

## THE DYNAMICS OF FRANCE-TURKEY RELATIONS FROM 2007 TO 2012

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### Abstract

This paper examines the dynamics of France-Turkey relations during their second historical stage, spanning from 2007 to the end of 2012, a period marked by the simultaneous presidencies of Nicolas Sarkozy in France and Abdullah Gül in Turkey. The relevance of this study lies in understanding how bilateral relations evolved under the strain of diverging strategic priorities, competing geopolitical visions, and the persistent question of Turkey's accession to the European Union.

The research employs a multidisciplinary methodological framework centered on strategic analysis. This approach is further supported by event analysis, which enables the identification and examination of key turning points and critical developments shaping bilateral relations, as well as content analysis, which systematically evaluates diplomatic communications, policy documents, official statements, and media coverage in order to capture the narratives and discourses structuring Franco-Turkish interactions. Through this methodological design, the study traces the interplay between structural constraints and political agency, with particular emphasis on the security architecture of the European continent, France's quest to consolidate its role within and beyond Europe, and Turkey's aspiration to assert greater involvement in European affairs while expanding its influence in other regional contexts.

The findings demonstrate that, despite recurrent difficulties and contradictions - rooted not only in geopolitical and strategic divergences but also in civilizational, ideological, and value-based differences - the period nevertheless witnessed the preservation of a steady trajectory of bilateral engagement. This trajectory was characterized by the coexistence of obstacles and cooperation, ultimately functioning as a driving force for continued dialogue and collaboration.

The paper argues that this dual dynamic of conflict and cooperation constitutes a defining feature of the period, placing it as a distinct and significant stage within the broader historical continuum of Franco-Turkish relations.

**Keywords:** *France-Turkey relations, presidential elections, Europe Puissance, European Union, bilateral strategic dialogue, turkish secularism, Christian identity, cooperation, cultural events, multilateral platforms.*

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## Introduction

The trajectory of France-Turkey relations assumed a qualitatively new dimension in the aftermath of the presidential elections in both countries, which brought Nicolas Sarkozy to power in France and Abdullah Gül to the presidency in Turkey. The convergence of these leadership changes created a new political context that reshaped the dynamics of bilateral interaction. The period of their respective tenures may be analytically framed as the second stage in the evolution of bilateral relations, marked not only by the broadening of multifaceted and multi-vector cooperation but also by the emergence of new areas of tension and negotiation. This stage witnessed France and Turkey engaging in dialogue on issues ranging from economic exchange and regional security to cultural diplomacy and European integration, each sphere reflecting both opportunities for partnership and points of divergence.

By virtue of its significance and its far-reaching outcomes, this phase occupies a distinct and noteworthy place within the broader historical continuum of Franco-Turkish relations, representing a period when bilateral ties were simultaneously tested and deepened in response to shifting international and domestic imperatives.

## The EU Accession Issue and Turkey's Political Transition

During this period, the issue of Turkey's accession to the European Union retained its salience, generating developments that constituted qualitatively new phenomena in the framework of bilateral relations between the two states. This occurred notwithstanding the fact that the presidency of the newly elected Abdullah Gül was widely perceived as inaugurating a "new era in Turkish politics,"<sup>1</sup> insofar as he was the first president to embed political Islam as a visible and influential factor within the structures of state governance.<sup>2</sup>

It should be emphasized that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's decision to nominate Abdullah Gül as a presidential candidate was met with

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<sup>1</sup> Sayın Gül, bu yemini hiçbir zaman unutmayın. Radikal, August 29, 2007. <https://web.archive.org/web/20070930220642/http://www.radikal.com.tr/index.php?tarih=29%2F08%2F2007> (accessed July 3, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> "Gül'ün adaylığını doğru bulmuyoruz". CNN Turk, August 14, 2007. <https://www.cnnturk.com/2007/turkiye/08/14/gulun.adayligini.dogru.bulmuyoruz/384226.0/index.html> (accessed May 11, 2025).

sharp criticism and resistance from secular segments of Turkish society.<sup>3</sup> In May 2007, Gül's initial attempt to assume the presidency was blocked by the Constitutional Court. However, following the parliamentary elections of 2007<sup>4</sup>, in which the Justice and Development Party secured 46.6 percent of the vote, Gül was elected as the country's new president, thereby inaugurating a new phase in the political history of Turkey.

### **Sarkozy's Position and Early Frictions**

In contrast to the policies pursued by former President Jacques Chirac, Nicolas Sarkozy consistently expressed opposition to Turkey's accession to the European Union from the very beginning of his presidency.<sup>5</sup> Already during his electoral campaign, Sarkozy had pledged to derail the accession negotiations, an issue on which, once elected, he adopted a political stance that, while still restrictive, was more nuanced than the uncompromising position articulated during the campaign.

As early as the beginning of 2007, Sarkozy declared that "Turkey has no place within the European Union," further stressing that "Europe must have clearly defined borders, so that not all countries aspire to become members of the organization - starting with Turkey, which has no place within the territory of the European Union".<sup>6</sup>

President Nicolas Sarkozy formally grounded his arguments in the geographic principle of Europe as a strategic power (*Europe Puissance*)<sup>7</sup>, as well as in the imperatives of consolidating and sustaining the dominance of European culture. Concurrently, he emphasized the centrality of French public opinion and its expression - a factor of critical importance for advancing his broader political agenda effectively.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Gül: Adaylığımız devam ediyor. *Hurriyet*, May 5, 2007. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/gul-adayligimiz-devam-ediyor-6497246> (accessed May 5, 2025).

<sup>4</sup> Turkish main opposition takes judicial bill to Constitutional Court. *Hurriyet Daily News*, February 26, 2014. <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-main-opposition-takes-judicial-bill-to-constitutional-court-62977> (accessed July 7, 2025).

<sup>5</sup> Turkey's EU hopes fade with Sarkozy. *Financial times*, May 7, 2007. <https://www.ft.com/content/55374310-fc82-11db-9971-000b5df10621> (accessed July 3, 2025).

<sup>6</sup> Sarkozy launches presidential bid with anti-Turkey stance. *Euobserver*, January 15, 2007. <https://euobserver.com/political/23251> (accessed July 3, 2025).

<sup>7</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy fait de la construction de l'Europe une "priorité absolue". *Les Echos*, August 27, 2007. <https://www.lesechos.fr/2007/08/nicolas-sarkozy-fait-de-la-construction-de-leurope-une-priorite-absolue-553425> (accessed May 18, 2025).

<sup>8</sup> Açık, Eşref. *Geçmişten Günümüze Türkiye-Fransa İlişkileri*, İstanbul: IQ Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 2008, p. 526. <https://www.kitapsepeti.com/urun/detay/kitap/gecmisten-gunumuze-turkiye-fransa-iliskileri/327466> (accessed April 20, 2025).

## Cultural and Civilizational Dimensions

Even during his tenure as Minister of the Interior, Sarkozy had faced criticism for his statements and policy decisions regarding Muslim communities residing in France. According to Turkish sources, these positions reflected discriminatory tendencies not only toward Muslim populations but also toward Islam and Islamic civilization more broadly.<sup>9</sup> Sarkozy consistently underscored his profound and close affiliation with Christian values and heritage, framing these as integral to the foundational principles of the European Union. In line with the perspective held by a substantial portion of European society, he construed Christian identity as a core element in the construction and perception of European identity.

Thus, given these emphases, a Muslim-majority country - Turkey, in this instance - was perceived as potentially weakening the sense of European identity and ultimately undermining the cohesion of the Christian cultural and civilizational framework.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, Sarkozy advocated for the creation and development of a framework for strategic partnership as an alternative to full EU membership, aimed at further strengthening Turkey-EU relations. This approach simultaneously generated new points of tension in bilateral relations<sup>11</sup>, beginning with Turkey's initiative to establish the Union for the Mediterranean and the subsequent process of its accession - a process in which both countries were actively engaged - and extending to the complex realities of the Eastern Mediterranean and their resolution<sup>12</sup>, issues which continue to exert a significant influence on the trajectory of Franco-Turkish relations.

It should be noted that the European Commission envisions three possible approaches for evaluating candidates for EU membership, which effectively delineate the initial phase of dialogue between the Union and the candidate state, thereby creating the conditions for eventual accession<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Sarkozy, *L'Europe et la concurrence*. Le Figaro, July 30, 2007.

[https://www.lefigaro.fr/debats/2007/07/30/0100520070730ARTFIG90128sarkozy\\_l\\_europe\\_et\\_la\\_concurrence.php](https://www.lefigaro.fr/debats/2007/07/30/0100520070730ARTFIG90128sarkozy_l_europe_et_la_concurrence.php) (accessed May 18, 2025).

<sup>10</sup> Irondelle, Bastien. *European Foreign Policy: the End of French Europe?* Journal of European Integration, 30(1), 2008, pp. 153-168, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036330801959556>.

<sup>11</sup> Tulmets, Elsa. *The European Policy of President Sarkozy: Innovations and Continuity?* Praha, 2008, p. 3. <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/136691/Tulmets%20rijen%202008.pdf> (accessed May 31, 2025).

<sup>12</sup> The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), <https://ufmsecretariat.org/who-we-are/member-states/> (accessed May 31, 2025).

<sup>13</sup> Torreblanca, Jose. *Sarkozy's foreign policy: where do European interests and values stand?* Política Exterior, 122, Madrid, 2008, p. 2.

First, member states must demonstrate commitment and readiness to prepare the candidate for the negotiation process. Second, they are expected to encourage and support the candidate state in implementing domestic reforms. The third approach involves the consolidation and institutionalization of political and cultural dialogue between candidate states and the European Union.

Within this context, Sarkozy adopted a decidedly negative stance regarding Turkey's involvement in such processes, primarily taking into account France's security environment and its broader implications, as well as the strategic priorities and agenda of French foreign policy.

In this context, Sarkozy's address at the fifteenth meeting of EU ambassadors on August 27, 2007, must be carefully considered. He stated: "I believe that the idea of partnership will one day be recognized by all as the most sensible approach. Meanwhile, like Prime Minister Erdoğan, I also hope that Turkey and France will restore the special relationship they have cultivated over a long shared history. I did not wish to raise this issue prior to the simplification of the treaty, as that would have created a complete deadlock. We cannot solve problems by creating a single, overarching impasse; we must address them by identifying appropriate solutions. Of the 35 chapters to be opened, 30 are compatible with the concept of partnership, while five relate exclusively to accession. I told the Turkish Prime Minister: let us focus on the thirty chapters compatible with partnership first, and then we will evaluate their effectiveness".<sup>14</sup>

It is hardly surprising that immediately prior to this speech, Sarkozy engaged in active lobbying to annul the aforementioned five chapters, thereby effectively vetoing Turkey's accession and preventing the addition of these new legislative chapters in the ongoing EU-Turkey negotiations.<sup>15</sup> Apart from the Republic of Cyprus, which Turkey does not recognize *de jure*, France was in fact the only country whose vetoes interrupted the negotiation process, thereby securing a "special" place in the Turkish political memory and, in turn, exacerbating bilateral tensions.

The five chapters in question were: Agriculture and Rural Development (Chapter 11); Economic and Monetary Policy (Chapter 17); Regional Policy

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<https://www2.uned.es/dcpa/Profesores/126JIgnacioTorreblanca/126Publicaciones/Torreblanca-Sarkozy-Foreign-Policy.pdf> (accessed May 31, 2025).

<sup>14</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy, Speech at the Fifteenth (EU) Ambassadors' Conference. Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, August 27, 2007.

<https://pastel.diplomatie.gouv.fr/editorial/actual/ael2/bulletin.gb.asp?liste=20070829.gb.html&submit.x=5&submit.y=11&submit=consulter#Chapitre1> (accessed May 18, 2025).

<sup>15</sup> France puts brakes on EU-Turkey talks. DW, June 25, 2007. <https://www.dw.com/en/france-puts-brakes-on-eu-turkey-talks/a-2634947> (accessed April 25, 2025).

and the Coordination of Structural Instruments (Chapter 22); Financial and Budgetary Provisions (Chapter 33); and Institutions (Chapter 34).<sup>16</sup>

Ultimately, Sarkozy argued that these chapters were directly linked to accession and that their immediate inclusion was not an urgent agenda item. In essence, this rationale represented a French strategy to establish Turkey as a “privileged partner” rather than a full EU member, serving as an alternative framework to formal accession.

### **The Union for the Mediterranean and Bilateral Stability**

As noted above, the establishment of the Union for the Mediterranean framework was a central project for the French side, which sought to assume an influential role in the region. This objective, in turn, required maintaining as cautious and balanced a relationship as possible with all members of the framework, including Turkey. During the same period, Turkey also sought to assert a dominant role not only in Europe but in other regions as well. Consequently, its foreign policy priorities placed particular emphasis on establishing deeper relations with countries in the Middle East and North Africa, thereby ensuring both active engagement and a direct presence in these regions.

It is logical that, during this period, confronting Turkey directly would have been an ineffective and impractical course of action for Sarkozy. Nevertheless, France not only worked to ensure the continued support of the other members of the Union regarding this issue, but also sought to avoid any potential deterioration in relations with regional states. Consequently, for Sarkozy, a policy of delaying confrontation with Turkey and preventing the deterioration of bilateral relations remained the most strategically viable option. By pursuing this approach, the French side was able to avoid sharp conflicts with Turkey while continuing to uphold a policy of maintaining relations - a stance encapsulated in Sarkozy’s statement: “I have always opposed this allegiance and continue to oppose it, and I believe the majority of the organization’s member states share France’s view”.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout his presidency, Nicolas Sarkozy consistently reminded his electorate in speeches and public statements that he would use the referendum mechanism to block, by all possible means, Turkey’s accession

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<sup>16</sup> France blocks start of Turkey eurozone talks. Euobserver, June 25, 2007.

<https://euobserver.com/enlargement/24354> (accessed April 25, 2025).

<sup>17</sup> Sarkozy et Obama s’opposent sur l’Entrée de la Turquie dans l’UE. Liberation, April 5, 2009. <http://www.liberation.fr/monde/0101560325-sarkozy-et-obama-s-opposent-sur-l-entree-de-la-turquie-dans-l-ue> (accessed May 18, 2025).

to the European Union. In this context, the referendum was considered the optimal strategic tool to delay any potential progress in current and future EU-Turkey relations. According to Turkish sources, Sarkozy's approach was also evident in his statements regarding changes to the referendum process<sup>18</sup>, with his main argument being that the referendum should not be automatic but should remain a maneuver that the French side could deploy only if necessary. Hence, the French intention is clear: Turkey would become the first, and perhaps the last, successful candidate required to win the hearts and minds of the French public.<sup>19</sup>

Consequently, the next step was to introduce a new subparagraph into Article 88-5, which would allow such maneuvering. This new subparagraph made a referendum mandatory for any prospective member state whose population exceeded 5 percent of the Union's total population. The French National Assembly approved this bill on May 29, 2008.<sup>20</sup>

It can be said that, during this period, divergent views emerged within the French political leadership regarding the policy toward Turkey. Even with this newly enacted bill, it was perceived by some as an attempt to constitutionalize hostility toward a particular country-in this case, Turkey.<sup>21</sup> In this context, Senator Jacques Blanc's remark essentially summarized the predominant criticism: "One should not point a finger at a friendly country."<sup>22</sup> Shortly thereafter, on June 24, 2008, the French Senate rejected the bill by a vote of 297 to 7, seeking to avoid further deepening the already tense relations between the two countries, which were on the brink of a profound crisis for various reasons.

The political developments during this period were directly influenced by France's presidency of the Council of the European Union, which lasted from July 1 to December 31, 2008.<sup>23</sup> Throughout this tenure, the French side

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<sup>18</sup> France says blunt 'non' to Turkey. France24, February 25, 2011. <https://www.france24.com/en/20110225-france-sarkozy-gul-turkey-eu-hopes> (accessed April 25, 2025).

<sup>19</sup> Sarkozy Is Criticized on a Visit to Turkey. The New York Times, February 26, 2011. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/26/world/europe/26turkey.html> (accessed May 31, 2025).

<sup>20</sup> Turkey not fit for EU accession: Sarkozy, DW, February 26, 2011, <https://www.dw.com/en/turkey-not-fit-for-eu-accession-sarkozy/a-14875593> (accessed May 31, 2025).

<sup>21</sup> Un Référendum sur la Turquie dans l'UE 'si la question se posait. Le Figaro, May 29, 2008. <https://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/2008/05/29/01002-20080529ARTFIG00694-ue-referendum-obligatoire-pour-l-entree-de-la-turquie.php> (accessed July 3, 2025).

<sup>22</sup> Pourquoi Gifler les Turcs. Liberation, May 4, 2008. <http://www.liberation.fr/tribune/010182345-pourquoi-gifler-les-turcs> (accessed May 18, 2025).

<sup>23</sup> A Successful Presidency - Results of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Fondation Robert Schuman, December 15, 2008. <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0121-a-successful-presidency-results-of-the-french-presidency-of-the-council-of-the-european-union> (accessed April 20, 2025).

employed all possible measures to disrupt any potential changes in EU–Turkey relations, striving to maintain the process in a maximally stalemated position.

During Sarkozy’s presidency, on December 19, 2008, two additional chapters related to Turkey’s accession were opened: “Free Movement of Capital (Chapter 4)” and “Information Society and Media (Chapter 10)”.<sup>24</sup> This development indicated that both countries still retained a certain degree of opportunity to influence the course of political events, primarily with the goal of maximizing the realization of their own interests, taking into account existing and potential opportunities arising directly from these changes.

France’s motivation for halting negotiations in the process was primarily based on the conviction that EU accession serves as a crucial lever for modernization and democratization in Turkey. This issue continues to intersect with Turkey’s external political and economic objectives, introducing a complex array of contradictions and contentious new challenges into bilateral relations and their future trajectory. At the same time, this dynamic functions as a strategic tool for the French side, which can be used to restrain and counterbalance Turkey when necessary.

It should be noted that during this historical phase, Franco-Turkish cultural and educational relations also experienced a distinctive development. According to Turkish sources, Turkey encountered certain challenges in the context of cultural relations during Sarkozy’s presidency<sup>25</sup>, emphasizing that, due to tense incidents, the possibility of utilizing public diplomacy as a tool was restrained, despite the positive initiatives in France at the outset of the event known as the “Turkish Season.”

As France’s Minister of Culture, Frédéric Mitterrand, remarked at the opening of the Turkish Season: “This is a new and astonishingly diverse Turkey that the French will experience<sup>26</sup>”. The events, which took place across 77 French cities, introduced specific changes within the broader context of bilateral relations.

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<sup>24</sup> Lequesne, Cristian and Rozenberg, Olivier. *The French Presidency of 2008: the Unexpected Agenda*, Stockholm, 2008, p. 15. <https://hal-sciencespo.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01064402/document> (accessed May 11, 2025).

<sup>25</sup> *Présentation de la Saison de la Turquie en France*. Ministère de la culture, June 30, 2009. <https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Nous-connaître/Decouvrir-le-ministère/Histoire-du-ministère/Ressources-documentaires/Discours-de-ministres/Discours-de-ministres-depuis-1998/Frederic-Mitterrand-2009-2012/Articles-2009-2012/Présentation-de-la-Saison-de-la-Turquie-en-France> (accessed May 18, 2025).

<sup>26</sup> Mitterrand, Lyrique avec la Turquie. *Liberation*, July 1, 2009. <http://www.liberation.fr/culture/0101577241-mitterrand-lyrique-avec-la-turquie> (accessed May 18, 2025).

Thus, the Turkish Season was held from July 1, 2009, to March 31, 2010<sup>27</sup>, encompassing the implementation of 400 diverse and multifaceted cultural events - an initiative that was unprecedented in the history of cultural relations between the two countries. It should be noted that the foundations for the Season had been laid during the tenure of former President Jacques Chirac<sup>28</sup>, in 2006, during the celebration of *Le Printemps Français* (the French Spring) in Turkey.<sup>29</sup> Together with his Turkish counterpart, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, Chirac had planned to allocate a budget of 23 million euros for this cultural festival, which, similar to the French Spring, reflected the ongoing expansion of Franco-Turkish cultural relations - relations that were enriched year by year with new initiatives and often served as a key guarantor of bilateral stability.<sup>30</sup> The first official state visit associated with France-Turkey relations in this context was made by Turkish President Abdullah Gül to Paris<sup>31</sup> for the opening ceremony of the initiative.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, it can be argued that, despite its apparent contribution to strengthening bilateral ties, this event did not achieve the predictable or desired impact that the parties had anticipated. While it was regarded as a new starting point for active cultural cooperation<sup>33</sup>, in reality, it remained largely confined to official statements and ceremonial events, without yielding any tangible results.

Nevertheless, the dynamics of bilateral relations between the two countries maintained a relative stability, supported in large part by frequent reciprocal visits. Between 2009 and 2010, more than seventy official exchanges took place<sup>34</sup>, reflecting a mutual readiness to develop and

<sup>27</sup> La Saison de la Turquie en France, [http://www.tv5monde.com/TV5Site/publication/publi-281-La\\_Saison\\_de\\_la\\_Turquie\\_en\\_France.htm](http://www.tv5monde.com/TV5Site/publication/publi-281-La_Saison_de_la_Turquie_en_France.htm) (accessed May 11, 2025).

<sup>28</sup> Message de M. Jacques Chirac, Président de la République, sur la manifestation culturelle "Printemps français d'Istanbul". Elysée, March 28, 2006. <https://www.elysee.fr/jacques-chirac/2006/03/28/message-de-m-jacques-chirac-president-de-la-republique-sur-la-manifestation-culturelle-printemps-francais-distanbul-le-28-mars-2006> (accessed May 11, 2025).

<sup>29</sup> C'est le Printemps français en Turquie. *L'écho touristique*, April 10, 2006. <https://www.lechotouristique.com/article/c-est-le-printemps-francais-en-turquie,10071> (accessed April 23, 2025).

<sup>30</sup> La Saison de la Turquie en France, <https://www.grandpalais.fr/fr/la-saison-de-la-turquie-en-france> (accessed May 11, 2025).

<sup>31</sup> Abdullah Gül en quête d'Europe à Paris. *Liberation*, October 9, 2009. [https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2009/10/09/abdullah-gul-en-quete-d-europe-a-paris\\_586658/](https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2009/10/09/abdullah-gul-en-quete-d-europe-a-paris_586658/) (accessed April 20, 2025).

<sup>32</sup> Le président turc Abdullah Gül en visite à Paris. *France24*, October 8, 2009. [https://www.france24.com/fr/20091008-le-pr%C3%A9sident-turc-abdullah-g%C3%BCI-visite-%C3%A0-paris-\[field\\_surtitre-formatted\]-0](https://www.france24.com/fr/20091008-le-pr%C3%A9sident-turc-abdullah-g%C3%BCI-visite-%C3%A0-paris-[field_surtitre-formatted]-0) (accessed May 11, 2025).

<sup>33</sup> Noce, Vincent. *Turquie Express pour Sarkozy*. *Liberation*, October 12, 2009. <http://www.liberation.fr/culture/0101596496-turquie-express-pour-sarkozy> (accessed July 3, 2025).

<sup>34</sup> Visites bilatérales, <https://tr.ambafrance.org/-Visites-bilaterales-> (accessed July 3, 2025).

strengthen cooperation and interaction in light of shared interests and geopolitical developments. However, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan repeatedly expressed concern that, despite visits by both the Turkish President and Prime Minister to France, President Sarkozy had not yet reciprocated with an official visit to Turkey since assuming office.<sup>35</sup>

Regarding the situation in Turkey, it should be noted that during the entire period of governance by the Justice and Development Party (AKP), Turkey's influence expanded significantly across the former territories of the Ottoman Empire, particularly in the Middle East and the Balkans. This strategic orientation was developed by former Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu<sup>36</sup>, whose approach has been characterized by many analysts as Neo-Ottomanism or Neo-Ottomanist policy.<sup>37</sup> Within this framework, addressing Turkey's potential accession to the European Union, Davutoğlu stated that Turkey would never request EU membership, no matter how central this issue might be to the state's foreign policy agenda<sup>38</sup>. In doing so, he effectively redefined and recontextualized the Turkish factor's existence, its influence, and its significant role within the contemporary international arena.

### **Economic Relations and the Transition to Hollande**

France-Turkey relations, in all their complexity, continued to develop across multilateral platforms as well, including the G20, over which France held the presidency at that time. During this period, President Sarkozy made a brief six-hour visit to Ankara in his capacity as the leader of the twenty largest economies, during which he once again reaffirmed France's position on the impossibility of Turkey's EU accession, proposing instead the alternative of a strategic partnership. His Turkish counterpart, Abdullah Gül, immediately responded, emphasizing that EU membership remained a consistent priority within Turkey's foreign policy agenda and urging the French side to refrain from influencing the ongoing process - a circumstance that could significantly undermine Franco-Turkish relations and their future

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<sup>35</sup> Turkish PM criticises Sarkozy ahead of Ankara visit. RFI, February 24, 2011. <https://www.rfi.fr/en/europe/20110224-turkish-pm-criticises-sarkozy> (accessed June 7, 2025).

<sup>36</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, <http://www.biyografi.net/kisiyrinti.asp?kisiid=2063> (accessed April 20, 2025).

<sup>37</sup> Erdoğan: AK Parti'nin yeni genel başkan adayı Ahmet Davutoğlu. Radikal, August 21, 2014. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/erdogan-ak-partinin-yeni-genel-baskan-adayi-ahmet-davutoglu-1208245/> (accessed April 25, 2025).

<sup>38</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu: Turkey 'will never beg' for EU membership. National Turk, December 20, 2012. <https://www.nationalturk.com/en/ahmet-davutoglu-turkey-eu-membership-30790/> (accessed April 20, 2025).

prospects. Gül stressed that the organization should honor its commitment, thereby allowing Turkey to successfully complete the process underway.<sup>39</sup>

Prior to his visit to Ankara, President Sarkozy granted an interview to the well-known Turkish journalist Mehmet Ali Birand. Summarizing the outcomes, Birand conveyed the clear messages Sarkozy addressed to both Turkey's political leadership and its society: Turkey's true place is not within the European Union but rather in the Middle East; Turkey's EU accession would ultimately benefit neither Europe nor Turkey. In doing so, Sarkozy once again reaffirmed the French position on the matter, emphasizing that Turkey bridges East and West - a unique role no other country can assume. He stressed that one should not remain confined by the patterns of the past, recognizing Turkey's active engagement in ongoing geopolitical developments, while simultaneously expressing readiness to deepen cooperation concerning Middle Eastern realities - without being bound by historical legacies, but rather acting and working collaboratively in light of current circumstances and the existing level and nature of bilateral relations.<sup>40</sup>

Regarding the bilateral trade and economic relations, President Sarkozy noted that France is the third-largest foreign investor in Turkey. In 2010, the volume of bilateral trade reached €12 billion<sup>41</sup>, with plans to further increase these figures. He also emphasized that Turkey is an indispensable partner for France within the G20 framework, highlighting France's strong desire to secure Turkey's support in G20-related matters.<sup>42</sup>

In May 2012, the next French presidential elections were held<sup>43</sup>, resulting in President Nicolas Sarkozy being succeeded by François Hollande, the candidate of the French Socialist Party. Hollande received 28.63% of the votes in the first round, securing first place and advancing to the second

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<sup>39</sup> Sarkozy receives cool welcome in Ankara. Financial times, February 26, 2011. <https://www.ft.com/content/0ea78022-4107-11e0-bf62-00144feabdc0> (accessed May 18, 2025).

<sup>40</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy: Turkey's place is not in the European Union, but in the Middle East. Panorama, February 25, 2011. <https://www.panorama.am/am/news/2011/02/25/sarkozi-turkey/985423> (accessed July 3, 2025).

<sup>41</sup> Nicolas Sarkozy: The European Union is not Turkey's place. Aysor, October 7, 2011. <https://www.aysor.am/am/news/2011/10/07/sarkozy-turkey-eu/343871> (accessed July 3, 2025).

<sup>42</sup> Sarkozy'yi Fransa lideri olarak ağırlamayacağız!. CNN Turk, February 24, 2011. <https://www.cnntrk.com/2011/dunya/02/24/sarkozyyi.fransa.lideri.olarak.agirlamayacagiz/607985.0/index.html> (accessed July 3, 2025).

<sup>43</sup> Décision N° 2012-154 PDR du 10 mai 2012, portant proclamation des résultats de l'élection du Président de la République, <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/2012/2012154PDR.htm> (accessed April 25, 2025).

round alongside Sarkozy. In the runoff held on May 6, 2012, Hollande emerged victorious over Sarkozy, becoming the 24th President of France.<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

Overall, the trajectory of Franco-Turkish relations during the period under review remained largely stable, despite the emergence of significant challenges and tensions. These difficulties were primarily rooted in the divergent strategic priorities and objectives of the two states: on the one hand, safeguarding European continental security while consolidating their respective roles and influence within the broader European framework; on the other hand, pursuing deeper engagement and expanding geopolitical influence in adjacent regions - a process that, at various junctures, encountered structural and operational obstacles. These tensions were further intensified by differences in civilizational outlooks, value systems, and ideological orientations.

Concurrently, bilateral cooperation and interaction continued to advance, propelled by the diversification and institutionalization of multifaceted relations across political, economic, security, and cultural domains. These developments functioned as a mutually reinforcing mechanism, facilitating coordinated action and underpinning the sustained growth, resilience, and long-term development of Franco-Turkish relations.

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#### **Conflict of Interests**

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

#### **Ethical Standards**

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.