained imprisoned due to allegedly "provoking the society to hatred and enmity"). The ZP is a pioneering secular radical right force in Turkey akin to anti-immigration radical right parties of Europe (Deniz & Kargın, 2023; Koca & Saç, 2024). While currently the ZP is not represented in the parliament, some public opinion research indicates that this new party is receiving considerable support from voters.[7] The ZP reveals a deeply ideological, uncompromising Turkish nationalism that puts a particular emphasis on the problem of refugees and immigrants in Turkey.[8] The ZP manifesto defines the AKP rule as a "palace regime" and also presents the main opposition CHP as a "yellow opposition" that is in collusion with the ruling party.[9] The ZP also locates itself as the representative of ordinary Turkish people *vis-à-vis* the alleged injustice inflicted upon them by "illegal immigrants" protected by the "palace regime".[10] Thus, a deeply conflictual political discourse pitting ordinary Turkish people from all walks of life against an establishment that is allegedly in treason to Turkey characterizes the ZP's discourse. In this regard, the ZP, indeed, appears as a deeply populist force in contemporary Turkish politics.

This overview of the current effective populist parties also reveals that these parties are populist because they put a strong emphasis on the "people" and simplify the political topography as a vertical conflict between those as the top (elites) and the down (the ordinary majority/the people).

3- Positions on 'europe' and the populism–Euroscepticism nexus in turkey

Among the parties examined so far only the AKP, YRP, TİP and ZP can be located at the intersection of populism and Euroscepticism since the DEM Party has usually been pro-EU. While the AKP has existed as a political entity since 2001, the others were founded more recently (YRP in 2018, ZP in 2021, and TİP in 2017), suggesting that the populism–Euroscepticism nexus has become more salient in Turkish politics towards the end of the 2010s.

In the 2002 general elections, the AKP openly declared full EU membership as a strategic priority (Başkan & Gümrükçü, 2012).[11] For the AKP, the integration process offered an opportunity to reshape Turkey's public sphere in a way that would legitimize and normalize the visibility of Islamic identity (Yılmaz, 2013; Öniş, 2010). In the early 2000s, EU-driven reform packages and the AKP's populist framing converged in practice. Harmonization laws civilianized the National Security Council and curtailed military–judicial tutelage (e.g., the restructuring/abolition of State Security Courts), which the government presented as EU-mandated democratization while domestically narrating them as

[2]https://tip.org.tr/program/ accessed:14.5.2025.
[3]See Tanıl Bora's evaluation of TİP as a left-populist force: https://birikimdergisi.com/haftalik/9586/sol-populizm-i accessed:14.5.2025.
[4]Refers to the conspicuous presidential palace built in Ankara in 2014 under Erdoğan's rule.
[5]https://tip.org.tr/program/ accessed:14.5.2025.
[6]Ibid.
[7]https://www.indyturk.com/node/751530/haber/2025%E2%80%99-ilk-kamuoyu-ara%C5%9Ft%C4%B1rmas%C4%B1-yay%C4%B1nland%C4%B1-hangi-parti-ilk-s%C4%B1radaaccessed:14.5.2025.
[8]https://www.zaferpartisi.org.tr/parti-programi/ accessed:14.5.2025.
[9]https://www.zaferpartisi.org.tr/kurulus-manifestosu/ accessed:14.5.2025.
[10]Ibid., 11–12.
[11]https://www.akparti.org.tr/media/0auje2sn/partiprogrami.pdf accessed:12.5.2025.

removing tutelary "elites" that had thwarted the people's will (Çınar, 2008; Öniş, 2010; Saatçioğlu, 2010). By advancing these steps under the banner of Europeanization—expansion of civil liberties, greater cultural pluralism, and the rollback of extra-electoral veto players—the AKP both weakened Kemalist strongholds and deflected accusations of pursuing a religious agenda, recasting liberal reforms as the restoration of popular sovereignty against an exclusionary establishment (Saatçioğlu, 2014; Kubicek, 2020). However, after 2005, the AKP's pro-European stance began to fade due to rising Turkey-scepticism within the EU and the bloc's increasingly ambiguous enlargement agenda. With growing electoral strength in 2007 and 2011, the AKP had consolidated power and no longer relied on the EU reform process to counterbalance the secular establishment (Aydın-Düzgit & Kaliber, 2016).

The Gezi Park protests in 2013 marked a turning point: the AKP framed EU criticism of its authoritarian response as evidence of European elites conspiring with domestic opponents—particularly Kemalists and liberals—to destabilize the elected government. This gave rise to a full-fledged "Sèvres Syndrome" discourse, casting the EU as a threat to Turkish sovereignty through internal collaborators (Gülmez, 2020). The narrative draws on a broader historical belief that Western powers have long sought to divide Turkey, as symbolized by the Treaty of Sèvres (Yılmaz, 2007; Guida, 2008). Following the Gezi Park protests, the AKP abandoned its observer status in the pro-EU European People's Party (EPP) and joined the Eurosceptic Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (AECR), formalizing its shift away from Europe's political mainstream (Wódka, 2016).

The 2016 coup attempt further radicalized the AKP's rhetoric. The EU's tepid response to the coup attempt was interpreted as implicit support for regime change, while European criticism of post-coup purges reinforced the "West vs. Turkey" dichotomy (İçener, 2016). By this stage, the AKP had fully embraced a civilizational discourse, positioning Turkey as the leader of the Muslim world against an allegedly hostile Christian club while still nominally supporting accession for strategic leverage, such as migration deals. This ideological shift was operationalized through neo-Ottoman symbolism and Islamist populism, portraying the EU as both culturally alien and politically antagonistic to Turkey's interests (Kaya et al., 2020).[12]

In this context, Euroscepticism became increasingly interwoven with the party's broader populist strategy, which linked domestic and external "elites" in a unified antagonistic frame. The object of opposition gradually expanded beyond concrete policy disputes to include broader critiques of the principles and future direction of European integration. While the AKP has never formally renounced its goal of EU membership, its rhetoric has increasingly questioned the EU's normative foundations. The intensity of opposition has fluctuated: early criticisms were largely instrumental and issue-based, whereas later discourse has grown sharper and more emotionally charged, especially around periods of political crisis. Yet this opposition has remained strategic and responsive to domestic priorities, rather than reflecting a fully consolidated ideological rejection of the EU.

Rooted in the *Milli Görüş* tradition, the YRP promotes an Islamist worldview and draws on narratives such as the Sèvres Syndrome, which historically depict Europe as driven by a "Crusader spirit" (Yılmaz, 2007). Echoing this perspective, the party program expresses strong scepticism toward the EU, accusing some member states of acting on religious bias and reviving a crusader mentality.[13] It frames the EU as an external extension of the "alien" cultural elites it opposes domestically, reinforcing its populist–Eurosceptic stance. The object of opposition targets both the normative foundations and political practices of the EU. While the YRP does not explicitly reject EU membership, it sets strict conditions for any potential engagement, insisting on mutual respect and economic cooperation—thereby distancing itself from the broader logic of political integration.[14] The party's opposition can be characterized as hard Euroscepticism, given its categorical rejection of EU values and strong cultural-religious framing.

As a populist radical right party, the ZP portrays the EU as part of an imperialist conspiracy aiming to alter Turkey's demographic structure and undermine national cohesion, positioning itself as the sole defender of Turkish identity. The party leader Özdağ links the EU, the United States, Israel, and various terrorist organizations as co-sponsors of "strategic migration engineering," which he describes as a modern form of invasion designed to destroy the Turkish nation from within (Türk, 2024). The ZP's historical narrative equates the current refugee crisis with the Crusades, the Sèvres Treaty, and other existential threats from the past, asserting that the nation is once again under siege (Koca & Saç, 2024). In this context, the party openly calls for the termination of EU accession negotiations.[15] While not rejecting cooperation

[12]This aligns with the concept of civilizationism, where populist nationalism frames identity conflicts as civilizational struggles. Like Europe's far-right movements—which weaponize "Christian-secular-liberal" values against Islam (Brubaker, 2017)—the AKP's rhetoric inverted this dichotomy. This mirroring underscores how civilizational discourse transcends geographic contexts, serving as a flexible populist tool.
[13]https://yenidenrefahpartisi.org.tr/page/parti-programi/14 accessed:12.5.2025.
[14]Ibid.
[15]https://www.zaferpartisi.org.tr/kurulus-manifestosu/ accessed:14.5.2025.

altogether, the ZP proposes replacing integration with a limited, transactional relationship.[16] The ZP adopts a hard and consistent Euroscepticism rooted in a conspiratorial, nativist worldview. Framing prolonged existence of refugees in Turkey as a "silent occupation", it calls for immediate deportation through its "Fortress Anatolia" project (Koca & Saç, 2024).[17]

A left-wing populist party, the TİP, views the EU as an instrument of global capitalism and Western imperialism (Boratav, 2017). The EU is often framed as part of the "Troyka"—a triad of imperialist institutions including the European Commission, IMF, and European Central Bank—particularly in the party's theoretical publication, *Komünist* (Özalp, 2017). The TİP's opposition centers on EU practices such as austerity, labor deregulation, and migration externalization, expressed through a soft but consistent leftist critique of capitalist and imperialist structures. Notably, the 2016 EU–Turkey migration deal is seen as reinforcing both European exploitation and domestic authoritarianism.[18] From the TİP's perspective, the deal reveals the EU as a collaborator of the "palace regime", deepening the oppression of the Turkish people. The nature of opposition reflects a left-wing populist stance that rejects the EU's neoliberal model while advocating solidarity with Europe's working classes. Its Euroscepticism is therefore selective, issue-based, and internationalist rather than nationalist or isolationist.

Since Turkey is not a member, the EU is largely framed as a membership goal rather than a site of political or normative convergence. Questions of institutional depth are postponed. Only parties like the YRP and ZP explicitly reject integration altogether, advocating instead for limited, interest-based cooperation.

4- Responses to euroscepticism and consequences

Since the early 2000s, the AKP has played a central role in shaping Turkey's EU policy—first as a pro-accession force, later as a key source of institutional Euroscepticism. In its early years, the AKP took an adversarial stance toward opposition parties' sceptical rhetoric, defending EU membership and reforms. However, as the party's position shifted from a pro-democratic actor to the major autocratizing force, it not only normalized but also amplified Euroscepticism in Turkish politics to legitimize some of its autocratic interventions. More recently, hardline parties like the YRP have pushed the AKP further right on key issues, such as the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. Pro-EU actors, including the CHP and the DEM, have largely failed to counterbalance this trend, partly due to the EU's own ambivalent stance and declining credibility as a political anchor.

5- Conclusion

Turkey's stalled EU accession process offers a unique vantage point on the populism-Euroscepticism nexus. The case's significance unfolds along three key dimensions. Ideologically, a clear spectrum exists. Right-wing populists (AKP, YRP, ZP) employ a civilisational and nationalist discourse, framing the EU as a culturally alien, Christian club that threatens Turkish sovereignty and Islamic identity, inverting the rhetoric of Europe's far-right. Conversely, left-wing populists (TİP) critique the EU from an anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist standpoint, viewing it as a neoliberal tool that reinforces exploitation.

Historically, Euroscepticism draws potency from the "Sèvres Syndrome"—the deep-seated fear of Western powers' attempts to dismantle Turkey. Parties like the AKP and YRP link EU policies to this historical schema, framing criticism as a modern-day existential threat.

Strategically, the case is defined by the ruling AKP's instrumentalization of its EU stance. It initially championed accession to dismantle the secular Kemalist "elite", then pivoted to a strategic Euroscepticism, portraying the EU as a hostile force. This demonstrates how the "Europe" issue serves as a versatile tool for redefining political conflict and legitimizing authoritarianism.

In conclusion, Turkey, a Muslim-majority candidate country, enriches the literature by providing a critical contrast to theories derived from member states and underscores how populism-Euroscepticism nexus is shaped profoundly by internal political battles.

Ethics and consent

Ethical approval and consent were not required.

Data availability

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✓ **Floris Vermeulen**
Public Administration, University of Twente, Enschede, The Netherlands

Interesting and clear country report on populism in Turkish politics describing the main political parties and the origins of their populist approach. I feel report is almost ready to be indexed.

- I would like to see a short description in the beginning of the report in which populism is defined but more importantly how the authors have identified (in general terms) whether or not a political party or movement is populist or not.
- What are the main criteria and what is the main (secondary) data that is used to identify this.

For the rest I feel the report and the results are ready to be indexed.

Is the background of the case's history and progression described in sufficient detail?
Yes

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?
Yes

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?
Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?
No source data required

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Yes

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Political science with focus on migration and countries of origin.

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Reviewer Report 18 August 2026

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Tugce Ercetin
Istanbul Bilgi University, Istanbul, Turkey

The country report successfully scrutinizes the relationship between populism and Euroscepticism in Turkish politics, considering different political party narratives and approaches. The main discussion relies on the understanding and framing of Europe and Euroscepticism in comparative terms, and it also indicates how populist actors and discourse can be articulated.
I have a few comments, but they are only suggestions, not necessary points. At this point, the authors may evaluate these points:

- The introduction provides an important overview of Euroscepticism in Türkiye. However, it could also engage with the literature on the mutual construction of images and place greater emphasis on this dimension. In other words, a mutual perceived and constructed image can be included. Although Euroscepticism has become particularly visible in recent years in relation to the “deal” and migration, fluctuations in practices concerning “European values” or democratic values could also be addressed.
- I believe that several important points need to be emphasized when categorizing political parties in Türkiye as populist or non-populist. For example, the AKP’s populism has taken different forms of articulation: although it has remained consistent over time, it has also evolved through different issues and narratives, including securitization, the production of negative emotions such as fear, and a more nationalist-Islamist tone. Similarly, the different forms of populism represented by other parties should also be addressed. For instance, can the CHP be categorized as an entirely non-populist party, or is it possible to identify a different form of populism? I believe this discussion could be developed further through closer engagement with the literature. This concerns not only the Özel period; during the local elections, a different form of populism was also performed in opposition to the AKP’s populism. It does not solely suggest making a distinction between left- and right-wing populisms; rather, it can highlight different forms of populism or demonstrate how they differ from each other. Regarding the ZP, greater clarity is needed about the distinction between, and overlap of, nativism and populism. The reasons why the DEM Party is less Eurosceptic than the other parties could be elaborated further, particularly with reference to ECtHR judgments and other democracy-related issues, including human rights and justice. In this sense, a similar position on CHP can be given; of course, it also indicates different approaches within the same political parties. But as I understand, the report focuses on party-level not actors.

- In the text, various political parties were included in the analysis to give a holistic depiction. From this perspective, the authors may define the selected parties and how they show differences and similarities in terms of analysis of the report. Similarly, the discourse "crusader spirit" belongs to the narrative of YRP, but is it possible to make a distinction with the AKP's background? Thus, these explanations or short footnotes can be considered; this is not necessary, of course. Additionally, framing as "aliens" has a similar resonation with the AKP's current "external forces – European voices" articulating cultural perspective, national identity, family, and anti-LGBT issues. To narrate the importance of "native, family and national" values in türkiye, the AKP uses a populist discourse positioning European or Western groups as "enemies". In this sense, the report may demonstrate how commonalities and differences in Euroscpetic narrative exist. The report clearly and efficiently highlights differences, but some commonalities can also be noted.
- The country name should be shifted to Türkiye.

Is the background of the case's history and progression described in sufficient detail?
Yes

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?
Yes

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?
Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?
Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Yes

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: populism

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Reviewer Report 18 August 2026

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Turkay Nefes
Spanish National Research Council (CSIC), Madrid, Spain

The report addresses an important case for understanding the relationship between populism and Euroscepticism and brings together useful material on several political actors. However, I believe the current version requires major revision, particularly concerning its structure, conceptual framework, and evidential basis.

Major comments
1. The report needs a clearer analytical structure. Political parties currently appear somewhat episodically, without a sufficiently explicit rationale for their selection, order, or relationship to one another. This makes the argument difficult to follow, especially for readers unfamiliar with Turkish politics.

2. The historical development of Euroscepticism is insufficiently developed. Although the Sèvres Syndrome is mentioned, the report does not systematically trace how dismemberment anxiety, suspicion of European intervention, and related attitudes developed across different Turkish political traditions. As a result, the historical background and contemporary party analysis remain somewhat disconnected.

One possible way of addressing these first two issues would be to organise the report around broader political traditions—such as Milli Görüş/Islamism, Turkish nationalism, left populism/socialism, and centre-left/centre-right politics—and examine how attitudes towards Europe developed within each. The Sèvres Syndrome could provide one useful historical thread through which both continuities and important differences could be demonstrated. Some of my own work came to mind:

- Nefes, T. S. (2024). The impact of group positioning on unfavorable perceptions of Greeks in Turkish politics between 1946 and 1960. Turkish Studies, 25(3), 499–518. https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2024.2331244 (Ref 1)
- Nefes, T. S. (2015). Understanding Anti-Semitic Rhetoric in Turkey Through The Sèvres Syndrome. Turkish Studies, 16(4), 572–587. https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2015.1084876 (Ref 2)
- Nefes, T. S. (2013). Political Parties' Perceptions and Uses of Anti-Semitic Conspiracy Theories in Turkey. The Sociological Review, 61(2), 247–264. (Ref 3)

I mention these because they came first to my mind. The authors should, of course, feel free to use any other scholarship that they consider more appropriate.

3. The evidential basis can be more systematic and transparent. The report relies predominantly on secondary studies. This is a legitimate approach for a country report, but its limitations should be acknowledged. It is currently unclear how studies, parties, and examples were selected, and little attention is given to scholarship that might qualify or contradict the interpretations presented.

One possible, although entirely optional, solution would be to select representative parties from the main political traditions and examine a comparable source for each—for example, party programmes, manifestos, or another systematically selected body of material. This would provide a clearer comparative basis.

4. The key concepts and reporting strategy require clearer definition and justification. Populism, Euroscepticism, and distinctions such as hard and soft Euroscepticism should be defined explicitly. The report should also distinguish more carefully between Euroscepticism, anti-Europeanism, and broader anti-Westernism. This is particularly important when historical attitudes towards “Europe” are used to explain contemporary positions towards the EU.

The authors should also explain why this particular reporting strategy was selected. At present, the combination of parties, secondary studies, and individual primary sources can appear somewhat convenience-driven. One of the principal theoretical sources used for the EUPopLink framework is itself listed as “peer review: awaiting peer review.” While this does not invalidate the framework, it would be useful to explain its selection and, where possible, anchor the key definitions in established peer-reviewed scholarship.

5. A table or figure would improve accessibility. A concise table or figure could summarise the principal political traditions or parties, their ideological positions, forms of populism, and attitudes towards Europe and EU integration. This would be particularly valuable for readers unfamiliar with Turkish politics.

Minor comment
There is a factual issue concerning YRP. The report states that the party “does not explicitly reject EU membership.” However, some official YRP statements explicitly advocated terminating Turkey's EU accession negotiations.

Recommendation
The Turkish case is highly relevant to the objectives of the EUPopLink project, and the report contains material from which a strong and informative country study could be developed. However, the concerns above affect the organisation of the argument, its historical framework, the selection and comparison of evidence, and the definition and application of its central concepts. I therefore recommend major revisions before approval. The suggestions offered above are intended as possible ways of addressing these issues rather than prescriptions for how the authors should restructure the report.

References
1. Nefes T: The impact of group positioning on unfavorable perceptions of Greeks in Turkish politics between 1946 and 1960. *Turkish Studies*. 2024; **25** (3): 499-518 Publisher Full Text
2. Nefes T: Understanding Anti-Semitic Rhetoric in Turkey Through The Sèvres Syndrome. *Turkish Studies*. 2015; **16** (4): 572-587 Publisher Full Text
3. Nefes T: Political Parties' Perceptions and Uses of Anti-Semitic Conspiracy Theories in Turkey. *The Sociological Review*. 2013; **61** (2): 247-264 Publisher Full Text

Is the background of the case’s history and progression described in sufficient detail?
Partly

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?
Partly

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?

Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?
No source data required

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Partly

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?
Partly

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Turkish politics, intergroup hostility, conspiracy theories

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Reviewer Report 10 August 2026

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Orçun Selçuk
Luther College, Decorah, Iowa, USA

This country report examines the populism-Euroscepticism nexus in Turkish politics. It traces the AKP's trajectory from EU-accession champion in the early 2000s to a civilizational, anti-Western critic. It also situates this alongside three other populist and Eurosceptic actors: the Islamist YRP, the radical-right ZP, and the left-wing TİP. The paper's central contribution is showing how "the Europe question" functions as a flexible discursive tool that different populist actors mobilize toward divergent ends and how this has tracked Turkey's broader democratic backsliding.

Here are my comments that would strengthen the quality of the report.

Substantive Comments

The authors characterize the current regime as approaching closed autocracy. I agree that the day-to-day developments in Turkey are alarming, but they are not completely outside of the boundaries of competitive authoritarianism. Jailing and harassment of opponents is textbook competitive authoritarianism. Also, arguing that Turkey is a full-scale autocracy undermines the report’s own contribution. The report covers multiple populist parties (YRP, TİP, ZP, DEM) that are not co-opted by the regime and that continue to compete. The persistence of authentic multi-

party populist contestation is itself evidence against the closed-autocracy characterization.

The authors quickly brush off the CHP as a non-populist actor. Although I tend to agree with this characterization for the main opposition party's general trajectory during the AKP rule, this point is asserted briefly rather than elaborated. One could argue that CHP under Özel (and İmamoğlu) has increasingly used a people-vs-establishment frame. The founding of the Yeni Parti is explicitly framed by Özel as founded "by the people." This is analytically similar to the populist framing the paper grants to TİP elsewhere in the same section. The authors should specify the criteria that exclude CHP while including TİP as populist. The same question applies to MHP, which is not discussed at all despite being arguably Eurosceptic and having populist features. Given that elements of both populism and Euroscepticism can be identified across nearly the entire party system (we can also add IYI Party here), I'd recommend a comparative table (party × populism indicators × type/intensity of Euroscepticism) to make the coding criteria transparent for the reader.

In the conclusion, the report claims that AKP, YRP, and ZP uniformly deploy a "civilisational and nationalist discourse" framing the EU as a "culturally alien, Christian club." While this generalization applies to AKP and YRP, it does not accurately describe the ZP, which the paper already explains earlier.

Points for consideration

"Euroscepticism" should also be capitalized consistently. It currently varies across the manuscript.

Internal party diversity is not addressed. Individual MPs or intra-party factions can hold considerably more (or less) Eurosceptic positions than their party's official platform; treating parties as unitary actors risks overstating coherence. Even a brief acknowledgment would strengthen the analysis.

The AKP's continued pro-NATO alignment sits in tension with its Eurosceptic and civilizational discourse. Clarifying whether Turkish Euroscepticism (across the parties studied) targets the EU's liberal/normative project specifically, versus Western multilateral institutions more broadly, would sharpen the typology. Some actors in the paper's scope oppose both the EU and NATO, while the AKP is Eurosceptic yet firmly pro-NATO.

A brief discussion of public opinion or voter-level Euroscepticism for each party (even a sentence per party, where survey data exists) would help ground the elite-discourse analysis in evidence of popular resonance.

Is the background of the case's history and progression described in sufficient detail?

Yes

Is the work clearly and accurately presented and does it cite the current literature?

Yes

If applicable, is the statistical analysis and its interpretation appropriate?

Not applicable

Are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?
Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the results?
Yes

Is the case presented with sufficient detail to be useful for teaching or other practitioners?
Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: Populism, Turkish politics

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 13 Aug 2026

Günce Sabah Eryılmaz

Dear Professor Selçuk, We would like to thank you for your careful reading of our country report and for your constructive and insightful comments. Your observations raise important points that will strengthen the analysis. We are currently awaiting additional reviewer reports before preparing our revisions, and we will address each of your comments thoroughly in the revised version. With best regards,

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.