

# **Host State Reactions to Home State Diaspora Engagement Policies: Rethinking State Sovereignty and Limits of Diaspora Governance**

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## **Abstract**

During the last few decades, institutions, policies and other state-sponsored mechanisms linking home states and diasporas have expanded well beyond traditional areas. Numerous states have established diaspora engagement policies and institutions to tap diaspora resources and maximize their political, economic and cultural interests. Previous research largely focused on these policies' motivations and their impact on diasporas, with little attention being paid to the host states' context. How do host states react to other states' diaspora engagement policies within their borders? Where do host states draw the line for other states' involvement in their territory? In this article, we examine Turkey's diaspora engagement initiatives in European countries, and zero in on host states' reactions to these extraterritorial activities. We argue that diaspora engagement has limits and its scope is determined by the foreign and domestic political processes of the host states and their concern over their sovereignty and security.

## **Keywords**

Diaspora, engagement, host state, authoritarianism, dual loyalties, sovereignty

## **INTRODUCTION**

On 20 May 2018, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Bosnia for his pre-election rally. Thousands Turkish diaspora members in Europe were there to chant slogans in favour of

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the Justice and Development Party/Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (thereafter AKP) and of the president, and most of them came from a long way away, from different European countries. The rally was organized by a diaspora lobby organization linked to the AKP, the Union of European Turkish Democrats (UETD), which later changed its name to the Union of International Democrats. The meeting turned into a demonstration of power for the president and the AKP, where the diasporans showed unquestionable loyalty to their ruler. Erdogan appeared as a strong leader who could garner support for his political aims beyond his country's borders and wield influence not just on his constituencies, but also on foreign populations. On the flip side was his inability to convince European leaders of the legitimacy of holding these transnational election rallies in European capitals, which was the initial aim of the transnational propaganda strategies of the ruling party and Erdogan himself. The AKP's election rallies were banned in many European metropolises, where the majority of the Turkish diaspora reside. Diplomatic tensions followed as the transnational space that the ruling party of Turkey wanted to carve for itself in Europe was limited most determinedly by the host countries' policymakers.

Since expatriate voting rights were introduced by Turkey in 2014, the transnational election campaigns of 2014, 2015, 2017 and 2018 have seen such tensions come to the fore and fill newspaper headlines. Turkey's diaspora governance policies, which have become more assertive and efficacious since the beginning of the 2010s, have made European policymakers wary of the scope of diaspora engagement activities and their long-term impact on Turkish diaspora members, and consequently on European societies in general. There has been rising discontent among European policymakers with Turkey's interventions in redefining, rebuilding and reshaping its diaspora in light of the AKP's political agenda. These developments are clear examples of how one home state's diaspora-governance agenda may face limitations and discontent when it disturbs the host state's political environment in ways that are perceived as

a threat by the host state. Our research shows that Turkey's diaspora engagement policies can only be partially explained by the neo-liberal trend in international relations wherein home states build systematic mechanisms, institutions and policies to tap their diasporas' economic, political, cultural and social resources. In line with Burgess (2020: 5), we find that 'homeland authorities have greater incentives to court migrants as a political constituency'. Turkey's experience has also a lot to do with the extraterritorial expansion of its symbolic power and resistance to it by host states, which makes it a highly interesting case to explore.

The last few decades have witnessed a large expansion of institutions, policies and other state-sponsored mechanisms, linking home states and diasporas well beyond the traditional areas (Brand, 2006; Gamlen, 2014; Marinova, 2017; Mencutek & Baser, 2018; Baser & Öztürk, 2020; Burgess, 2020). Numerous states have established different forms of diaspora engagement policies and institutions with a variety of motivations (Ragazzi, 2014). By doing so, they have 'reinvented and rescaled ways of exercising power beyond their boundaries' (Bahçecik, 2020). Previous research largely focused on the motivations of such policies and their impact on diaspora spaces but paid little attention to the context of the host state's reception. Therefore, in order to fill this gap in the literature, we examine how host states react to other states' diaspora engagement policies within their borders. We use as our point of departure the question of where host states draw the line for another state's involvement. In other words, where does diaspora governance end and where do host states feel that home states are contesting their sovereignty in their own territory?

A lot has been written on diaspora engagement by home states, particularly on the reasons and ideologies underpinning such policies and institutions (Burgess, 2020; Mencutek & Baser, 2018; Délano & Gamlen, 2014; Gamlen, 2019; Gamlen, Cummings & Vaaler, 2019; Ragazzi,

2009). Most of this literature has dealt with different diaspora engagement models, and come up with corresponding typologies (Ragazzi, 2014). Discussions have largely focused on the bureaucratic aspects of diaspora engagement by home states, looking at various types of diaspora ministries or offices, or at different modalities for granting voting rights to citizens abroad (Burgess, 2020; Mencutek & Baser, 2018; Lafleur, 2013; Collyer, 2014). Thus far, the existing research tends to describe diaspora engagement policies as entirely controlled and developed by home states, and implemented without taking host states into account. Admittedly, some authors explain that the nature of the host state might influence diaspora engagement policies. Brand (2006: 62) shows for instance that these policies can be used as a foreign policy tool to influence relations between home and host states. Délano and Gamlen (2014: 44) also remind us that diaspora engagement policies depend on where diasporas are settled, and on relations between home and host states. To date, however, there has been no study specifically examining exactly how the nature of host–home states’ relations influences diaspora engagement policies.

In that sense, exploring the extent to which, and the conditions under which, host countries let home countries reach out to their diasporas is crucial for measuring the effectiveness of diaspora engagement policies. While opportunity structures and constraints limiting the ability of diasporas to organize nationally and transnationally from host states have already been explored, with a stress put on the openness of the host country political system, on easiness of access to policymakers, or on legal opportunity structures (Baser, 2015; Marinova, 2017; Orjuela, 2018), the systematic analysis of constraints applying to home states’ engagement policies is long overdue. In particular, an exploration of how opportunity structures in host states might affect the capacity of home states to reach out to their diasporas seems necessary.

In this article, by using Turkey's diaspora engagement policies during the last decade, since the foundation of the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), as well as the reactions of European states to Turkey's proactive interference in diaspora spaces as a case study, we shed light on a less discussed aspect of the diaspora governance phenomenon. We focus on the reactions of political leaders and on political debates in Austria, France, Germany and the Netherlands. In addition to belonging in the European Union (EU) where many foreign policy matters are discussed, these four European countries all host significant Turkish diaspora groups and have been targeted by the AKP in its latest transnational electoral campaign. Our data primarily includes declarations by Austrian, Dutch, French and German political leaders and policymakers over the past decade, as relayed in various media such as newspapers and television channels. We use interpretive theorizing and meaning making in order to make sense of this data (Krauss 2005), and to highlight the framings and narratives used in the targeted countries. What makes Turkey an important case study is that its considerable diaspora in Europe and its domestic and foreign policy agendas have a noteworthy impact not only on its transnational imagined community abroad, but also on European politics and policies.

The principal contributions of this article are the following: first, it contributes to the burgeoning literature on diaspora governance by unpacking the host country dimension of the multilateral entanglements among diasporas and home and host countries, which has been neglected in existing scholarly work. Second, it brings back discussions on state sovereignty and dual loyalties into the current debates in diaspora studies and links them to questions of how securitization policies are utilized by host states when diaspora engagement is perceived as a threat. Third, it reflects on the implications of these newly emerging complex interactions between home and host states on transnational political processes. In the following pages, we

first unpack the literature on state-led diaspora engagement policies. Then a brief overview of Turkey's proactive diaspora governance policy is presented, followed by a detailed analysis of European host states' reactions to Turkey's attempts to reach out and mobilize certain segments of its diaspora. We argue that three main types of reactions dominate: first, the conceptualization of the spillover of homeland conflicts as a threat to the public order; second, a denunciation of transnational authoritarianism and of diasporas' support for authoritarian regimes; and, third, a stress put on competing loyalties and values which might indicate a friction between diasporas and host states. In the last section, we place the Turkish case in a broader perspective in light of the discussions around the concepts of state sovereignty and dual loyalties.

## **STATE-LED DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT POLICIES: SHORTCOMINGS OF THE CURRENT DEBATES**

Recent research has clearly demonstrated that home states in the Global South in particular are increasingly reaching out to their diasporas in order to enhance homeland interests abroad (Burgess, 2018). Some home states have formed specific ministries for diaspora affairs, while others have created executive and legal branches to deal with different aspects of diaspora affairs. Gamlen, Cummings and Vaaler (2017) came up with a three-tier typology to define the dominant perspectives in the literature, which they named as tapping, embracing and governing perspectives. Early studies focused more on the tapping potential of diasporas by home states for national interests, mostly in terms of remittances, aid and investment (Kovács, 2020; Leblang, 2017), while subsequent perspectives examined how home states include diasporas in their national imaginary, and therefore nation-building practices (Lainer-Vos, 2010), by engaging with them in a positive or negative manner (Brand, 2006). Finally, the governance perspective, which is gradually becoming dominant, focuses on the decentralized approach

used by both home and host states as well as international organizations to global governance of migration (Gamlen, Cummings & Vaaler, 2017). All three perspectives, which might overlap at the policy level, still fall short in explaining the changing role and place of state sovereignty in today's international relations, particularly from a host country perspective.

What does the current literature on state-led diaspora governance repeatedly tell us? First, there is consensus on home states' motivations for using diaspora engagement to further national or party interests abroad (Burgess, 2020, 2018; Garding, 2018). Second, scholars acknowledge that diasporas are heterogenous and, therefore, home state engagement can be selective in nature and take positive and negative forms while addressing loyal and dissident diaspora groups (Mencutek & Baser, 2018; Turner, 2013; McIntyre & Gamlen, 2019; Baser & Öztürk, 2020). Third, diaspora engagement is not free from politics, and is volatile depending on the interests of the home state elites (Burgess, 2018; Garding, 2018). Domestic political agendas of home states are directly or indirectly reflected in diaspora engagement strategies, especially in times of crises and critical junctures in the homeland (Laguerre, 2005). Engagement can happen sporadically or systematically regardless of whether there is an institution or not (Burgess, 2018). The burgeoning literature presents case-by-case analyses for theory-building about the homeland–diaspora nexus, and newly emerging studies have started focusing on how diasporans are interpreting home states' renewed interest in dominating the transnational space (Mahieu, 2019). Host perceptions of these interactions between the homeland and claimed populations abroad are still a question mark in the literature.

In this article, we depart from the idea that diaspora governance policies are top-down and designed by homeland actors without necessarily taking the diasporas' own needs and multifaceted agendas into consideration (Kuznetsov & Freinkman, 2013). These policies are

uninvited but tolerated to a certain extent by host states, especially when these diaspora initiatives are the result of joint ventures by home and host states. State-led diaspora policies may disturb the already existing balance of power between the host state actors and the diaspora as well as among different diaspora groups, for instance by supporting financially and/or discursively some diaspora organizations that are not necessarily reflective of the majority of opinions in the concerned diaspora. These policies usually reflect the homeland's interests while also curbing or accelerating diaspora mobilization either by empowering or disempowering certain groups. Recent studies on state-led diaspora engagement policies increasingly show that these policies are tailored around ruling party interests as much as they are sold as state policies (Burgess, 2020, 2018; Garding, 2018), and they are political projects that pursue ruling parties' agendas as much as they are presented as driven by economic or public diplomacy motives (Baser & Öztürk, 2020). Garding (2018: 355) criticizes explanations which focus solely on the economic dimension of these policies by underlining the fact that recent trends in the evolution of diaspora institutions do not co-evolve with home states' fluctuating economic health. The Turkish case, for example, clearly demonstrates that the timing of formulating more and more assertive diaspora mobilization policies coincides with domestic political developments in Turkey more than anything else.

Without directly addressing the issue of how host states react to diaspora engagement policies, the existing literature provides information on the multiple factors that could come into play for explaining such reactions. In particular, how diaspora engagement policies are perceived in host countries is likely to depend on how they define their own national community. Diaspora identities are often seen as politically hyphenated identities that do not sit well with the nation-state form (Kalra, Kaur & Hutnyk, 2005: 33). In that sense, diasporas can represent a threat to the national sovereignty of host states, whose salience could be heightened by diaspora



engagement policies. Host states tend to equate the hybrid nature of diasporas, fed by diaspora engagement policies, with ‘fifth column’ type of threats, and with attitudes of ‘dual loyalty’ (Sheffer, 1994: 72). This also explains why many host countries develop legislations that prevent double citizenship (Joppke, 2008) and/or make it complicated to acquire the host society’s citizenship.

In parallel, representations pertaining to specific diasporas are likely to explain why host countries might be more or less likely to accept home states’ engagement policies. The size of the concerned diaspora as compared to the host country’s population, its level of politicization, as also its assigned characteristics (religion, language, etc.), constitute other important factors for explaining the attitude of host countries towards diaspora engagement policies. In the Global North, diasporas tend to be seen as threats to national unity and security, especially when coming from the Global South, conflict-ridden areas and/or ‘non-democratic’ states (Laffey & Nadarajah, 2012). Fear of conflict contagion leads to host states developing intense surveillance policies, relying on control and policing, including the monitoring of linkages with actors located in home countries (Féron, 2017).

Another main factor offering avenues for explaining host states’ attitude towards diaspora engagement policies relates to interstate and international dimensions. Whether the concerned home and host states have asymmetrical power relations, tight pre-existing links and relations, common ‘historical baggage’ which can include shared colonial or imperial histories, all can come into play for understanding the potential limits set by host states towards diaspora engagement policies. These policies can be seen as external interferences with no proper diplomatic oversight, and thus as contravening basic principles of national sovereignty, except perhaps between countries that share strong links, such as within the EU. From this perspective,

potential moves by host countries to control diaspora engagement policies can be interpreted not as necessarily hostile towards home countries, but as reaffirmations of the inside–outside dichotomy on which state power is based (Collyer, 2014).

Besides these three main factors, scholars like Gamlen (2019) have shown how diaspora outreach policies have developed differently over time. Can we, in a similar way, identify limits to diaspora engagement policies depending on conjunctural and strategic factors? In times of war or tensions in the homeland, for instance, host countries are more likely to pay close attention to diaspora outreach policies, especially if they fear conflict spillover.

Diasporas are ascending as non-state actors and surely pose a challenge to the traditional understanding of sovereignty and nation-states as we know it. As Ragazzi (2009) points out, diaspora networks compel students of political science and international relations to observe how concepts such as nation, citizen and sovereignty have to be reinvented and reinterpreted, and how the traditional Westphalian understanding of nation-state is challenged in a globalized world. Our observations of the current literature demonstrate that these discussions are particularly made within the home–state–diaspora nexus, and that they ignore issues related to the host states’ sovereignty. In this article, we propose to scrutinize host countries’ reactions, arguing that state sovereignty is still at play in diaspora politics despite the celebratory approach towards global governance and deterritorialization. The case under scrutiny demonstrates that host states can still use their leverage over limiting another nation-state’s operations on their own soil for their own national interests.

## **TURKEY UNBOUNDED**

Turkey is one of the most prominent countries in terms of migrant flows from the Global South to the Global North. There has been continuous mobility from Turkey towards various locations, especially in Europe, since the 1960s when Turkey signed bilateral guest worker agreements with host states in need of cheap labour. These agreements were based on temporary contracts, with no assumption that the workers would stay in Europe longer than the terms of the bilateral agreements (Burgess, 2020: 92). Many Turkish immigrants, however, opted to stay, leading to the formation of one of the largest diasporas in Europe. Turkey's engagement with these groups then happened on an ad-hoc basis and mostly addressed pressing issues regarding their legal status. The Turkish state's mentality began to transform in the 1970s when the state started considering measures that would prevent cultural assimilation. The Turkish state started implementing policies to facilitate migrants sending remittances back home and using savings to invest in Turkey. On the cultural and religious front, at the beginning of 1970s, the formal religious institution in Turkey (Diyanet) started sending imams abroad to facilitate the religious education and practices of Turkish migrants (Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2003). The first economically motivated migration flows were then followed by family reunifications, conflict-generated migration (particularly from Leftist, Kurdish and Alevite groups) in the 1970s and 1980s as a result of *coup d'états*. Many political organizations such as ultra-nationalist (Grey Wolves), Kurdish or Leftist movements went into exile. In the 1980s, Turkey showed a more active political engagement with diaspora communities abroad, but it was not as systematic as it is today. Rather than formulating initiatives to build a pro-regime diaspora, the state opted for initiatives to demobilize dissident groups and created surveillance and monitoring mechanisms to keep diaspora activism under control (Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Mencutek & Baser, 2018).

In those years, Turkey was under military tutelage, and the suppression of political Islam abroad became a top priority for Turkish officials. The state adopted a policy of long-distance Kemalism and tried to spread the dominant ideology of rule by secular and Kemalist principles (Senay, 2012). Therefore, the state's engagement with the diaspora occurred as a result of a political project and mirrored the leading state ideology of the 1980s and 1990s. Turkey used the Diyanet to curb other Islamic movements such as the Milli Gorus while simultaneously establishing organizations such as Turk Evleri as cultural organizations (Mugge, 2012: 25). Turkey also put in place diplomatic attempts to curb Kurdish activism and demanded that host countries ban outlawed organizations in Turkey (Baser, 2015).

The 1990s brought about a different strategy due to Turkey's attempts to become a member of the EU. Turkey started seeing diaspora organizations as an asset in this endeavour (Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2003). As suggested by Aksel (2014: 210), there was an active transnationalization of Turkey's state mentality combined with an active involvement of the Turkish state in diaspora spaces as well as a proactive institutionalization process to govern the 'Turkish diaspora' (Aksel, 2014; Mencutek & Baser, 2018). Therefore, the Turkish state's policy towards emigrants gradually transformed in response to the changing times and the profile of the ever-evolving diaspora, and the AKP's attempts should be interpreted as a continuation of previous efforts rather than a new phenomenon.

In line with Garding's (2018) institutional change perspective to understand the evolution of diaspora institutions, the Turkish state's active interest in mobilizing a loyal and impactful diaspora can be understood within the interests of the ruling party and its political agenda. During the last decade, Turkey has initiated a proactive engagement policy with its citizens abroad and this has coincided with the gradual rise to power of the AKP. Similar to the previous

trends, the diaspora engagement policy was very much influenced by the AKP's political, economic and cultural world-view and agenda; consequently, state institutions and apparatuses were shaped to serve the survival of the new regime at home, and its reputation abroad. The AKP established the YTB in 2010, and in just a decade, this institution, with its branches, subunits and organically linked diaspora organizations, has begun dominating the transnational social space that hosts the Turkish diaspora.

According to Akçapar and Aksel (2017), Turkey's attempts to woo its diaspora occurred in four different realms: institutional, ideological, political (electoral) and relational. The institutional realm refers to the establishment of new institutions and state apparatuses to implement the diaspora policy, while the ideological realm refers to the ideological duty that the diasporans are given by their home states. The political or electoral realm was created through the introduction of expatriate rights, and the relational realm refers to the associational relations between the diaspora members themselves and the state as represented by institutions operating in the diaspora. The YTB has invested a significant amount of time and effort to maximize Turkey's gains from the diaspora in these four realms by initiating various activities to mobilize dormant loyalties in the diaspora, rebuild and reshape the span of diasporic activities, and to strengthen ties with certain segments of the diaspora while curbing the dissidents' voices. This selective engagement is well documented by scholars who have examined both the actions and discourses of the newly established institutions, and they reveal that most YTB activities target diasporans who would constitute the AKP's voter base rather than the whole diasporic population (Yanasmayan & Kaşlı, 2019). As Burgess (2020: 102) has rightly argued, the AKP and President Erdogan have managed to 'shift the lines of inclusion and exclusion in Turkey's imagined community', and this has been reflected in the diaspora spaces as well.

The main state apparatuses that are in charge of implementing the diaspora policy under the YTB are the Yunus Emre Institutes, the Diyanet and the Union of International Democrats (UID), all of which act for Turkey's interests abroad. There are also bottom-up foundations, organizations and mosque associations which voluntarily collaborate with state institutions on a number of issues from language courses to monitoring and surveillance of dissidents. The institutions responsible for enhancing the diaspora governance policy prepare specific programmes to create incentives for the diaspora to rekindle their ties with Turkey and act as bridges between host and home countries. Scholars have argued that Turkey has used diaspora engagement as a tool for public diplomacy and, therefore, the diaspora has been deployed to build soft power in the host countries to advance Turkey's interests (Akçapar & Aksel, 2017). It could be said that these motivations stayed active initially, but later, domestic politics compelled the ruling party to change its agenda towards the diaspora where, at times, the public diplomacy aspects have been forgotten and replaced by Turkey's attempts to exercise hard power outside its boundaries (Baser & Öztürk, 2020). The diaspora engagement policy has shown visible dissonance over the last decade with regard to its initial aims and actual actions on the ground. Turkish politicians started adopting an anti-Western rhetoric (Kaliber & Kaliber, 2019) and built on an East–West distinction to woo diaspora communities in Europe, including the wider Muslim population from different parts of the world.

The authoritarian turn in Turkey, which started with the Gezi protests in 2013 and continued with critical events such as the collapse of the peace process between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in 2015, the coup attempt in 2016 and the regime change in 2018, paved the way for large waves of migration out of Turkey towards Europe and other countries both in the Global North and South, as well as for the Turkish state to tighten its grip

abroad. The new layer of the Turkey-originated diaspora is a heterogeneous community of Kurds, Alevites, Leftists, dissidents, public intellectuals, secular white-collar communities as well as members of the Gulen Movement (GM) (Watmough and Öztürk, 2018). The latter constitutes the largest segment of the newcomer community. The GM had a strategic alliance with the AKP regime until they started a power struggle from 2010 onwards due to interest-based conflicts. The rift between the two camps became highly visible in the media as well as in the AKP's attempts to sideline Gulenist networks from state apparatuses. The AKP regime blamed the GM for the coup attempt in 2016 and a purge of Gulenists started in Turkey after the post-coup securitization policies were put in place (Watmough and Öztürk, 2018). This led to a massive exodus of the Gulen Movement's followers outside Turkey, and the AKP then started a global purge of the Gulenists and hunted 'enemies of the state' in the diaspora.

The diasporic space became an extended platform for the unfolding of political conflicts in Turkey which not only affected the diasporans' everyday lives but also led to violent and non-violent tensions among different groups within the diaspora, especially during election times. Turkey's interference in the European political sphere under the guise of diaspora governance policies created mistrust and scepticism among European policymakers and European societies at large. Rather than acting prudently to protect the image and rights of Turkish diasporas in Europe, Turkish policymakers acted pragmatically to benefit from the expanding rift between the EU and Turkey to garner votes and the support of loyalists for regime survival (Yanasmayan & Kaşlı, 2019).

## **EUROPEAN HOST STATES' REACTIONS TO TURKEY'S DIASPORA GOVERNANCE POLICIES**

The Turkish case demonstrates that it is vital to understand what motivations drive the foundation of diaspora governance institutions, but, more importantly, what aims these institutions are used for and what consequences these bring to other state and non-state actors in the transnational field. Since the early 2010s, it has been possible to observe that Turkey's diaspora governance policies have had an impact on how Turkish diasporas' presence is viewed by European political actors. The old debates on integration and opportunity structures have been augmented with discussions on whether diasporans are internalizing 'European values' given that their loyalties might lie elsewhere, how diaspora governance policies are interfering in European states' domestic affairs, and what implications diasporic ties might have on identity politics.

In order to assess host states' reactions to Turkey's proactive engagement in diaspora spaces since the beginning of Turkey's diaspora governance policies under the AKP, we categorize below the main European reactions under three headings: first, imported conflicts which pose a threat to public order in European societies; second, transnational authoritarianism and diasporas' support for authoritarian regimes and sourcing from democratic countries in Europe; and, third, competing loyalties and values which might indicate a friction between diasporas and host states. These three categories sometimes overlap but also provide us with three main themes to situate these developments in a broader perspective. Below, we give examples illustrating each category before discussing what these categories mean with regard to reinterpreting state sovereignty in the age of diaspora governance with a particular focus on host states.

### **Spillover of homeland conflicts: A threat to the public order?**



The Turkish diasporas in Europe are extremely heterogeneous and were the result of numerous flows from Turkey either as labour migration or conflict-generated displacement. This heterogeneous structure, despite enriching the Turkey-originated diaspora community, sometimes creates fragmentations based on ethnic/religious/ideological/class-based differences and makes Turkey's diaspora vulnerable to political developments in Turkey as domestic politics are reinvented in the transnational space in the form of imported conflicts (Féron, 2017; Baser, 2015; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). Especially in the 1990s, the feud between the Turkish and Kurdish nationalist groups turned violent in European metropolises, which triggered an immediate reaction from European policymakers. Turkish political groups had satellite organizations in the diaspora, and conflict dynamics were transported and/or reshaped by diaspora entrepreneurs claiming to represent each group outside the homeland's borders. Therefore, the spillover of Turkey's domestic conflicts into the European political space is not a new phenomenon. Reactions to and discourses on these imported conflicts have however changed dramatically. First of all, before Turkey's systematic diaspora policy was put in place, European policymakers would target diasporas when there was a violent or non-violent altercation among diaspora communities. By contrast, in recent years, policymakers are primarily targeting the Turkish state when they fire warnings about imported conflicts. Second, the authoritarian turn in Turkey and the increased polarization within the Turkish diaspora now seem to matter more than the events of the 1990s and 2000s when Turkey still had prospects of EU membership, and when European member-states had leverage over Turkey's foreign and domestic policy decisions (see Burgess, 2020: 50).

Each critical juncture in Turkey has become a potential polarization hazard for the diaspora. Especially during transnational election campaigns since 2014, cleavages between the different groups have become more visible and the certainty of violent confrontations in European

metropolises has alarmed political leaders to the extent that in 2017, Turkish-origin German politicians judged Turkey's transnational elections to be too divisive for an already politicized and polarized diaspora (Deutsche Welle, 2017a). Eventually, in 2018, Germany, Austria and other countries banned Turkey's extraterritorial election campaigns. President Erdogan's reaction to the German and Austrian ban on extraterritorial campaigns was to say that they will 'pay the price' for their actions and that Turkey's democracy cannot be stopped (Gotev, 2018).

The situation was similar in the Netherlands, where Dutch politicians pronounced that Turkish elections should remain in Turkey and that the spillover of political tensions could cause disorder (Gotev, 2018). These reactions from European policymakers were not welcomed by the Turkish politicians, who accused them of giving space to other opposition parties such as the Left-leaning pro-Kurdish party, the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). It was also observed that such tensions actually strengthened xenophobic approaches towards the Turkish diaspora. The far-Right leader, Geert Wilders, demanded a ban on all diplomats from Turkey. In retaliation, Turkey threatened the Netherlands with economic and political sanctions (King, 2017).

Clashes among Turkish and Kurdish groups intensified after the collapse of the peace process as well as Turkey's invasion of areas in Syria which were under the control of the Syrian Kurdish groups. In October 2019, clashes occurred between Turks and Kurds in Herne in Germany after Turkey's military offensive in Kurdish-controlled areas in Syria. The German Integration Commissioner, Annette Widmann-Mauz, said in response to the violence, 'We have a responsibility to prevent the conflict in the region becoming a conflict in our society...in Germany' (AFP, 2019). In June 2020, deadly and violent events also occurred in Austria. An immediate statement from Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, including harsh criticism of

President Erdogan, said that the latter should stop interfering in Austrian affairs. Kurz continued by stressing that more restrictions would be put in place to contain imported conflicts (Euractiv.com, 2020). Some violent encounters also happened within Turkish groups themselves. In the Netherlands, Turkish nationalists attacked the Gulen Movement's diaspora organizations, which was then condemned by the Mayor of Rotterdam, Ahmed Aboutaleb, who said, 'Don't import the conflict. It's bad enough that these tensions exist in Turkey' (BBC, 2016).

Not only Turkey's own domestic issues but also its foreign policy decisions outside Europe affect diaspora spaces. During the Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020, in which Turkey provided extensive military and vocal support to Azerbaijan, clashes occurred between the Turkish and Armenian diaspora communities in several places. Particularly in France, Turkish nationalist groups attacked Armenian neighbourhoods chanting slogans (Skopeliti, 2020). Further, an Armenian genocide memorial was defaced with graffiti which included slogans in favour of President Erdogan and the Turkish nationalist movement, the Grey Wolves, which the French government banned immediately.

### **Transnational authoritarianism**

Entailing the monitoring, regulation and containment of diaspora groups which are perceived as dissidents (Baser and Öztürk, 2020), transnational authoritarianism has increasingly been employed by hybrid or purely authoritarian regimes. Turkey in particular has devised multiple strategies to securitize its diaspora, notably after the coup attempt in the early 1980s. In order to curb transnational Kurdish activism, it lobbied European states through diplomatic channels. The Turkish demands included banning Kurdish TV stations, Kurdish organizations and language courses as well as the deportation of Kurdish activists who had trials pending in

Turkey (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). Although securitization attempts have been common during the past decades, since the authoritarian turn in Turkey, transnational authoritarianism has accelerated and begun penetrating into diasporans' everyday lives, affecting them at both macro and micro levels.

In particular, the Turkish state has actively subcontracted the surveillance and monitoring of dissidents to loyal diaspora members as well as to employees of state-linked institutions such as *imams*. Claims that a foreign country has been brazenly spying on dual-nationality citizens within their borders have created additional hurdles for European governments attempting to manage anti-immigrant sentiments and extreme Right-wing populist opposition. For instance, the Diyanet administers around a thousand mosques in Germany. After the Turkish state's crackdown on dissidents at home and abroad, German police revealed that the Diyanet's *imams*, who work for the Turkish Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB), have been spying on Turkish diaspora members who belonged to the Gulen Movement (BBC, 2017). Austria became one of the first countries to label Turkish state-funded mosques as a threat to its security and deported the *imams* of seven mosques in 2018. Turkey immediately labelled this act as Islamophobic. Another incident where Turkish-origin children showed up in a mosque in Turkish military uniforms as part of a World War I commemoration event created a debate around the impact of mosques on next-generation Turkish migrants (BBC, 2018). Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz said that 'parallel societies, political Islam and radicalisation tendencies have no place in our country' (BBC, 2018). Dutch politicians denounced the 'long arm of Turkey' in the Netherlands when various newspaper outlets revealed that the *imams* were spying on Gulen Movement supporters (Reuters, 2016). In the Netherlands, another cause for concern — and debate — was the Turkish embassy's call to

Turkish diasporans to denounce dissidents who criticized the current regime and President Erdogan to the embassy (RT, 2016).

As a precautionary measure, the German Federal Ministry of Interior banned a Turkish diaspora gang called Osmanen Germania which was allegedly very close to the AKP and acted against those opposed to the AKP regime and/or President Erdogan. Osmanen Germania was set up in 2014 by young Turks in Germany who belonged to an extreme-Right biker club and who would intimidate Kurdish and other groups who were deemed to be Turkey's enemies. German investigations revealed that an AKP member was financing the group to buy weapons, organize counter-protests and monitor regime dissidents abroad. The investigations also revealed that this gang had close ties to the Union of European Turkish Democrats (EUTD), which is considered to be the diaspora organization that runs the AKP's lobbying business in Europe (Deutsche Welle, 2017b). In response to these developments, the Austrian Interior Minister, Karl Nehammer, said, 'If Erdogan and Turkey are trying to establish a systematic network of informers in Austria, there must be consequences' (AFP, 2020).

These developments not only damaged Turkey's reputation abroad, but also clearly showed that Turkey's quest for public diplomacy has geared itself towards regime survival rather than building a positive image abroad. Diasporas' resources were being tapped not for building soft power, but for extending hard power extraterritorially via transnational state apparatuses as well as loyal diasporans as proxies of the Turkish regime (Yanasmayan & Kaşlı, 2019). Therefore, it is no coincidence that such actions by Turkey have created uneasiness among European policymakers and societies at large. The measures taken to contain Turkey's extraterritorial authoritarian reach have resulted in a larger discussion on the integration levels

of diasporans and the values that they are committed to despite having lived in Europe for many years.

### **Competing for loyalties and values**

Despite the not-so-open space given to Turkish transnational electoral campaigns, Erdogan and his party have won a sweeping majority of the diaspora votes in three consecutive elections (Baser and Öztürk, 2020; Burgess, 2020). The election results clearly show a strong voter base that supports the Erdogan regime in Turkey, and one that also harbours a deep sentimental connection to his domestic and foreign agendas. Various European politicians have made declarations underlining the perceived contradictions between the Erdogan regime's values and the so-called European values. Moreover, these events opened platforms for extreme Right-wing parties to comment on the loyalties of diaspora communities in order to increase their supporters' base. For instance, an Austrian Freedom Party official said that Turkish diasporans who vote for Erdogan should go back to Turkey as they do not belong in Europe (*Daily Sabah*, 2018). The party's deputy chief, Johann Gudenus, declared that the 2018 Turkish elections proved that the integration of Turkish immigrants has been a miserable failure. Therefore, Turkey's ever-growing presence in diaspora spaces is not only creating security-related concerns, but also bringing back old debates regarding Turkish immigrants' compatibility with European values, integration potential and the dual loyalties stemming from their transnational ties.

These debates surfaced more visibly and assertively when expatriate voting rights were utilized by Turkey's diasporans, leading to massive transnational election campaigns and propaganda by the AKP, and to the escalation of discursive polarizations among various diaspora groups and violent altercations. In addition to the inflammatory rhetoric, Turkish politicians often

underlined that ideal Turkish diasporans have their heart and mind in Turkey and that they will integrate but not assimilate into European societies (Bahçecik, 2020). This emphasis on the pragmatic use of European citizenship while keeping one's loyalties anchored in Turkey added to the already existing scepticism about the attachment of Turkish communities to their host countries. The AKP's specific efforts in rejuvenating nationalist and religious feelings among the diaspora youth as an investment in the coming generations also alarmed policymakers in Europe. The main perception was that parallel societies, which were said to have been created by unintegrated migrants in European metropolises, were being created deliberately this time by foreign states, threatening the public order and sovereignty of host states.

This concern has led to multiple debates and policy initiatives. For instance, Austria has begun investigating the citizenship status of Turkey-originating migrants there. As the country does not allow dual citizenship, Turkish people are expected to denounce their Turkish citizenship in order to naturalize in Austria. However, there have been cases where Turkish citizens reacquired their Turkish citizenship after having obtained their Austrian passports. After the 2018 Turkish elections, Austrian authorities identified thousands of such cases and cancelled their Austrian citizenship. Besides altered discussions around election times, Turkish-origin politicians' relations with Turkey also became a matter of debate in Europe. In Sweden for instance, the Green Party member Mehmet Kaplan had to resign from his political role as Housing Minister after the Swedish media discovered that he was too close to the UETD, which has organic ties with the AKP (*The Local*, 2016). Moreover, the DITIB's activities and Turkish politicians' visits to open mosques in Germany caused great tensions and German politicians asked organizations such as the DITIB to maintain a clear distance between politics and religion in their affairs (Ahval.com, 2018).

In France too, attempts have been made to curb Turkey's influence not only on Turkish groups but on other Muslim communities as well. This has notably led to the creation of a National Council of Imams, whose main function is to 'vet' *imams* operating in France. The idea is to end the practice of foreign *imams* — around 300 currently sent by Turkey, but also Morocco and Algeria — who are seen as more likely to be radical and as particularly influential among the Turkish diaspora (France 24, 2021). In addition, in January 2021, the French government launched, together with five representatives of the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM), a Charter of Principles for French Islam, the purpose of which is to fight against 'Islamist separatism'.

These reactions clearly demonstrate that home states' diaspora engagement policies have limits and host states place embargoes on such activities when they perceive their sovereignty and national interests to be under threat. Turkey's recent proactive transnational policies constitute an interesting example, but the findings are not unique to the Turkish case. Below, we discuss the implications of state-led diaspora mobilization in a wider perspective and place the debate in a broader context.

## **RETHINKING SOVEREIGNTY**

We started this paper by asking where host states draw the line when it comes to home states' diaspora engagement policies, and how they justify their reactions. Based on the example of European host states' reactions to Turkey's diaspora engagement policies, it appears that host states do indeed set firm limits on home states' interventions. Three main types of perceived threats seem to trigger a reaction, all of which relate to host states' territorial sovereignty. First, host states react strongly when home states' engagement policies are likely to trigger violence within diasporas, or between diasporas and the rest of the population, as, for instance, when



there is a perceived risk of conflict contagion from home to host country. Instead of being perceived as an internal disturbance, transported conflicts between diasporas are increasingly considered within an international security and foreign policy frame within which the diasporas' homeland plays a major role. Second, host states are likely to firmly counter any perceived risk of radicalization of diasporas. In the case of the Turkish diaspora, the multiple references to potential religious activities controlled by foreign religious actors underscore the fact that diaspora engagement policies tend to be read through the prism of 'international terrorism', and thus to turn diasporas into primary targets for host states' securitization policies. And third, host states are likely to swiftly counteract when home states' engagement policies are suspected of feeding dual loyalties among diasporas as, for instance, in justifying anti-dual citizenship measures. Though expatriate voting rights are generally celebrated as an expansion of popular sovereignty, election rallies organized from abroad were perceived by host states as a violation of their sovereignty, as a foreign power (an authoritarian and non-democratic state) exerting undue influence in their territory. Therefore, it is important to underline that it was not the expatriate voting rights per se that created an uproar in host countries, but the fact that these rights paved the way for authoritarian leaders to campaign in these countries and forge allies. Although similar in nature, we have also observed that each host state had its own approach to dealing with such influence. Reactions varied according to national concerns and interests.

Interestingly, the perceived threats triggering reactions by host states relate to core territorial sovereignty and security matters. Economic matters like the sending of remittances and fund-raising activities organized by home states, as well as 'soft' political issues like home country-related political activism, do not seem to trigger much reaction from host states. Importantly, these reaffirmations of host states' sovereignty build upon the assumption that diasporas, as targeted by home states' engagement policies, cannot be considered to be 'regular' citizens.

Suspected of harbouring dual loyalties, diasporas targeted by home states' engagement policies become potential foreign agents whose loyalty has to be re-established either by obliging them to choose between their home and host country and/or by forcefully condemning their home state's policies.

It is however interesting to note that discourses justifying host states' reactions to home states' diaspora engagement policies do not necessarily foreground sovereignty issues. In the examples we reviewed, host states explain their reactions to Turkey's diaspora policies by relying heavily on narratives about so-called European and democratic values. Security- and sovereignty-related concerns are therefore veiled in narratives about values and norms. Here, it is important to remember that these discourses and practices by host states do not just target Turkey, seen as having abandoned 'EU values', but also their EU partners whom they need to reassure, as well as other home states whose potential active diaspora engagement policies have to be pre-empted.

But it is perhaps the fact that host states' reactions seem to be primarily addressed to home states, rather than to diasporas themselves, that is the most telling. With a few exceptions, host states seem to hold home states, and not diasporas, responsible for impinging on their sovereignty and for endangering their security. So, whereas home states' engagement policies primarily target diasporas, host states' reactions introduce an asymmetry by responding to home states themselves. Diasporas, however, are held responsible for giving unswerving loyalty to a foreign country, which makes their ties to the host country questionable. For some policymakers, especially on the Right-wing spectrum, this is a fact that can be easily interpreted as a sign of un-integrability and incompatibility with European values. Diasporas are treated as a monolithic body by certain actors and either seen as passive receivers of home state policies

with no agency of their own or ungrateful citizens/residents who compete against the free states that gave them a home.

All of this confirms some of the insights that we drew earlier from the existing literature, but it also hints at some other important elements that underscore the need to pay more attention to host states' reactions to home states' diaspora engagement policies. First, there is a conjunctural aspect to these reactions, which suggests that the interstate/bilateral factor matters considerably. In the example we developed, host states seem to primarily react to political events in Turkey, and Turkey's relation to the EU integration process is clearly important too. It therefore seems that host states' reactions are largely dependent upon the identity of the concerned home state: it is unlikely that reactions would have been so strong with a close political or ideological ally. Second, in our chosen case study, during the past decade, host states have been addressing their condemnations primarily to the home state and not to the concerned diasporas, which suggests that they conceive of diasporas in international politics as a means to an end, rather than as actors. This represents a change as compared to the previous decades during which host states would directly target diasporas. It also shows that diaspora engagement policies have actually had a detrimental effect for diasporas in host countries: instead of empowering diasporas in the eyes of host-state governments, diaspora engagement policies have incited host states to bypass them and to directly interact with home states. As a consequence, through and because of diaspora engagement policies, diasporas are increasingly securitized by host and home states without ever becoming real partners. Third, host states primarily react using diplomatic tools to counter home states' diaspora governance policies. Host states have not yet developed their own counter-diaspora governance policies, but, if anything, have reacted by further securitizing the concerned diasporas. This is a clear

reaffirmation of the primacy of state sovereignty principles, against globalization and international governance approaches.

All of this suggests that as soon as home states' policies (seem to) infringe upon traditional state matters, host states strongly reaffirm their sovereignty. Going back to Collyer's argument about the 'inside' and 'outside' of states, and the distinction between territorial and popular sovereignty (2014), we can say that while diaspora engagement policies embody home states' wish to enforce their popular sovereignty, they can also trigger a reaffirmation of host states' territorial sovereignty. In addition, our study suggests that diasporas are international actors only within the strict limits established by both home and host states. Moreover, opportunity structures in host states for diaspora mobilization account for home states' diaspora-related activities; in other words, the threshold is set where the host state draws the limits of extraterritorial intervention. This shows that interstate relations between home and host states are definitely a fundamental blind spot in diaspora research, which would need to be further explored and theorized, beyond case studies.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this paper, we have shown that home states' diaspora mobilization efforts can be interpreted as a violation of host states' sovereignty in certain cases. Several factors play a role in how host state responses are formulated as a response to foreign interference in their territory under the disguise of diaspora engagement policies. We showed that gradual escalation of interference and increasing frequency and intensity of such policies might pave the way to a push-back by host states.

The findings of this article are relevant for other cases in global politics especially within the realm of imported conflicts, transnational repression and discourses on clashing loyalties and values. For instance, the recent wars in Karabakh and in Israel show that diasporas can easily mobilize and commit violent acts when the homeland conflict escalates. Violent clashes between Azerbaijani and Armenian diaspora groups in France and the US are a testimony to this. As a reaction to these clashes, France banned Turkish ultra-nationalist groups which were involved in attacks after a memorial dedicated to the Armenian genocide was defaced by these groups in Lyon. In the US, Palestinian diaspora demonstrations turned into riots and attacks against Jewish individuals were reported. After violent encounters in New York City, the host country response was to mobilise police forces against attackers, and the NYPD Hate Crimes Task Force started investigations against the gangs who organized such acts.

As can be observed, any escalating conflict in the homeland makes adversary diaspora groups vulnerable to altercations, and, in line with our findings, all these recent events have been approached from a securitization perspective by host states. Moreover, with regard to transnational oppression, many authoritarian states have formulated extraterritorial securitization frameworks to silence regime opponents abroad. As a recent Freedom House report shows, authoritarian states use a variety of tactics including ‘assassinations, illegal deportations, abductions, digital threats, INTERPOL abuse and family intimidation’. The report also revealed that 31 home states have used such tactics in 79 host states since 2014 and, among them, China, Turkey, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Russia and Iran are listed as the most aggressive countries towards dissident diasporas. This is an increasing trend that puts diasporas and exiles at risk globally, and host states in a situation of being stuck between a rock and a hard place. Lastly, as xenophobia and anti-immigrant discourses occupy the political

environment in host states, other cases beyond Turkey will appear on issues related to competing loyalties and values (Wernber, 2004; Baron, 2009).

Examining the Turkish case has demonstrated that host countries' reactions are characterized by their scattered and disorganized nature: host states do not seem to have developed any coordinated and consistent policy in terms of responding to home countries' engagement. This is because they prefer to respond via already existing political and diplomatic means. This is in line with what we know of how most host states interact with diasporas, which they usually see as a means to an end and not as targets or partners in policy-making. Our findings, therefore, point to a need for articulate and consistent diaspora policies. Rather than interpreting current transnational developments as a transgression of sovereignty and putting the blame on either diasporas or home states, host states should also respond to transnational challenges by turning diasporas into partners and allies.

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