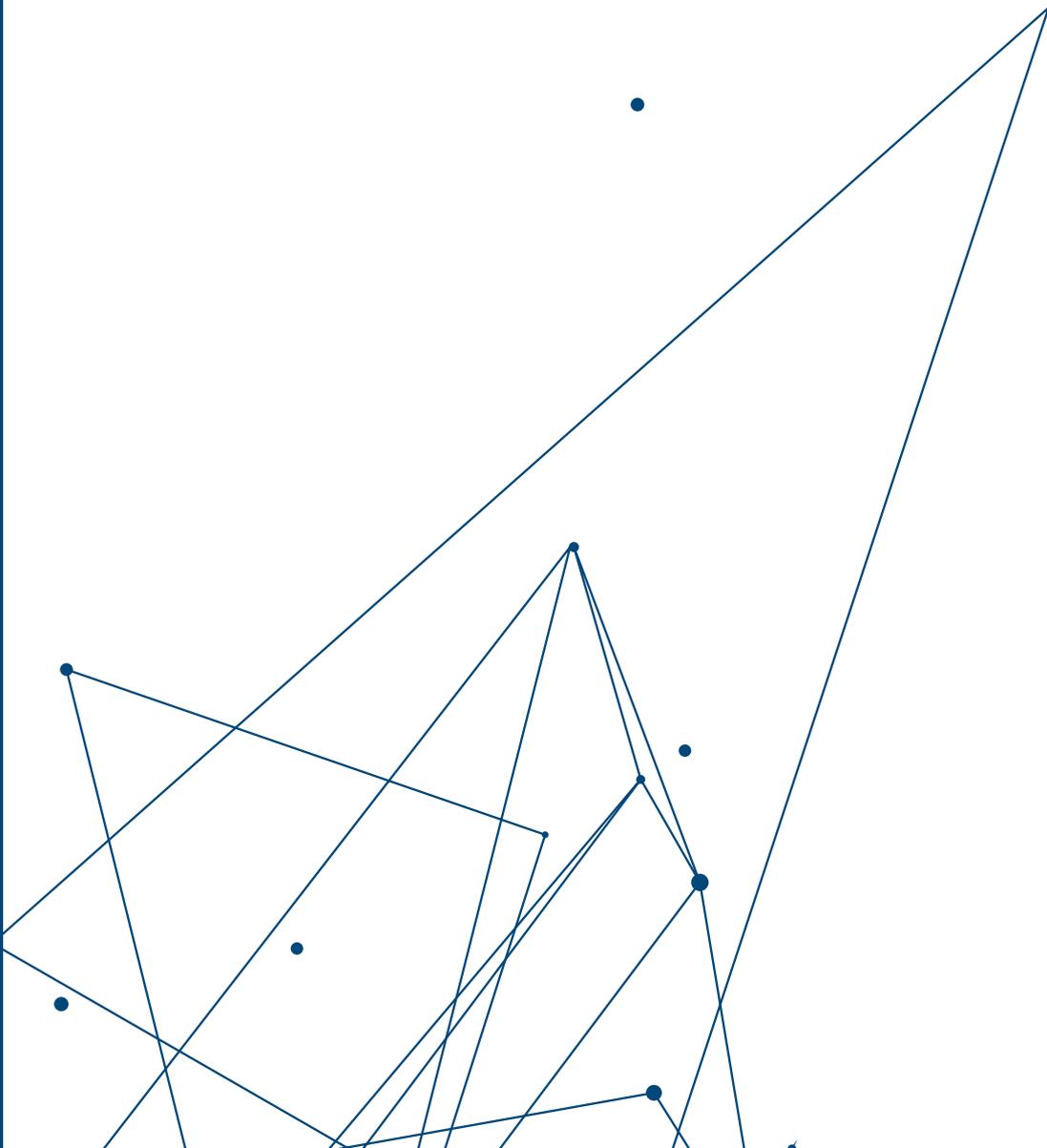


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The Turkish Diaspora in France

Aurélien Denizeau



France has a comparatively large Turkish population. Almost 600,000 residents have Turkish nationality themselves, or were born to Turkish parents. Significant labour migration began in the 1970s, followed by family reunifications. Turkish political and religious organisations are very visible, although often comparatively small. Since the 2000s, the Turkish community has increasingly become politically active. This has created tensions around issues such as the Armenian Genocide and the French government's moves to tighten control over Muslim organisations. However, Turkish nationalist and Muslim associations are poorly organised and deeply divided. Moreover, a gradual diplomatic rapprochement between France and Turkey since 2021 has eased tensions within France.

This paper is one of five CATS Network Papers assessing perceptions, ongoing debates, and key responses in selected EU member states regarding Turkish diaspora policies.

Aurélien Denizeau is an independent researcher and holds a Ph.D. in Political Science and International Relations from Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO), Paris, France. His research focuses on Turkish history and political life, as well as Turkish foreign policy, its relations with the European Union and its strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean.

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1.

Introduction

In absolute numbers, France has the second-largest Turkish population in the European Union after Germany. Over the last few years, Turkish migrants in France and their children born there have become the topic of heated debate in French public discussions, which have focussed on two important themes: questions of identity and tensions linked to the presence of the Islamic religion on French territory, and Turkey's growing activism and its desire to re-establish a link with Turkish populations abroad.

This report analyses the situation of the Turkish community in France, issues related to this, and especially how Turkey's political actors may try to instrumentalise this population as part of its diaspora policy, which has become an integral part of Turkish foreign policy in the last two decades. The first part offers an overview of the Turkish presence in France. It covers the history of Turkish immigration to France, the size of the Turkish population there, the associations established, and the voting behaviours of the Turkish diaspora in Turkish and French elections. The second part focusses on the question of the political prevalence and mobilisation in the French public space of Turkish migrants as well as their children born there. It shows the emergence of new mobilisations and the increasing visibility of the Turkish diaspora as actors in public discussions, as well as the role of the Turkish government in supporting this phenomenon. The final section looks at the political issues concerning the Turkish diaspora in France, the potential exploitation of those issues by the Turkish government, and the reactions among the French public.

2.

Turkish Presence in France

This section analyses the Turkish presence in France in the broader context of French immigration policy. The Turkish diaspora, including those with Turkish citizenship and/or have French citizenship, represents a minority within the French immigrant and Muslim population. As the diaspora has well-established organisations, Turkish migrants and their children born there often engage with Turkey politically. The conservative ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) is popular among Turkish voters in France.

2.1

The Historical Context of Turkish Migration to France

Compared to the other waves of immigration that France has experienced, Turkish immigration started relatively late.

2.1.1

The General Context of Migration to France

Traditionally, three significant waves of immigration to France can be distinguished:

- The first wave (mid-19th century – early 20th century) was primarily due to the arrival of workers – predominantly of European origin – during the Industrial Revolution. In 1901, there were approximately 330,000 Italians, 324,000 Belgians, 90,000 Germans, and 80,000 Spaniards.¹ By the end of this period, tens of thousands of Jews from Central and Eastern Europe were also arriving, fleeing

¹ Gérard Noiriel, *Le creuset français: histoire de l'immigration, XIX-XX*, (Paris: Seuil, 1988): 407

persecution and pogroms.²

- The second wave (interwar period) was driven by political factors against the backdrop of the wars that tore Europe apart. During the First World War, France called upon the populations of its colonies, mainly North African populations, to fight on its territory. From then on, the flow of immigrants from the French colonies began to rise. After the war, France also welcomed a significant number of people from Armenia (60,000 in 1926) fleeing persecution and massacres.³ The arrival of Armenians during this time also marked the first episode of migration from Turkish territory. France continued to welcome political refugees during the interwar period, such as Spanish Republicans fleeing Franco's regime.
- The dissolution of the French colonial empire marked the third wave of immigration (1950s to 1980s). Apart from the French being repatriated from Algeria after independence (nearly one million), this last wave primarily involved labour immigrants from Africa and Asia. Since the 1970s, this labour immigration developed into a more permanent settlement, with the family reunification policy allowing immigrant workers to bring their families to France. The second half of this period was also marked by migration from Turkey.

2.1.2

History of Turkish Migration to France

Turkish immigration to France took place in several stages. The period from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s was primarily driven by labour immigration. In the mid-1970s, family unification became a critical factor in shaping migration patterns. Finally, starting in the 1980s, political factors also began to play a role in migration from Turkey, particularly with the arrival of Turkish citizens who were fleeing the military regime after the 1980 coup d'état.

The labour recruitment agreement signed between France and Turkey on 8 April 1965 formalised the migration of Turkish workers to France. Similar to Turkey's agreement with the Federal Republic of Germany in 1961, the labour recruitment agreement with France was part of a rapprochement between Paris and Ankara. The 1960 coup d'état in Turkey brought to power leaders who wanted a more active diplomacy, whereas France, under the impetus of Charles de Gaulle, distanced itself from the American alliance and sought new partners in Europe. In 1963, France agreed to Turkey's participation in the Common Market of the European Economic Community. During the same time, France was experiencing a period of economic growth, which further

² Musée de l'Histoire et de l'Immigration, *Juifs d'Europe orientale et centrale*, <http://www.histoire-immigration.fr/dossiers-thematiques/caracteristiques-migratoires-selon-les-pays-d-origine/juifs-d-europe-orientale>

³ Anahide Ter Minassian, "L'immigration arménienne vers la France", *Les Cahiers d'Archéologie* (online), 26 June 2007, <https://lepassedarnouville.fr/l-immigration-armenienne-vers-la-france-54>

contributed to the motivation to recruit foreign workers. Moreover, the recession that the Federal Republic of Germany experienced between 1966 and 1967 led to an increase in the flow of Turkish workers to France.

In 1974, the government under Prime Minister Jacques Chirac (1974–1976) ended immigration for economic reasons, and on 29 April 1976, it authorised immigration for family reunification. The decree was suspended in 1977 by the Raymond Barre government (1977–1978) before being reinstated following intervention by the Council of State. These two decisions (end of labour immigration and authorisation of family reunification) permanently changed the nature of Turkish immigration to France. The percentage of female immigrants from Turkey increased rapidly, from 25.7% in 1975 to 42.3% in 1982.⁴

During the 1980s, political developments in Turkey also started influencing Turkish immigration to France. Those arriving could be direct refugees (political activists fleeing military repression) or indirect (in particular, Kurdish populations fleeing the civil war and its social and economic consequences). The military coup of 1980 was followed by harsh political repression, which pushed many activists (the left-oriented ones in particular) to leave the country. The armed conflict between the Turkish Army and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) that started in 1984 led to the migration of Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin. At the same time, under the presidency of François Mitterrand (1981–1995), France adopted a discourse that emphasised human rights, particularly concerning left-wing activists and Kurdish populations. On average, between 1,500 and 2,000 refugees arrived in France each year.⁵ Nonetheless, this represents an average, not a stable number. Applications for political asylum increased during the 1980s, reaching 17,355 in 1989.⁶

It became clear during the following decade that Turkish migrants would largely be settled in France. Indeed, many children of Turkish immigrants, born in France or arriving in France at a very young age, started to acquire French citizenship.

It is difficult to assess whether, after the failed coup of 2016, the number of political refugees – especially those affiliated with the Gülen movement – has increased in France. Indeed, the Turkish diaspora in France with close ties to this movement have adopted a discreet profile to avoid any possible retaliation by the Turkish government.⁷ According to the Ministry of the Interior, between 2015 and 2019, the number of applications for residence permits from Turkish citizens rose from 202,219

⁴ Elif Aksaz, “L’émergence d’un problème public au cours des années 1970–1980”, in *Les dossiers de l’IFEA, La Turquie aujourd’hui*, no 22 (Istanbul: Institut français d’études anatoliennes [IFEA], 2015): 1–9

⁵ Gaye Petek- Şalom, “Les ressortissants turcs en France et l’évolution de leur projet migratoire” *Hommes & Migrations*, no. 1212 (March–April 1998): 18

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ Marianne Meunier, “Turcs de France: une communauté sous influence?”, *La Croix* (online), 17 October 2021, <https://www.la-croix.com/France/Turcs-France-communaute-influence-2021-10-17-1201180923>

to 213,758, with most of this increasing taking place during the first two years and without any significant increase after 2016.⁸ In 2019, the number of visa applications from Turkey for humanitarian reasons was 925, an increase of 26% compared with the previous year. It does not appear that the repression of the failed coup d'état had a significant impact on migration flows from Turkey to France.

2.2

Overview of the Turkish Community in France

It is difficult to evaluate the size of the Turkish population in France precisely. Turkish diaspora associations are numerous but fragmented. The voting behaviours of the diaspora in French elections are not well known, but they are better known with regard to Turkish elections.

2.2.1

Approximate size of the Turkish community in France

French statistics differentiate between the terms “immigrants” and “descendants of immigrants”:

- An “immigrant” refers to one who was born in a foreign country and settled in France (he or she may or may not have French citizenship).
- A “descendant of an immigrant” refers to one who was born in France, but at least one of his or her parents was born in a foreign country.

According to statistics published in 2020 by the Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, INSEE),⁹ there are 246,000 Turkish immigrants (born in Turkey) and 348,000 descendants of Turkish immigrants (with at least one parent born in Turkey) in France. However, as mentioned earlier, the statistics are not entirely accurate. This is because no specific category exists for the children of descendants of Turkish immigrants, even though they may possess Turkish citizenship. According to the estimates, the number of Turkish migrants and their descendants in France varies

⁸ Ministère de l'Intérieur, *Les chiffres clés de l'immigration en 28 fiches*, (Paris, June 2021): 25
<https://www.immigration.interieur.gouv.fr/Info-ressources/Actualites/Focus/Les-chiffres-cles-de-l-immigration-2019-en-28-fiches>

⁹ Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques [INSEE], *Répartition des immigrés par groupe de pays de naissance: Données annuelles de 2006 à 2020*, (Paris, July 2023)
https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2381755#figure1_radio1

between 600,000 and 800,000.¹⁰

Turkish immigrants and their children who were born in France constitute a smaller diaspora community compared to those from the Maghreb countries (with 2 million from Algeria, 1.8 million from Morocco, and 700,000 from Tunisia) as well as from the southern European countries (with 1.2 million from Portugal, 1 million from Italy, and 746,000 from Spain). At the same time, immigrants and descendants of immigrants from Turkey constitute a larger population than those with Asian origins, such as those coming from China or India.

There is very little data on the number of French-Turkish dual nationals. In 2018, the number of Turkish citizens registered on the electoral lists of Turkish consulates in France was 330,000,¹¹ suggesting that nearly half of Turkish immigrants and their descendants in France have Turkish citizenship.

The geographic distribution of the Turkish diaspora is uneven. In 2006, the largest Turkish immigrant populations were in Île-de-France (48,840) and Rhône-Alpes (33,629).¹² However, although Alsace has fewer Turkish inhabitants (23,077), it is the region with the highest density of Turkish diaspora compared to other migrant communities: 21.7% (3.8% in Île-de-France and 10.2% in Rhône-Alpes). Within major urban areas, Turkish migrants and their children who were born in France frequently live in the suburban areas, such as in Sarcelles and Clichy-Sous-Bois in Paris, or Villeurbanne in Lyon.

Turkish Diaspora Community and Muslim Diasporas

As France is a secular state, according to a law from 1905 that separates religion and the state, the French administration does not officially play any role in the organisation of Islam in the country. Representative bodies of the Muslim faith, around 2,500 mosques, are largely organised according to the law of associations from 1901. Mosques are grouped into two main types of associations: the French Council of the Muslim Faith (Conseil Français du Culte Musulman, CFCM) and the Regional Councils of the Muslim Faith (Conseils Régionaux du Culte Musulman, CRCM).

¹⁰ Öznur Küçük Sirene, “De la discrétion à la mobilisation, les Turcs de France sortent de l’ombre”, *TRT France* (online), 24 January 2019, <https://www.trt.net.tr/francais/europe/2019/01/24/de-la-discretion-a-la-mobilisation-les-turcs-de-france-sortent-de-l-ombre-etude-1132484> (link suppressed in 2023);

Tremblais Jean-Louis, “Les A Francens de France sont aussi sous la menace des Turcs”, *Le Figaro*, 20 November 2020

¹¹ “En France, la communauté turque a massivement voté pour Erdogan”, *France Info* (online), 25 June 2018, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/turquie/presidentielle-turque-qui-a-vote-pour-qui-en-france_2818739.html

¹² Stéphane De Tapia, “Permanences et mutations de l’immigration turque en France” *Hommes & Migrations*, no. 1280 (July 2009): 10

As in the case of measuring the exact size of the Turkish diaspora community, it is difficult to assess the number of Muslims in France. Existing surveys present some practical difficulties (because it is forbidden to ask questions regarding religion in official surveys) and terminological difficulties, especially concerning how to identify a Muslim. For instance, can persons with secular lifestyles be categorised as Muslims? Or should the descendants of Muslims automatically be considered Muslim as well? Depending on the chosen classification, surveys conducted in recent years indicate that there are between 4.1 million¹³ and 8.4 million¹⁴ Muslims in France (constituting somewhere between 6% and 12% of the total population).

Still, it is difficult to know how to sort this population according to the countries of origin. North Africans and their descendants likely constitute the largest share. According to the Institut national d'études démographiques (National Institute for Demographic Studies, Ined), there were 2.5 million descendants of immigrants from the Maghreb in 2020, 1.15 million of which were of Algerian origin.¹⁵ This suggests that the Turkish diaspora in France represents somewhere between one-tenth and one-fifth of Muslims in France. Although this is not an insignificant proportion, it is still far lower than that of the population originating from the Maghreb.

2.2.2

Education Backgrounds of those Born in Turkey and Living in France

According to available education indicators, the Turkish diaspora has the poorest education performance, starting at the elementary school level: In 2016, 44% of children born in France with at least one parent of Turkish origin had repeated a year in elementary school. This marks the highest repetition rate, compared to, for instance, 36% of students with Sahelian African roots, 33% of Franco-Algerians, and 25% of the overall population.¹⁶ These results may be explained by the fact that Turkish migrants are known to score low when assessing the amount of help they provide their children with the homework. In 2008, for instance, about 5% of French children of Turkish origin reported receiving help from their parents with homework, compared to about 20% of children with Tunisian or Moroccan origins, and the

¹³ Roguyata Sall, "Observatoire de la laïcité: des religions plus visibles, mais des fidèles moins nombreux", *Mediapart*, 11 July 2019

¹⁴ François Héran, *Avec l'immigration: Mesurer, débattre, agir* (Paris: La Découverte, 2017): 19–20

¹⁵ Institut national d'études démographiques [Ined], "Descendants d'immigrés par pays d'origine" (July 2023), <https://www.ined.fr/fr/tout-savoir-population/chiffres/france/immigres-etrangers/descendants-dimmigres-par-pays-dorigine/>

¹⁶ Cris Beauchemin, Christelle Hamel and Patrick Simon (eds.), *Trajectoires et origines: Enquête sur la diversité des populations en France* (Paris: Institut national d'études démographiques [Ined], 2016): 176–179

nationwide figures of 35% (helped by the father) and 65% (helped by the mother).¹⁷

Moreover, only 31% of French residents of Turkish origin obtain a baccalaureate degree (46% for French people of Algerian origin, 62% national average), and 21% have access to university education (37% of French people of Algerian origin).¹⁸ The early marriages of young females of Turkish origin have an impact on their ability to earn diplomas. Indeed, French people of Turkish origin are the only population segment among whom girls have fewer diplomas than boys. Finally, 26% of men and 44% of women report having experienced a period of unemployment during the first seven years of their working life, which is the highest rate among all the groups studied.¹⁹

These statistics might imply a lack of participation by the Turkish diaspora community in mainstream society. For the Turkish diaspora community, on the other hand, they are signs of discrimination and exclusion from the system.²⁰

2.2.3

Turkish Associations

Turkish participation in associations in France is quite dynamic, yet fragmented. Turkish associations are often small and locally active, and they are most prevalent in the Alsace region. Among others, one can mention, for example, the Turkish Cultural Center of Mulhouse, the Turkish Cultural Association of Schirmeck, and the İstikbal Association of Mulhouse. These small organisations bring together the local Turkish population and organise meetings often with a cultural focus. There are, however, several associations at the national level. In this case, it is possible to distinguish cultural and political associations on the one hand, and religious organisations on the other.

Examples of Political and Cultural Organisations:

- The Alliance of Franco-Turkish Lawyers is comprised of lawyers who have links to France and Turkey. It claims to be an independent association; however, its president, Selçuk Demir, regularly intervenes in favour of the Turkish government.
- The Anatolia Cultural Center was founded in 1984 and is based in Paris. This association offers Turkish language courses as well as organises cultural meetings

¹⁷ Laure Moguerou, “L’aide au travail scolaire dans les familles immigrées de milieux populaires” *Migrations Sociétés*, no 3-4 (vol. 147-148) (2013): 159-174

¹⁸ Cris Beauchemin, Christelle Hamel and Patrick Simon (eds.), 2016: 192-194

¹⁹ Sami Kiliç, “Fils d’ouvrier, conservateur, endogame, en échec scolaire: le portrait du Franco-turc en 2016” *Zaman France*, 28 January 2016

²⁰ Samim Akgönül, *La Turquie “nouvelle” et les Franco-Turcs: Une interdépendance complexe* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2020): 67-68

and activities. Although it is not officially involved in politics, its members have the reputation of being very fond of traditional Kemalism: They defend a vision of Turkey embodied by the principles of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, emphasising the importance of secularism, republican ideas, and territorial integrity.

- The Council for Justice, Equality and Peace (COJEP) was founded by Ali Gedikoğlu, a Turkish citizen who has been residing in France since 1983. Ali Gedikoğlu is known to be favourable to the AKP government.²¹ COJEP was founded in 1993 as an umbrella association of various multicultural organisations. Due to its expansion throughout the country and the increase in its activists, it has been divided into many regional federations (especially in the region of Alsace) since 2005. Although at the beginning it positioned itself as a defender of multiculturalism, it now identifies itself as being a more neutral humanitarian association. COJEP has branches across the world and works with international non-governmental organisations (NGOs).²²
- The Turkish Federation of France formally organises charitable activities, trips to Turkey, and pilgrimages to Mecca. However, it is affiliated with the European Turkish Federation, headed by Cemal Cetin, a deputy of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP).²³ Its president, Orhan İlhan, has expressed sympathy for Turkish nationalist activism. The association's Facebook page also shows clear support for Turkish and Azerbaijani nationalism. This association is believed to be linked to the Grey Wolves movement, which was officially dissolved in 2020 by the French government.
- The Turkish Union of France was founded in 2018 by Semih Boyuk, a business school graduate. Its stated objective is to bring together Franco-Turkish associations to foster a strong community capable of defending its interests. The association defines itself as “modern progressive”, but it strictly refuses any links with political movements and asserts its independence.²⁴

²¹ Olivier Claudon, “Ali Gedikoglu, un chef de file des pro-Erdogan en France, visé par une enquête judiciaire”, *Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace* [DNA], 2 June 2018, <https://www.dna.fr/actualite/2018/06/02/une-figure-de-la-mouvance-pro-erdogan-visee-par-une-information-judiciaire>

²² “Our Team”, *Cojep International* (online), <https://cojep.com/about-us/>

²³ Guillaume Origoni, “La dissolution des Loups gris en France ne signe pas la fin du mouvement ultranationaliste turc”, *Slate* (online), 25 November 2020, <https://www.slate.fr/story/197414/turquie-mouvement-loups-gris-ultranationaliste-dissolution-france-mhp-erdogan-ankara>

²⁴ “Conseil d'Administration” *Union des Turcs de France* (online), <https://www.unionturcsdefrance.com/organisation>

Main Religious Organisations:

- The Coordination Committee of Turkish Muslims in France (CCMTF) has the legal status of a French association due to the 1901 law. However, it is organically linked to Diyanet, the Turkish Administration of Religious Affairs. Since 2005, via its representatives, it has been a member of the CFCM board of directors. The president of the CCMTF, Ahmet Öğraş, chaired the CFCM from 2017 to 2019. Given its position towards the Diyanet, the CCMTF is likely in alignment with the AKP's policy towards Turkish Islam in France.
- The Milli Görüş Islamic Confederation is linked to the Islamist Saadet Party. The party originates from a political tradition from which Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's AKP originates, but today it positions itself in opposition to the government. The Milli Görüş movement has been officially present in France since 1995. Today, its relations with the Turkish government are complex. There are disagreements between Milli Görüş and the AKP. However, in France, the majority of Milli Görüş activists are believed to support President Erdoğan.

2.2.4

Political Behaviour of the Turkish Community in France

During French Elections:

In March 2021, French President Emmanuel Macron spoke of the risk of Turkish interference in French elections. Indeed, the Turkish diaspora in France could represent an electorate of several hundred thousand voters. However, it is very difficult to know the voting habits of French citizens with a Turkish background during French elections, given the lack of studies on the topic. All the major French parties have members with Turkish names but in small proportions. Notwithstanding, a few assumptions can still be made:

- Given the strong links between engagement with Kurdish activism and the French anti-capitalist left-wing parties, it can be assumed that members of the Turkish diaspora of Kurdish origin who engage in Kurdish political activism favour these parties in French elections.
- Similarly, it can be assumed that French nationals with Turkish background who are sympathetic to Turkish secular nationalism do not generally vote for these anti-capitalist left-wing parties.
- Left-wing anti-capitalist parties are popular among France's Muslim communities due to the former's emphasis on fight Islamophobia. It is consequently possible that some of the electorate of Turkish origin – defining themselves as Muslim first

- may support these left-wing anti-capitalist parties.
- Given the hostility towards political Islam present in the rhetoric of the French far-right parties, such as Rassemblement National (until 2018 known as Front National and led by Marine Le Pen), the Turkish diaspora, especially those who support the AKP, might not favour these parties.

However, these are first-hand assumptions based on first-hand observations. Only a survey of the voting behaviours of the Turkish diaspora in France could test these assumptions. Still, as is the case in other European countries such as the Netherlands, segments of the Turkish diaspora actively engage in French politics. For instance, the Justice and Equality Party, a political party with ties to the AKP, was founded in 2015 by Sakir Colak.²⁵ Its low share of votes in the 2017 parliamentary elections (fewer than 10,000 voters, amounting to less than 1% of the total vote) and its inability to present a list in the 2019 European elections suggest its narrow electoral base. Therefore, it lacks any considerable influence on the public debate. The party was finally disbanded in 2020 due to administrative irregularities.

During Turkish Elections:

The voting patterns in Turkish elections of Turkish migrants in France and their children born there show two things. On the one hand, an overwhelming majority support the AKP and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and a strong minority within the electorate cast their votes in favour of pro-Kurdish parties. In contrast, Turkey's main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), gained fewer votes in France than in Turkey. Although the turn-out rate has remained below 50%, there has been a clear increase in participation ever since the Turkish electorate abroad was given the right to cast votes at Turkish consulates in 2012: from 8.35% in 2014, it rose to 36.97% in June 2015, to 47.32% in 2018,²⁶ and finally to 49.5% in 2023.²⁷

In the 2014 presidential election, Erdoğan received 66% of the votes in France (compared to 52% in Turkey), while the Kurdish candidate Selahattin Demirtaş gained 19% (compared to 10% in Turkey). On the other hand, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, backed by an opposition coalition consisting of the CHP party and the ultranationalist MHP party, received only 15.5% of the vote (compared to 38% in Turkey).

The 2017 constitutional referendum, which legally paved the way for Turkey's transition into a presidential system – which is characterised by the supremacy of the

²⁵ Laure Marchand, "Comment le parti d'Erdoğan s'infiltré en France", *L'Obs*, 7 April 2017, <https://archive.wikiwix.com/cache/index2.php?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nouvelobs.com%2Fmond%2F20170407.OBS7705%2Fcomment-le-parti-d-erdogan-s-infiltre-en-france.html#federation=archive.wikiwix.com&tab=url>

²⁶ Samim Akgönül, 2020: 68

²⁷ "France élection présidentielle de 2023" *Yeni Şafak* (online), 17 May 2023, <https://www.yenisafak.com/fr/secim-cumhurbaskanligi-2023/yurtdisi-fransa-secim-sonuclari>

executive over the judiciary and legislative branches – was supported by an overwhelming majority of the Turkish electorate in France (64.86% according to results published by the government-run Anadolu Ajansı (known by its initials AA), a much higher number than the final referendum result of 51.41%). The “yes” vote in France was even higher than the average percentage of votes from abroad (59.09%).

In the 2018 presidential election, Erdoğan received 65.3% of the votes in France (compared to 52.59% in Turkey),²⁸ and pro-Kurdish Selahattin Demirtaş received 18.3% (compared to 8.40% in Turkey). The other opposition candidates received much lower totals: The CHP’s candidate Muharrem İnce received 14.3% in France (30.64% in Turkey), and candidate Meral Akşener of the nationalist İyi Party (a splinter party from the MHP) received 1.6% (7.29% in Turkey).

Following previous election trends, Erdoğan received 64.8% of the votes in the first round of the 2023 presidential elections (compared to around 49% in Turkey), and the opposition alliance’s candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu gained around 33.6% (compared to about 45% in Turkey). The nationalist candidate Sinan Oğan received only 1.1% of the votes, while in Turkey he obtained more than 5%. In the second round, President Erdoğan received a similar percentage as before (around 65%), whereas Kılıçdaroğlu took 35%.

A close look at the results of the parliamentary elections offers a more interesting perspective.²⁹ In France, among the parties supporting President Erdoğan, the AKP obtained around 48% and the MHP 14%; this outcome is similar to the one observed in Turkey (42.5% for the AKP and 11% for the MHP). On the other hand, among the opposition parties, the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) came out on top in France with 18% (versus 12% in Turkey), while the CHP obtained only 12.5% (versus 22.5% in Turkey). The balance of power among the opposition parties is clearly reversed in France, with pro-Kurdish sentiments dominating the opposition voters’ choices.

This trend does not change much across consular regions. In the consulate of the city of Marseille, for example, the Turkish population votes mostly for the pro-Kurdish party. Selahattin Demirtaş came out on top in the 2014 and 2018 presidential elections, gaining 53.18%³⁰ and 45.8% of the votes, respectively.³¹ During the 2023 elections, the HDP gained 45.4% of the votes, while the AKP received 30.4% and the CHP 9.3%.³² Marseille is also the only consulate where the “no” vote in the 2017 referendum was the majority (52.4%). It is also noteworthy that in Paris and

²⁸ *France Info* (online), 2018

²⁹ “France Résultats de l’élection - 14 mai 2023 Élections générales” *Yeni Şafak* (online), 17 May 2023b, <https://www.yenisafak.com/fr/secim-2023/yurtdisi-fransa-secim-sonuclari>

³⁰ Samim Akgönül, 2020: 59

³¹ *France Info*, 2018

³² *Yeni Şafak*, 2023b

Bordeaux, the vote totals of the AKP were lower than in the consulates of Lyon, Strasbourg, and Nantes – a trend that could be observed as early as 2014 and was still prevalent in 2023.

Overall, the voting behaviours of the Turks in France reveal four main trends:

- A significant majority vote in favour of the AKP and Erdoğan, representing nearly two-thirds of all Turks in France (therefore a significantly higher proportion than in Turkey).
- A small but significant percentage (between 18% and 20%) cast their votes for the pro-Kurdish parties.
- There is an underrepresentation of the Kemalist and nationalist opposition (except during the 2023 election, mainly because the pro-Kurdish opposition supported the Kemalist candidate instead of presenting its candidate).
- There are clear regional variations: The pro-Kurdish vote dominates in the Marseilles region, whereas the pro-AKP vote is strong in the regions of Lyon and Strasbourg.

3.

Political Tensions between French Society and the Turkish Diaspora in France

During the last two decades, the Turkish community has been increasingly visible in the public space. This development seems to be encouraged by the ruling AKP as part of its policy to grow the diaspora community abroad. However, this has led to concerns within the French public about the political and religious activism of the Turkish diaspora.

3.1

Historical Context of the Turkish Diaspora's Political Activity

There has recently been a politicisation of the Turkish community. Between the 1970s and the 2000s, Turkish activism in France was largely linked to leftist movements, including Marxist and pro-Kurdish parties and organisations. Since the AKP rose to power in 2002, however, a new form of activism has emerged, underlined by more systematic involvement with the Turkish government. This activism has not only become manifest, but it is also facilitated by the emergence of new associations and involves the media. Yet, this new space is not necessarily coherently structured.

The first political mobilisations of Turkish migrants in France go back to the end of the 1970s and are linked to left-wing activism. For instance, Marxist organisations were active in mobilising illegal Turkish workers in order to obtain work permits. In the 1980s, cultural and social associations of a secular nature also emerged. Take, for instance, the association ELELE (1984), which focusses on female and child victims of

violence.³³

Compared to the prevalence of these left-wing organisations, conservative and nationalist actors were much less visible in the public space. For the period between the 1970s and the 2000s, there appears to be a difference in this respect with regard to the Turkish nationalist associations in France and other European countries. Indeed, the most famous ultranationalist association, the so-called Grey Wolves, was more visible in Germany, Austria, and Belgium than in France.³⁴ As for religious associations such as Milli Görüş, they subscribe to a Muslim approach that reaches beyond the Turkish community, addressing the populations of North African and African origin by offering them the same services as Muslims of Turkish origin, such as receiving humanitarian services or participating in collective religious events. Thus, until the 2000s, there was no particularly visible conservative or nationalist Turkish activism in France.

3.1.1

The Diaspora: A Foreign Policy Tool Desired by the Turkish Government

The 2000s marked an evolution in the relationship between Turkey and the Turkish population in France. On the one hand, new technologies – the internet, social networks, mobile phones – allowed Turkish migrants and their children born in France to reconnect with their families back in Turkey. They can also follow Turkish news from satellite channels and via Turkish-language websites. Simultaneously, this decade was marked by the new party in power, the AKP. Even though the Turkish government preceding the one led by the AKP was always interested in the lives of Turkish migrants abroad, this interest took a more systematic and concerted form under AKP rule. For Turkey's ruling elites, diaspora policy has become an active part of foreign policy. As such, it has been perceived as an instrument to gain influence. By using available networks and technologies, and by establishing new associations, the AKP government seeks to mobilise the Turkish population in Europe to defend its own political interests. The aim has been to create an active "diaspora" serving Turkey's geopolitical objectives.

The term "diaspora" – historically used for communities driven out of their lands of origin, such as the Jews claiming origin in Palestine, or the Armenians who fled the Ottoman Empire – has only recently started to be used to define populations that have created a community of their own within a country in which they reside in general.³⁵ Indeed, until the 1990s, nation-states insisted on the need for immigrants on their

³³ Samim Akgönül, 2020: 93

³⁴ Isabelle Rigoni, *Mobilisations, actions et recompositions. Migrants de Turquie et réseaux associatifs en France, en Allemagne et en Belgique*, (France: University Paris, doctorate thesis, 2000): 365

³⁵ Johan Jansson, *Meeting the conditions of being a diaspora: The case of the Cuban diaspora in the United States of America* (Sweden: Linnéuniversitetet, bachelor thesis, 2017): 15–17

soil who were determined to stay for the long term to become culturally integrated into society. In this context, the idea of diaspora was more difficult to envisage, as it implied the long-term presence of distinct communities within a national community. This problem is particularly important in France, where the authorities traditionally ask immigrant populations not only to integrate into society, but also to assimilate, which implies breaking with their roots and essentially adopting a French identity.

The notion of diaspora that emerged in the 1990s varies according to the definition, but it is based on a few main principles: the awareness of forming an ethno-national group that is distinct from those in the society where they reside; maintaining links across national borders with those of the same origin in the homeland countries; maintaining links with the government of that homeland; and engaging with specific organisations and in activism in the cultural, social and political realms.³⁶ These last two elements are at the heart of the AKP's diaspora policy. This policy was symbolised by the founding in 2010 of the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (Yurt Dışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı, YTB). The YTB is solely responsible for providing services to Turkish communities abroad as well as communities that Turkey considers kin. The AKP's diaspora policy encourages Turkish communities in Europe to integrate into their host countries, while resisting assimilation. It also aims to turn these communities into delegates or facilitators in the dialogue between Turkey and European countries. Another objective is to encourage the social ascension of these communities' members and encourage them to show solidarity in order to represent an influential element within European societies.³⁷

As the next sections demonstrate, these aims were not fulfilled in the case of France, and the desire to create a diaspora has not been successful. However, it has triggered the politicisation of Turkish migrants and their children who were born there and facilitated their mobilisation in the French public space.

3.1.2

The Emergence of new Mobilisations: The Example of Armenian Genocide Laws

The disputation about the genocidal nature of the Armenian massacre by the Ottoman government in 1915 became one of the main elements for the mobilisation of the Turkish population in France during the 2000s. If tensions linked to Armenian terrorism were perceptible in France as early as the 1970s and 1980s, it was the law of 29 January 2001 that recognised the Armenian genocide which set things into motion. Notably, until this first law went into effect, no massive mobilisation of Turks in

³⁶ Ibid: 18-21

³⁷ Ibid; Interview with Zafer Sırakaya, AKP MP (Ankara, 19 February 2019)

France had taken place. Discussions mostly took place among French philosophers, historians and politicians and the segments of society that had no Turkish roots. Questions concerning the relationship between politics, law and history shaped the debate.³⁸ Critical objections by the Turkish state and its representatives were also not unusual, but there was almost no significant input from the Turkish population of France.

This situation changed in 2011, when French Deputy Valérie Boyer introduced a bill to prohibit the contestation of genocides recognised by the National Assembly. This meant a de facto ban on denying the Armenian genocide. This triggered strong reactions among the Turkish communities in France against the promulgation of this law. The French branch of the Union of European Turkish Democrats – funded and managed since 2005 by Ahmet Oğras and with close ties to the AKP – mobilised its activists against the law. Ahmet Oğras himself also appeared in the media to criticise it.³⁹

Passed by the National Assembly, the law was presented to the Senate in early 2012. On this occasion, the Turkish community organised a mass mobilisation. On 21 January 2012, between 15,000 (according to the police) and 50,000 (according to the organisers) demonstrators gathered in front of the Senate, two days before the review of the law. This gathering was unprecedented in terms of its size and, above all, its ability to manage the logistics of bringing together several different organisations. Many Turkish associations in France of various ideological affiliations and political strands – ranging from Milli Görüş to Kemalist associations such as A TA TURQUIE – supported it.

Turkish diplomatic bodies also played an essential role in mobilising the masses. The consulates organised busses to bring the demonstrators from the provinces. Some even came from Belgium, Germany, and Luxembourg. Officially, the demonstration was framed as a freedom of expression issue and the refusal to legislate history. Yet, the Turkish national identity, rather than a “French” one, was manifest in the overwhelming presence of the Turkish flag, the slogans chanted in Turkish, and the display of traditional Turkish dances.⁴⁰ The demonstration gave the impression that the Turkish community in France could thus effectively organise themselves behind a common cause.

The Senate nevertheless passed the law on 23 January 2012. Yet, about a week later, some members of parliament referred the matter to the Constitutional Council. The latter declared on 28 February 2012 the law to be contrary to the Constitution. In the end, it was not the mobilisation of the Turkish community, but the action of the

³⁸ Olivier Masseret, “La reconnaissance par le Parlement français du génocide arménien de 1915”, *Vingtième Siècle: Revue d’Histoire, Vingtième Siècle. Revue d’histoire*, no. 1 (vol. 73) (2002): 139–155

³⁹ Ségolène Débarre and Gaye Petek, *Histoire des Turcs en France* (Paris: Détours, 2019): 183

⁴⁰ Observations made by the author during this demonstration.

parliamentarians that was decisive for the outcome. Given the ideological diversity of the deputies who brought this issue before the Constitutional Court, their request seems more likely to have been linked to legal principles than a specific political ideology. Still, the demonstration also played a catalytic role. In the years that followed, members of the Turkish diaspora took numerous initiatives to make their voices heard in the French media landscape.

3.1.3

A new Visibility for the Turkish Population in France

During the 2010s, the Franco-Turkish media sphere grew considerably. While some existing media channels have boosted their levels of coverage, many new outlets have also appeared. Some of them became popular very quickly.

Turkish Media Addressing the Francophone Audience:

Turkey's national public broadcaster, the Turkish Radio and Television Company (Türkiye Radyo Televizyon Kurumu, TRT) founded the TRT.net news website in 1999 and is now broadcasting in 31 languages. Its French version translates the articles published on the Turkish website, particularly concerning major topics relating to Turkey and the international scene. It also offers articles specifically related to news about French-speaking countries.

Anadolu Ajansı, the official Turkish public news agency referred to as AA, also has a French version. According to the testimony of a journalist of the editorial team,⁴¹ the articles offered are drawn from different sources. They are related to international affairs and are generally translations of articles published by the agency in Turkish. Some articles about the news in the Maghreb and Africa are from the AA's versions published in these territories. Interestingly, for all subjects related to France, there is a team of French writers who propose articles on French themes. Not all of these authors are of Turkish origin. For example, there is Feïza Ben Mohamed, an admirer of President Erdoğan⁴² and an activist affiliated with the Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en France (CCIF), which was dissolved in early 2021 by the French government, as it was accused of supporting public speeches encouraging religious extremism.

⁴¹ Interview with the author (24 June 2021)

⁴² As can be observed in some interventions on Twitter (now known as X), visible in this tweet by Polémique-Victor, X (online), 20 October 2020, <https://twitter.com/FredericLefevre/status/1319334137040408578>

Media Generated by Migrants for the French-Turkish Audience:

Alongside these media platforms linked to Turkish agencies, there are also media channels specific to France. Largely founded during the 2010s, these new media ventures are the product of initiatives of individuals with a Turkish background. Red'Action was one such example. It was founded in the summer of 2016 after the July 15 coup attempt. Its founder, Öznur Küçüker Sirene, was born in Turkey. A French speaker, she studied at the Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris. With this new media outlet broadcasting in French, she intended to “bring a new look on Turkey”.⁴³ Red'Action does not claim to belong to any political party but presents an editorial line that closely reflects the public discourse of Erdoğan and the AKP; 30,000 people followed its Facebook page in July 2021. However, site updates and the number of publications have slowed considerably since early spring 2021. Sirene remains active on its Twitter page, which has almost 15,000 followers.

Another new outlet, Medyatürk, was founded in 2017 by Fatih Karakaya, an activist for the Justice and Equality Party. Its editorial line is also close to the discourse of the AKP and expresses open support for political Islam. Several articles have supported Islamist organisations such as the NGO Baraka City (whose founder requested to be granted asylum in Turkey; Turkish authorities then promised to study his request) and the CCIF, until its dissolution in 2020. The Twitter page of Medyatürk had more than 75,000 subscribers in July 2021. Karakaya himself is followed by more than 32,000 people, the vast majority of whom are French-speaking and of Turkish origin.

This visibility of Turkish migrants and their descendants in France is achieved through other cultural and legal organisations as well. This is the case, for example, with the Alliance des Juristes Franco-Turcs (AJFT), which was reorganised in 2015 and offers legal assistance to members of the Turkish community by relying on a network of some 200 lawyers. Its president, Selçuk Demir, has become very popular within the Turkish diaspora community. He has made numerous appearances in the French media, particularly in debates on Turkey. Although the AJFT is officially apolitical, Demir's interventions are generally marked by favourable commentary about the AKP and President Erdoğan.

Links between these different structures can be observed. For example, Öznur Küçüker Sirene, the editorial director of Red'Action, regularly publishes opinion articles on TRT France. On 5 May 2021, she published an article about Turks in France, whom she presented as “models of integration” who had become “political and media targets”, based on different testimonies. In the same way, Demir was the subject of laudatory articles on the Medyatürk site. Moreover, when the Bordeaux Court prosecuted this media outlet for an article about the harassment of a Franco-Turkish family, it received the support of AA on the basis that press freedom could be

⁴³ Expression used during a discussion with the author.

threatened.

Although links exist between Turkish media outlets in France, they are not sufficient to constitute a network. The connections are often short-term and not institutionalised. This illustrates a more general obstacle to the Turkish desire to create a unified diaspora in France: the lack of a structural framework to help firmly organise Turks in France.

3.1.4

An Incomplete and Fragmented Structuring

Although the 2010s marked a period of more visibility in France's public space of Turkish migrants and their children, the diaspora associations and organisations still present a fragmented structure. It is hard to talk of an organised diaspora that is capable of carrying out communal activities. The network of Turkish activists in France of various ideologies is still very poorly structured, which limits its capacity to influence the public debate. Several elements account for this weakness.

Ideological divides within associations in which Turks participate is one reason. Although the new media and associations that emerged in the 2010s are generally characterised by loyalty and adherence to the ideas of the AKP, this is not the case for certain older movements. Of course, the Kurdish movements are a special case: Refusing to assimilate into an ethnic Turkish identity, they develop their own political goals. This was clear when they refused to participate in the 2012 demonstrations against the law introduced by French Deputy Valérie Boyer. While displaying their Turkish identity, other associations claim to be Kemalist and secular, and are therefore opposed to the vision developed by the pro-AKP movements. This is the case, for example, with the cultural association A TA TURQUIE. We can also mention here the cultural internet site HUMANITEA, whose editor, Mihriban Döner, while presenting cultural elements of Turkey, has strongly criticised certain decisions of the AKP, such as the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention (2021), which advocates for the protection of women.⁴⁴

A second factor is the fragmented nature of individual initiatives. This new level of visibility is, above all, the fruit of actions by politically motivated members of the Turkish community, who do not act in a coordinated manner. There is therefore no structure that can create a link between them and unify their actions. Quarrels of a personal nature also divide the Turkish population of France. For instance, Öznur Küçük Sirene and lawyer Selçuk Demir regularly exchanged hostile remarks on social networks. These conflicts cause their supporters to take positions, further aggravating the fragmentation and polarisation that surrounds independent opinion

⁴⁴ Mihriban Doner, "Le retrait de la Convention d'Istanbul: une erreur", *Humanitea* (online), 4 April 2021, <https://www.humanitea.fr/post/le-retrait-de-la-convention-d-istanbul-une-erreur>

leaders.

Moreover, the capacity of the Turkish community in France to create organisations suffers due to the lack of a political culture. The politicisation of the community remains mostly limited and rhetorical. It is marked by commitments that often stem from family legacies and remain within a community framework. As mentioned earlier, there is not a broad representation of people of Turkish origin in the major French political parties or activist movements. While it is difficult to find figures on this, this limited political participation is also manifest in the lack of long-term coordinated activities between different Turkish or pro-Turkish movements. As explained above, there are links between them, but there is no real structural solidarity or cohesion of action.

Therefore, it is difficult to believe that the Turkish population in France forms a diaspora in the sense desired by the Turkish government. It lacks solidarity and unity of action among its members and organisations; it also lacks a broad, cultivated, and solid support base that could be mobilised for political purposes. Despite these limitations, there has been an increasing level of self-assertion by the Turkish population within the field of French politics, particularly starting in the 2010s. This has been accompanied by the aggravation of old issues and the emergence of new ones.

3.2

Main Issues related to the Turkish Population in France

Currently, two factors shape tensions between France and the Turkish population there. The first is the presence of Turkish nationalism within the diaspora, which leads the latter to oppose French institutions and media outlets that are perceived as being hostile to Turkey, and also to oppose the minorities from Turkish regions who live in France now, such as the Kurds and Armenians. A second area of tension emerges at the intersection of the AKP's discourse on combating Islamophobia and the French policy on Islam.

3.2.1

Growing Turkish Nationalism

The increasing activism of Turkish nationalist groups, a marked hostility towards the French media, and threats against the members of minority groups from Turkey

living in France and considered hostile to Turkey all contribute to negative perceptions about the Turkish community among the French public.

With close ties to the Grey Wolves movement (which does not have legal status in France), Turkish ultranationalists take part in dramatic actions when they feel that Turkey and its image are under attack. In May 2018, for instance, in reaction to the front page of the daily newspaper *Le Point*, which described Erdoğan as a “dictator”, some 20 Franco-Turkish activists threatened the owner of a newsstand in the town of Le Pontet (Vaucluse) and wanted him to remove the newspapers. The police had to intervene.

A series of more serious incidents took place in the summer of 2020. Against the background of a confrontation between Turkish and Armenian militants, violence emerged on both sides. A young Franco-Turk, Ahmet Çetin, was seen in a social network video implicitly threatening the Armenian population of France. The dissemination of this video led to a large controversy in France, and Ahmet Çetin was suspected of belonging to the Grey Wolves. In November 2020, Gérald Darmanin, the Minister of the Interior, in reaction to this incident, declared the dissolution of the Grey Wolves.

More recently, during the 2023 elections, there were incidents of violence at the ballot boxes in the Turkish consulate in Marseille.⁴⁵ These were isolated cases that went under the radar in France. However, several witnesses in the field attributed responsibility to Turkish nationalist activists, who allegedly intimidated opposition voters.⁴⁶ It is unclear whether these incidents indicate a long-term trend, but they do suggest that Turkish ultranationalist actors, who have been more low-profile since the dissolution of the Grey Wolves, are still active.

3.2.2

Tensions over Secularism, Religious Radicalism, and Islamophobia

Ever since the AKP came to power, the issue of Islamophobia has been a recurrent source of tension between France and Turkey, per the AKP’s discourse on combating Islamophobia. Despite Islamophobia being a real problem in France (and elsewhere in Europe), for the AKP, combating Islamophobia is also an instrument to gain influence. The AKP equates French secularism and the fight against Islamic communitarianism with racism, and it regularly denounces French decisions taken in this direction. This

⁴⁵ “Election présidentielle en Turquie: rixes entre partisans et opposants à Erdogan autour d’un bureau de vote à Marseille”, *Le Monde* (online), 1 May 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/elections/article/2023/05/01/election-presidentielle-en-turquie-rixes-entre-partisans-et-opposants-a-erdogan-autour-d-un-bureau-de-vote-a-marseille_6171704_5001134.html

⁴⁶ Author’s interview with observers on site

discourse resonates widely among Turkish migrants as well as their children born there, but also among other Muslim populations.

It can be seen that Turkish groups and associations in France are focussing on denouncing Islamophobia. This is the case, for example, with Anadolu Ajansı, whose analyses are often oriented towards this issue,⁴⁷ as well as in media channels such as Medyatürk⁴⁸ and Red'Action.⁴⁹ These tensions crystallised around the Charter of Principles for Islam in France, drafted by the CFCM in 2021.⁵⁰ This text stated that Islam and the French Republic were compatible but it rejected political Islam. However, three of the CFCM member associations refused to sign it. Among these three associations, two were of Turkish origin: the CCMTF and the Milli Görüş movement.⁵¹

The position taken by these associations reveals a turning point for Turkish Islam in France. Traditionally, the activists of Turkish religious associations acted in discretion, avoiding involvement in French public debates. By openly taking sides in a public way – against a policy that is supported by the French state and related to the Islamic question – the CCMTF and Milli Görüş show an open willingness to weigh in on the public debate. Above all, they are arguably showing their rejection of the French-style model of secularism, which they equate with a desire to control Islam.

3.2.3

Reactions from within French Civil Society

The pronounced political and media salience that began in the 2010s of Turkish migrants in France and their children born there has provoked numerous reactions. The French press has taken an interest in this subject, initially out of curiosity before finally expressing concern and criticisms. Politicians have also reacted, generally with a suspicious or even hostile position towards the Turkish community. If there are minority segments sympathetic to Turkish politics, public opinion has tended to be swayed by distrust.

The Turkish diaspora community has been the focus of interest of the French media especially during the periods of greatest tension. There were a growing number of

⁴⁷ Fatma Bendhaou, “France: L’islamophobie, entre constante politique et déni”, *Anadolu Ajansı* [AA] (online), 22 April 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/fr/analyse/france-l-islamophobie-entre-constante-politique-et-d%C3%A9ni-opinion/2216651>

⁴⁸ “L’islamophobie, un racisme devenu acceptable”, *Medyatürk* (online), 1 April 2021, <https://www.medyaturk.info/france/2021/04/01/lislamophobie-un-racisme-devenu-acceptable/>

⁴⁹ Cihan Bircan, “Au final, pourquoi est-on islamophobe?”, *Rédaction* (online), 24 February 2018, <https://www.redaction.media/articles/final-on-islamophobe/>

⁵⁰ “Charte des principes pour l’Islam de France”, *Mosquée de Paris* (online), <https://www.mosqueedeparis.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Charte-des-principes-pour-l%E2%80%99Islam-de-France.pdf>

⁵¹ Stanislas Poyet, “Qui sont les trois associations qui refusent de signer la charte de l’islam?”, *Le Figaro*, 21 January 2021

articles in the French press on Turkish community-related themes between 2019 and 2021. A recurring subject was the supposed influence of President Erdoğan on the Turkish population in France. Articles were devoted to this subject in newspapers such as *L'Express*⁵² and *Le Journal du Dimanche*.⁵³ These themes could also be found in more specialised media, such as the geopolitical journal *Conflits*.⁵⁴

Another theme concerned the influence of Turkey on issues relating to Islam and its governance in France, for example in *La Croix*⁵⁵ and *Marianne*.⁵⁶ The overall tone of these articles was quite similar: They expressed concerns about the way Turkey could use identity issues related to the Turkish community or Turkish Islam in France. The focus was generally on the supporters of the Turkish government in France, rather than on its opponents.

There is consensus among French political movements in their debates about the Turkish community. This consensus is all the more interesting because in France, questions of identity and religion are generally the subject of lively debates and deep disagreements. However, if one observes the reactions of the French political class to the debates concerning Turkish migrants and their children born in France (e.g., the activities of Turkish nationalists, Turkey's supposed desire to interfere in French elections, criticism of the Charter of Principles for Islam in France), one does not observe any significant disagreement. All of the political parties are critical of the actions of Turkish activists and associations in France and their links with Turkey.

Thus, in 2020, the French political class was unanimous in its criticism of the Turkish nationalist demonstrations and the Grey Wolves movement. However, there were differences of opinion about how to respond. Indeed, the Rassemblement National believed that the dissolution decree taken by Minister of the Interior Gérald Darmanin would have no impact, since it was impossible to clearly define the Grey Wolves as an association. Under these circumstances, it requested that the association be classified as a terrorist movement as part of a European procedure. This hostility to the Grey Wolves is also found on the left, for example within the left-wing party France

⁵² Agnès Laurent, "Comment Erdogan infiltre la diaspora turque en France", *L'Express* (online), 25 June 2019, https://www.lexpress.fr/societe/comment-erdogan-infiltre-la-diaspora-turque-en-france_2084854.html

⁵³ Guillaume Perrier, "En France, la diaspora turque reste sous l'influence d'Erdogan", *Le Journal du Dimanche* [Le JDD] (online), 5 October 2020, <https://www.lejdd.fr/Societe/en-france-la-diaspora-turque-reste-sous-linfluence-derdogan-3996149>

⁵⁴ Louis Du Breil, "La diaspora turque en France, le nouveau levier d'Erdogan", *Conflits*, 16 November 2020

⁵⁵ Mélinée Le Priol, "La Turquie tisse sa toile dans l'islam de France", *La Croix* (online), 19 January 2020, <https://www.la-croix.com/Religion/Turquie-tisse-toile-islam-France-2020-01-19-1201072648>

⁵⁶ Younes Belfellah, "L'ingérence turque dans le champ religieux en France", *Marianne* (online), 6 October 2020, <https://www.marianne.net/agora/humeurs/lingerence-turque-dans-le-champ-religieux-en-france>

Insoumise, whose national spokeswoman, Danielle Simonnet, referred to “Islamist fascists”.⁵⁷

This consensus is reflected more widely in public opinion. Although there are no surveys, strictly speaking, on how the French public view members of the Turkish community, opinion polls generally reflect a great level of distrust. In a context in which debates on Turks in France focus on potential Turkish interference in French elections, one can deduce that there is distrust on the part of the public. It should be noted, however, that despite the presence of questions about the Turkish community in the media and political debates, it is not a priority topic for the French public. The debates on this issue are not national in scope, and there has been no mobilisation of French civil society on this issue.

3.2.4

Evolution of French–Turkish Relations and its Impact on Domestic Issues

As mentioned above, the issues linked to the Turkish diaspora in France are also linked to the difficulties in bilateral relations between France and Turkey. Therefore, it is important to mention the significant shift in bilateral relations since 2021. Turkish President Erdoğan and French President Emmanuel Macron seem to share a desire to improve bilateral relations. Both leaders defended a similar approach during the war in Ukraine, which began in February 2022, condemning Russia’s attack while wishing to maintain a dialogue with Russia. Since then, a potential visit by Macron to Turkey has been regularly mentioned in the press, although it has not yet materialised.

Meanwhile, the Turkish population in France has become less of a political issue. There were no accusations of Turkish interference in the 2022 French presidential and parliamentary elections. And during the Turkish elections of 2023, voting by the diaspora in France was mostly conducted without problems, except for the aforementioned incidences of violence at the ballot boxes. Since 2021, there has been a noticeable easing in the political tensions that have been agitating the Turkish diaspora in France. It is arguably premature to say that this represents the status quo. There is no empirical study of sufficient scope to analyse whether this is true or not. However, it serves as a reminder that issues relating to the Turkish diaspora in France are closely linked to bilateral relations between France and Turkey.

⁵⁷ Tweet by Danielle Simonnet, X (online), 3 April 2021, <https://twitter.com/LePG/status/1378408473399066630>

4. Main Highlights of the Report

- The number of people in France of Turkish origin is approximately 600,000. Nearly half have dual citizenship (France/Turkey). These are relatively recent immigrants who arrived in France initially for economic reasons and later also for political reasons. They are spread throughout the country and are strongly concentrated in Alsace and the large cities.
- Politically, this Turkish population largely votes for the AKP and Erdoğan while offering significantly less support for the main opposition party, the CHP. There is also a minority that supports the pro-Kurdish party, formerly known as the HDP. On the other hand, there is little data on the voting behaviours of the Turkish community in French elections.
- The salience in politics and the media of Turkish migrants and their children born in France is very recent, dating back to the early 2010s. It occurred primarily due to the rejection of laws relating to the Armenian genocide, and thereafter due to the founding of new media outlets and associations.
- However, there is no solid organisational structure of the Turkish community in France. The actions of the community are an amalgamation of individual initiatives.
- The expression of Turkish nationalism in France is due to the diaspora opposing how they are portrayed by the French government, institutions, and media, in addition to hostile attitudes towards the Turkish community.
- The AKP's discourse on combating Islamophobia is in conflict with ideas about French secularism and efforts to govern Islam, leading to tensions in relations with the Turkish community and its religious associations.
- The increasing visibility of the Turkish community in France and its activities have caused great concern among the French political and media elites. In general, except for some segments within other Muslim populations in France, there is a distrust among the public concerning the actions of Turks in France.
- How these issues regarding the Turkish diaspora in France develop in the future depends on how relations evolve between France and Turkey.

Abbreviations

AA	<i>Anadolu Agency (Anadolu Ajansı)</i>
AJFT	<i>Alliance of Franco-Turkish Lawyers (Alliance des Juristes Franco-Turcs)</i>
AKP	<i>Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)</i>
CCIF	<i>Collective against Islamophobia in France (Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en France)</i>
CCMTF	<i>Coordination Committee of Turkish Muslims in France</i>
CFCM	<i>French Council of the Muslim Faith (Conseil Français du Culte Musulman)</i>
CHP	<i>Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi)</i>
COJEP	<i>Council for Justice, Equality and Peace</i>
CRCM	<i>Regional Councils of the Muslim Faith (Conseils Régionaux du Culte Musulman)</i>
HDP	<i>Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi)</i>
Ined	<i>National Institute for Demographic Studies (Institut national d'études démographiques)</i>
MHP	<i>Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi)</i>
NGOs	<i>Non-Governmental Organisations</i>
TRT	<i>Turkish Radio and Television Company (Türkiye Radyo Televizyon Kurumu)</i>
YTB	<i>Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (Yurt Dışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı)</i>

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