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Extraterritoriality of European borders to Turkey: an implementation perspective of counteractive strategies

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Abstract

This article seeks to “decolonize” the externalization project of European borders by focusing on the subjectivity of Turkey as being a long-standing candidate country, seeking to be a “regional power” in the Middle East and increasingly moving into undemocratic rule. The study suggests that externalization project of European borders does not only move outwards from the European center, and then straightforwardly get implemented by the passive “others”. The case of Turkey epitomizes that the “others” are geopolitical subjects with their counter-discourses and strategies as well as their co-constitutive roles in shaping the very framework of the process. The study adopts an implementation perspective with the aim of providing nuanced local details about how Turkish border guards act, interpret, internalize or challenge the border externalization policies.

Keywords: Border externalization, European Union, Turkey, Implementation approach, Counteractive strategies

Introduction

The “Europeanization” of migration and border policies, which began with the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1999, has become part of the European Union (EU) conditionality process in which candidate countries have been obliged to incorporate their mobility and border control mechanisms to the Schengen *acquis* (Boswell, 2003; Lavenex, 2006; Lavenex & Ucarer, 2003). Following the enlargement in 2004 that produced new external borders, a new rationale was adopted under so-called “Wider Europe” doctrine (European Commission, 2004). The main objective of this new policy design was to extend the influence of the EU’s jurisdiction over neighboring non-EU countries with the aim to “improve their capacity for migration management and refugee protection, prevent and combat illegal immigration” (European Council, 2004) and achievement of “greater political, security, economic and cultural cooperation” (European Commission, 2004). The creation of new spaces of intervention for Europe in its “Neighbourhoods” has sparked scholarly interest in the critical examination of the geopolitical strategies of the “*European Neighbourhood Policy*” (ENP) (Bialasiewicz et al., 2009; Boedeltje & Van Houtum, 2011; Celata & Coletti, 2015; Jones & Clark, 2008; Lavenex, 2008; Scott, 2005, 2009; Zaiotti, 2007). The creation of new spaces of intervention in third countries goes hand in hand with the reconfiguration of spatiality in border management, which is based on a “bordering exercise” along “migratory routes”

(Bialasiewicz et al., 2009). This re-spatialization of border practices has become more mobile, itinerant and dispersed, receiving considerable scholarly attention in critical security and border studies (Bialasiewicz, 2012; Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias, & Pickles, 2011, 2013, 2016; Newman, 2006; Rumford, 2006; Vaughan-Williams, 2009).

The existing literature on the extraterritorial jurisdiction of the EU draws significant attention to the asymmetrical and hierarchical relationship between the European “center” and its “periphery,” particularly the center’s strategies of constructing, defining, categorizing, ordering and subjugating the neighbors it desires (Bialasiewicz, 2012; Boedeltje & Van Houtum, 2011; Casas-Cortes et al., 2016; Jones & Clark, 2008; Van Houtum & Boedeltje, 2011; Zaiotti, 2007). Some scholars delineate the process as “a new colonial mechanism” in the post-Westphalian world order (e.g., Boedeltje & Van Houtum, 2011). However, much less attention has been given to literature that “decolonize” (El Qadim, 2014) the study of border externalization in which the “others”, that is, countries outside Europe, are not considered only as mere objects of pre-defined policies but geopolitical subjects standing in an asymmetrical relationship to EU countries.

In this regard, Turkey presents an interesting case – a candidate country whose ambitious foreign policy is moving away from Europe with the motivation of being a “regional actor” in the Middle East under increasingly authoritarian rule. The main questions this article seeks to answer in this respect are twofold: What are the characteristics of the European externalization project in Turkey and how does Turkey’s subjective understanding of its geopolitical position shape this project? The so-called “EU-Turkey deal”, signed with a long-standing candidate country in the midst of an attempted coup and state of emergency, represents neither a part of a straightforward enlargement process nor an ENP agreement with a neighboring country. It resembles *an ENP-like accession partnership* which is inherently contradictory and impossible to finalize. On the one hand, it initially aimed to “reward” Turkey through the provision of financial aid and visa liberalization for Turkish citizens, similar to other neighboring countries; on the other hand, it is intertwined with the opening of chapters for accession negotiations, including one specifying Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, which is incompatible with ever increasingly authoritarian Turkey.

By taking the *sui generis* position of the Turkish case into account, this article is based on a study of the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement, linking it to the wider literature on the “externalization” of European borders and to critical border and security studies. Numerous studies on the “EU-ization” of the Turkish migration and border regime and its accession negotiations emphasize the historical, political, legal and international aspects of the topic (Biehl, 2009; İçduygu, 2007, 2011; İçduygu & Üstübcü, 2014; Kirişçi, 2003; Özçürümez & Şenses, 2011; Paçacı-Elitok, 2013). This study goes beyond high-level policy analysis, particularly focusing on the EU-Turkey Statement and utilizing fieldwork-based research with the aim of capturing policy implementations by border practitioners on the ground. In addition to examining political statements and policy documents, the article provides an empirical analysis of the practices, beliefs and actions of Turkish border practitioners.

Adopting an implementation perspective provides nuanced local details about how practitioners act, interpret, internalize or challenge the policies in everyday practices (Cote-Boucher, Infantino, & Salter, 2014). With this motivation, the paper aims to demonstrate the interplay between diplomatic relations during the negotiations and the

practices of Turkish border guards in the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement. Empirical data was gathered through fieldwork conducted from April through August 2016 – from the implementation period of the Statement and reaching the fourth month of data collection right after the attempted coup in Turkey – in various districts of İzmir; a city located at Turkey's Aegean coast which was at the heart of the refugee movement from Turkey heading to Europe in 2015 and the site for deportations from Greece as part of the Statement. During the fieldwork, I conducted semi- and unstructured interviews with the Turkish Coast Guard team (Interviews 1 to 15) and customs officers (Interviews 16 to 19),¹ in addition to police officers, personnel of municipalities, members of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) which works with the Turkish Coast Guard in emergency aid. Along with the interviews with border practitioners, I also did close encounter with people who attempted to cross borders, were “intercepted” or pushed-backed. Since this paper aims to particularly focus on the controlling strategies and justification mechanisms of border practitioners, the testimonies of border-crossers would be subject of future study. Since Coast Guard holds the core authority in Turkish-Greek sea border security and receives less scholarly attention, the main focus here will be on how the Turkish Coast Guard members act, give meaning to their actions, perceive “Europe” and adopt counter-strategies, struggles and competition in their practices.²

The main arguments the study suggests are threefold. Firstly, in the European “externalization” process, the subjectivity of being a “gatekeeper” provides Turkey a bargaining leverage that translates into the strategies of superiority of a candidate country heading toward authoritarian rule. Secondly, similar perceptions against Europe are internalized by Turkish border guards; and their counter-discourses and strategies are mainly shaped around three areas: the politics of condemnation, the ad hoc nature of border practices – resulting in an antagonistic relationship – and the strategies of superiority as governing technologies. Thirdly, the case of Turkey does not only indicate the non-monochromatic, differentiated nature of the externalization project but also the constitutive role of the “other” in shaping the framework of the process.

Theorizing “externalization”: the spatiality and temporality of European borders

The critical studies on security and borders attempt to theorize contemporary borders by stressing their reformulation, reallocation and re-spatialization, which have become increasingly dispersed, mobile and deterritorialized, operating within and beyond the geopolitical limits of sovereign territories (Balibar, 2004; Bialasiewicz, 2008, 2012; Bialasiewicz et al., 2009; Casas-Cortes et al., 2011, 2013, 2016; Coleman, 2007; Newman, 2006; Rumford, 2006, 2008; Walters, 2004, 2006; Weizman, 2007, 2011). The nature of contemporary borders exemplifies a way of what Weizman (2007) describes as “transportable” and “deployable” imaginaries of border politics being performed inside societies as well as in other states' territories, particularly “where [the] migrant is” (Casas-Cortes et al., 2016, p. 232). These “transportable” border politics manifest in the exportation of migration policies, citizenship and entry regulations, new techniques of mobility control and new surveillance mechanisms to third countries (Bialasiewicz et al., 2009).

These “transportable” strategies, which create new spaces of intervention for Europe, result in an asymmetrical relationship between the Europe and its neighbors which

have has been widely discussed within the context of the “center” position of Europe governing its “periphery” via pre-defined policies of conditionality (Bialasiewicz, 2008, 2012; Bialasiewicz et al., 2009; Boedeltje & Van Houtum, 2011; Casas-Cortes et al., 2011, 2013, 2016; Jones, 2006; Jones & Clark, 2008; Lavenex, 2008; Zaiotti, 2007). The “other” has to willingly transform itself, adapting European values and ways of doing in order to become European but not actually European. The diffusion of non-negotiable and pre-determined European principles to third countries in similar conditionality logics of enlargement has been mostly referred to as the “Europeanization” of Europe’s “neighbourhood” (Bialasiewicz, 2008; Boedeltje & Van Houtum, 2011; Jones, 2006; Jones & Clark, 2008; Lavenex, 2008; Van Houtum & Boedeltje, 2011). It implies an extended jurisdiction of the EU that brings a “(b) ordering order” to the “chaotic” outside (Bialasiewicz et al., 2009; Jones & Clark, 2008). Neighbors are not seen as equal partners in this “close” cooperation and integration, rather they are obliged to adapt in order to qualify as part of the “ring of friends” or become privileged partners (Van Houtum & Boedeltje, 2011; Zaiotti, 2007). The mechanism of conditionality determines who will be a “friend” and who will be designated a “non-friend” or “foreign.” Bilateral Action Plans lay out the criteria to be followed and evaluate the progress of implementation via country reports. This asymmetric relationship between the European “center” and its “periphery,” establishes a hierarchy of otherness and contextualized as part of the postcolonial, neo-colonial or neo-imperial nature of the European project (Boedeltje & Van Houtum, 2011; Giaccaria & Minca, 2011; Scott, 2005, 2009; Van Houtum & Boedeltje, 2011). This “neighbourhood” is not constituted through the use of “hard power” but rather through policy transfers, the diffusion of certain narratives, norms, practices and ways of doing and discursive construction of the “other” that needs a teacher (Bialasiewicz et al., 2009).

Besides the spatial reconfiguration of borders as explained above, Walters (2004, p. 679) touches on their temporality by utilizing the term *geostrategy* to describe a “particular way of organizing the space of border” under specific “political programs, objectives and ambitions,” which is built on certain historical, contextualized repertoires in different geographies. He aims to capture the multiplicity and plurality at work in the construction of Europe’s frontier zones. Therefore, he lists four different geostrategies of Europe: *networked (non)border*; *march*; *colonial frontier*; and *limes*. *Networked (non)border* refers to the removal of “dividing” lines within the Schengen area through the ways in which controls have been managed via transnational networks of policing. *March* implies a zone between powers, a buffer zone protecting and insulating the interior as in the case of Central and Eastern European countries (Walters, 2004, p. 683). The complexity of the EU’s frontiers also contains asymmetric power relations, with the imperial logic of assimilation and pacification entailing disruption of “settled regional, economic and geopolitical relations”. These areas are called the *colonial frontier*, in which “the center is acknowledged repository and arbitrator of what is proper,” as in the cases of Poland and Hungary (Walters, 2004, p. 688). Finally *limes*, as the fourth geostrategy, refer to “an edge, fringe or limit,” which has materialized in today’s Mediterranean frontier.

Walter’s contribution not only captures the plurality of contemporary border-making, but also highlights the temporality of borders, reactivating certain historical, pre-modern forms in particular geographies based on their specific historical and political context. Walters acknowledges that this categorization is not a “totalising description” in which

the “EU’s frontiers fully conform to these images” (Walters, 2004, p. 679). Besides lack of fully conformance to these mentioned categories in Turkish case, the particular focus here is that Walter’s valuable attempt to broaden the conceptualizations of European border-making does not encapsulate the geostrategy of the “other”. In a similar vein as Walters (2004), numerous scholars aim to avoid totalizing and deterministic readings of the “externalization” project and underline the dynamic and complicated character of imperial logic with different geostrategies in place to different degrees over the eastern, northern and southern neighborhood (Boedeltje & Van Houtum, 2011; Browning & Joenniemi, 2008). Capturing the differentiated, multiple, incomplete and dynamic “geopolitical subjectivity” or *geostrategy* of Europe (Boedeltje & Van Houtum, 2011; Walters, 2004) is a notable contribution. However, less attention has been given to the *geostrategy* or subjectivity of the “other.” Hence this study goes beyond the desire to capture diversification and focuses on the geopolitical subjectivity of Turkey, with its political ambition of reversing the passive role of the “gatekeeper” and utilizing its bargaining power to transform the framework of the “externalization” project at both the high-level of diplomatic relations and the “street-level” (Cote-Boucher et al., 2014) of border practitioners.

The case of Turkey: the trajectory of the EU-Turkey statement

Situating my fieldwork within the historical and political developments in Turkey is necessary in order to unpack the interplay between policies and their implementation. The policy negotiations on migration and border management between the EU and Turkey opened when Turkey was officially declared a candidate country in 1999 (İçduygu, 2007). The Accession Partnership Document of 2001, prepared by the European Commission, set out the principles of the EU *acquis* regarding visa regulations, the asylum system, anti-trafficking policies and the enhancement of administrative and technological capacities of border management (Biehl, 2009; Kirişçi, 2003). Accordingly, Turkey introduced visa requirements in 2002 for six Gulf countries³ and added an additional 13 countries⁴ in 2003 to the list of those subject to the visa requirements (İçduygu, 2007). In the same vein, Turkey renewed the citizenship law and the law on work permits, as well as amending the Penal Code by signing the Palermo Protocol in order to fulfill the provisions regarding anti-trafficking and transnational organized crime (İçduygu, 2007). The National Action Plan for Asylum and Migration (NAP) in 2005 and the National Harmonization Program of 2008 have accelerated migration and border control mechanisms through the intensification of repatriation and deportation centers, the addition of sophisticated equipment (e.g., projectors, binoculars, thermal cameras, barbed wires and watch towers), the enhancement of inspection and information facilities and biometric technologies, and the training of border guards and liaison officers (İçduygu & Aksel, 2012). Chapter 24 of the EU *acquis* covers the administrative and technological capacity for data management, information exchange, training of the police force and implementation of detention and reception centers. All of these political, legal and institutional transformations, in which “migration diplomacy” (İçduygu & Üstübici, 2014) has become the major subject of relations, have been referred as the “Europeanization” of Turkish migration and border management and extensively elaborated on within the literature (İçduygu, 2007, 2011; İçduygu & Üstübici, 2014; Özçürümez & Şenses, 2011).

From 2009 onwards, Ahmet Davutoğlu's foreign policy approach at enhancing collaboration and economic, political and social relations with neighboring countries, has become one of the pivotal drivers influencing "Europeanization" process (Kale, Dimitriadi, Sanchez-Montijano, & Süm, 2018). This foreign policy approach redirected its focus toward the Middle East and Africa by poisoning itself as an influential, "humanitarian" "regional order" has started to contradict with EU's migration and border policies with respect to the adoption of a liberal visa policy towards neighboring countries (Kale et al., 2018). This was followed by the lifting of visa requirements for citizens of various third countries that have been categorized within the negative list of the EU.

In the aftermath of the Arab Spring and the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011, Turkey announced an "open door policy" for Syrians fleeing from the war and adopted the Law on Foreigners and International Protection in 2014, providing the legal basis for a "temporary protection regime" for Syrians. This went hand in hand with the moralist discourse in foreign policy presenting itself as a "moral actor" in the region as oppose to the crimes of Syrian government against humanity (Demirtas-Bagdonas, 2014). The adoption of "morally superior" self-image in the foreign policy coincides with the Gezi Park protests, the rise of authoritarian rule and a considerable increase in human rights violations in domestic politics, which have complicated relations with Europe.

When migrants' dead bodies on Turkish shores received the attention of international media in 2015, the Turkish government Tayyip Erdoğan started using discourse condemning Europe for "abandoning Syrian refugees to their fate and making the Mediterranean a cemetery" ("Erdoğan: Avrupa ölen her mültecinin," 2015). Simultaneously, when Turkish security forces halted the movement of approximately 3000 migrants in the city of Edirne in 2015, it was portrayed as a "success" of Turkey in the media, a message highlighting Turkey's indispensable role in "gatekeeping" for Schengenland (Hürriyet, 2015). The reaction of Turkish government to this "humanitarian crisis" contains a rhetoric of Turkey's irreplaceable role in "gatekeeping", but also an adoption of moral sentiments legitimizing Turkey's morally superior self-projection via-a-via inhumane defensive approach of Europe:

"The humanitarian crisis that is unfolding day by day is a test of our humanity as well as our morality. It is high time for Europe to look at the mirror, be honest about what it sees in the reflection, to stop procrastinating and start assuming more than its fair share of the burden...Turkey cannot succeed alone. EU members must shoulder their responsibility, show humility, be more open and adopt a humane stance in the face of this real humanitarian tragedy unfolding on its doorstep. The convenient reflex of putting the onus on Turkey, adopting a purely defensive approach with wholesale security measures and building walls to create a Christian "fortress Europe" may be attractive to those who have understood nothing about European history, but it will not work" (Davutoğlu, 2015).

The politics of condemnation coincide with the bargaining tool of being a "gatekeeper" to Europe, which has translated into a kind of "superior" position of Turkey in diplomatic relations. Despite the "emergency" call of Europe against the

“unfavourable circumstances” of the mass movement, Turkey insisted on prolonging the period of negotiations in order to force the EU to agree to Turkey’s strategic priorities (EurActiv, 2015). Firstly, the EU had to commit to provide “substantial and concrete new funds outside the IPA (Instrument for the Pre-Accession Assistance) funds” reaching €6 billion and to support Turkey in meeting the requirement of the “Visa Liberalisation Dialogue” and reinvigorating the long-stalled accession process (European Commission, 2015a). On numerous occasions, Erdoğan attempted to illustrate the indispensable dependency of the EU on Turkey’s cooperation in managing the migratory movement, even utilizing explicit threats such as “opening the doors to Greece and Bulgaria anytime and put[ing] the refugees on buses” (“Turkish president threatens to send,” 2016) if the funding was not increased to €6 billion and new negotiation chapters not opened.

Secondly, since the “urgency” of the “migration deal” was the top priority of the EU, the EU officials had to accept a delay in the release of the European Commission’s Annual Progress Report, from the scheduled date of October 14 to November 10 at “Erdoğan’s request” (Barker & Wagstyl, 2015). The intention of the delay was not to negatively influence the “successes” of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government during the election campaign of November 1. Once the elections were over, with the AKP regaining a parliamentary majority, the Commission’s Annual Progress report announced that Turkey had reached its lowest point in meeting the Copenhagen criteria (European Commission, 2015b). Despite lowest records, mutually beneficial relationship on migration and border management were praised.

Thirdly, the EU chose to remain silent about the de-democratization process under the leadership of Erdoğan; binding commitments on human rights, the rule of law and democracy were almost completely left out of the agenda. The intense migratory movement in the summer of 2015 and the EU’s efforts to manage it occurred during the same time as significant deteriorations in relations between Turkey and its Kurdish population; the Kurdish peace process was abandoned, the pro-Kurdish People’s Democratic Party (HDP) was increasingly marginalized, armed conflict intensified in south-eastern, overwhelmingly Kurdish cities – resulting in high numbers of civilian deaths and the forced displacement of Kurdish populations – and all peace defenders in the country were criminalized. Despite these human right violations, which have been followed by the deterioration of the rule of law and the collapse of institutions in Turkey especially in the aftermath of the coup-attempt, the EU could not utilize its role of a “strong mentor and guide” or its “civilian,” “normative” power (as it pronounce itself) toward its candidate country (Boedeltje & Van Houtum, 2011). The EU’s only concern was to stop migratory movement “immediately” by “temporary and extraordinary measures” (European Council, 2016).

At the summit of November 29, both parties agreed to “re-energizing” the accession process “which will bring order into migratory flows and help to stem irregular migration” through the measures of “active cooperation on migrants, preventing travel to Turkey, ensuring application of established bilateral readmission provisions and swiftly returning migrants who are not in need of international protection to their countries of

origin” (European Council, 2015). In return, the fulfillment of the Visa Liberalisation Roadmap (VLR) would be accelerated, Chapter 17 (Energy, Economic and Monetary Policy) would be opened, the High Level Energy Dialogue and Strategic Energy Cooperation would be launched, and preparatory steps for upgrading the Customs Union could be launched towards the end of 2016. When five headings of blocks addressed in the VLR, including the full application of readmission agreements are actualized, the EU has committed to lifting the visa requirements for travel in the Schengen zone. However, with the inclusion of visa liberalization in the picture, the process has become more paradoxical. Since the VLR, which was signed before the process of the Statement, requires certain accomplishment in fundamental rights, there seemed to be no sign of the political will in Turkey to achieve it. However, despite these discrepancies and impossibility of actualizing certain legal provisions due to the de-democratization process in Turkey, the final agreement was reached on March 18, 2016. These discrepancies and questionable legal provisions also enable ad hoc nature of practices without any principle accountability, which will be discussed in the next section.

An implementation perspective: border practices in İzmir

The routes from Turkey into Europe, which encompass the land routes to Greece and Bulgaria and the sea route to the Greek islands, have long been used by migrants. Until 2010, the sea route to Greece was the major channel for migrants (Amnesty International, 2015). In 2010, the main route shifted to Greece’s land border, due to increased surveillance at the sea border by the Greek Coast Guard in collaboration with European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) (Amnesty International, 2015). Once mobility shifted to the Greek land border, Greece launched Operation Aspida (Shield) across the Evros borderland in 2012, deploying additional police officers and constructing additional fences (Amnesty International, 2015). Border strengthening measures across Evros led to a shift of migratory flows toward the Greek islands and Bulgaria that shaped the direction of the refugee movement in the summer of 2015.

Its nearness makes İzmir one of the key zones of departure on the way towards Greece, having witnessed an intense migratory movement in the summer of 2015. It is also the location of returns from Greece as a part of the Statement, receiving notable media attention during the first week of the operation in April 2016. When I was there, during the first week of returns, it was full of Turkish officials from the Directorate-General of Migration Management (DGMM) and the Department of Border Management, police and customs officers, as well as journalists, activists, civil society members and residents. It was a hotbed of contention. On the one side there were activists and members of NGOs criticizing the “deal”; on the other side there were large numbers of residents, who had held a protest 2 days previously to proclaim that “they do not want a refugee camp”, watching as deportees were put on buses to be transported to another city.

There is definitely a need to differentiate the period leading up to the Statement from that following it. Right after the Statement, both Turkish and Greek authorities have strengthened and multiplied patrolling activities, accompanied by Frontex and NATO

operations deployed in the Aegean Sea, with enhanced surveillance activities. In explaining the situation in 2015, a customs officer stated “Last year was entirely turmoil. It was completely a chaos I would say. No one seemed to be interested in the crossings. Turkish Coast Guard members were saying that it was not their duty; it was the concern of the other side who had to find a way to solve the problem” (Interview 16, April 2016).

The role of the coast guard is pivotal in border control because they hold the core competency. In collaboration with Frontex and NATO, coast guards on both sides of the border (Turkey and Greece) hold the nucleus authorization in protecting the borders of the specific country, practicing the principles of the action plans, intercepting migrants on boats and conducting returns. When they are asked to define their daily routine, the answers are mostly articulated in the ordinary language of certain tasks combined with their “honorable role”. At the level of operational management of the Turkish Coast Guard, the practical regime of justification indicates a pattern similar to Bigo’s (2014) description, in which managers frame their tasks as an imperative, not a coercive action. They “stop the boats,” since they are “just law enforcement officers”. But they frame and legitimize their jobs as “very significant” in which their “only motivation for enduring these appalling conditions is saving people’s lives” (Interviews 1, August 2016). Their framing as a border guard encapsulates the paradox of guarding a territory while protecting people in need of rescue and evokes the stimulating discussions on the “intimately linked” (Ticktin, 2005) nature of humanitarianism and policing (Aradau, 2004; Fassin, 2012; Pallister-Wilkins, 2015). In that sense, the frame of “patrolling” goes hand in hand with the “warnings” of migrants who are in need of help:

We take action when we receive a warning. In situations of distress, migrants call 158 or they send a location via WhatsApp; almost all of them have GPS. Sometimes our sensitive citizens report when they encounter a group of people getting prepared to cross. In addition to warnings, we do regular patrolling. Similarly, on the other side, the Greek Coast Guard and NATO warships also patrol and they report incidents to us. (Interview 1, August 2016)

However, in the case of Turkey, the moral sentiments attached to the discourses and daily practices of Coast Guard members are rooted in the politics of condemnation against Europe. My fieldwork indicated that there are three interrelated essential points that need to be explored, around which counter discourses and strategies of border practitioners are shaped: the politics of condemnation linked to self-exculpatory moral sentiments; the informal, ad hoc nature of practices; and the strategies of superiority.

Politics of condemnation

The constitution of the European “neighbourhoods” through policy transfers, the diffusion of certain norms, narratives and ways of doing has been critically addressed within the literature (Bialasiewicz, 2008, 2012; Boedeltje & Van Houtum, 2011; Jones & Clark, 2008; Zaiotti, 2007). In this asymmetrical relationship, the “other” is obliged to adopt certain pre-determined European principles in order to qualify as a part of the “ring of friends” and a privileged partner (Van Houtum & Boedeltje, 2011; Zaiotti, 2007). The mechanism of conditionality categorically and hierarchically designates who is a

“candidate,” “non-candidate,” “potential member,” “friend” or remains “foreign” (Boedeltje & Van Houtum, 2011). However, the case of Turkey demonstrates that the “other” also utilizes the strategies of adverse naming and condemnation attached to moral sentiments.

Firstly, inconsistent with the financial aid received under the deal for border control, the Turkish Coast Guard complain about their inadequate capacity and accuse the EU of not meeting its obligations despite its promises. I need to highlight a detail here; discontentedness was only voiced by team members when the head of the team left the port. Most of the informal knowledge, especially regarding the lack of capacity or practices of other departments, was gained in the absence of the head of the team. This nuance highlights both internal heterogeneity among Coast Guard members based on their hierarchical position and the competitive social relations even within the same “social universe” (Bigo, 2014), providing a kind of reflexive account. As one member noted:

“There are lots of obstacles. The equipment is inadequate. Sometimes we cannot sleep for 30 hours and then join rescue operations. Nothing actually changed after the deal with respect to our capacity and equipment” (Interviews 14 and 15, August 2016).

In the rhetoric used by Coast Guard members, both Europe and Greece are often referred to as the “other side,” putting the entire burden on Turkey’s shoulders without fulfilling their promises (Interviews 10, 11 and 15, August 2016).

Secondly, Coast Guard members deploy narratives analogous to the Turkish government’s, in which they utilize moral sentiments making Europe responsible for this “humanitarian crisis.” It becomes a way to dissociate them from criticism. The “other” becomes Europe, “putting the lives of migrants at risk” and it thereby becomes “the duty of the Turkish Coast Guard [members] to take the responsibility of saving lives for the sake of humanity” (Interviews 3–15, August 2016). One was keen to display his criticism of European policies by stressing that he was “sorry about this desperateness” and that it was “all Europe’s fault [for] making the Aegean a cemetery” (Interview 14, August 2016). Here both political leaders and practitioners of border policing utilize identical narratives, in which moral sentiments become the major tool for blaming Europe and identifying themselves as morally superior, as if Turkey plays no role in human rights violations at the borders. When I asked about various criticisms voiced by non-governmental organizations⁵ due to “push-backs” at the Aegean Sea, one responded: “We never do push-backs. When we detect a boat we just intercept. But we do not have any idea about the other side. They call us and we leave the port for the operation” (Interview 8, August 2016).

The ad hoc nature of border policing: “a game of ping-pong”

The agreed-upon final version of the Statement, full of discrepancies and questionable legal provisions,⁶ was to be “immediately” implemented by “temporary and extraordinary measures,” which in return highlights the ad hoc nature of practices without any principle of accountability (Casas-Cortes et al., 2016). In addition to the fuzzy legal basis which provides maneuvering space to border practitioners, the territorial and jurisdictional expansion of “borderwork” (Rumford, 2006) necessitates the reformulation and re-spatialization of border practices through the ways in which borders become

more mobile, “itinerant” and dispersed (Agnew, 2003; Casas-Cortes et al., 2016; Newman, 2006; Rumford, 2006, 2008; Vaughan-Williams, 2009). However, the spatiality of borders needs to be theorized together with the temporality of border practices. In explaining the impermanence of border policing, a Coast Guard member stated:

“Our job is not one of those that are routinized and planned. You have to keep up with new dynamics and emergencies. The routes for and the ways of crossing are always changing and you have to adapt yourself all the time. Also every incident has its own specific circumstances. There is always a risk of witnessing unexpected things at the border, which frequently necessitates finding a suitable solution at the time of the incident.” (Interview 1, August 2016)

The ad hoc border practices, in conjunction with the fuzzy legal basis of the State-ment, pave the way for a maneuvering space in which the lack of a concrete distribution of roles between the Turkish and Greek Coast Guards sometimes causes an unstable and antagonistic relationship between the two, an arbitrary use of violence without any principle of accountability (Casas-Cortes et al., 2016) as well as fertile ground for the narrative of condemnation as discussed above. As a customs officer put it in an interestingly self-reflexive manner, “The relationship between the Turkish and European border guards looks like a ping-pong match. Each side tries to pass the responsibility to another at the level of practice.” (Interview 19, August 2016).

The extemporary character of border practices was intensified due to the political context of Turkey, especially over the last few years. In the third month of the State-ment, Turkey witnessed a coup attempt on July 15 and a “state of emergency” began which lasted until July 18, 2016. More than 125,000 people have been made redundant or suspended from the military, civil service, or judiciary, about 36,000 people have been jailed, 140 media outlets and 29 publishing houses have been shut down, more than 2500 journalists and media workers have become unemployed, and 148 journalists have been detained (Gumrukcu & Tattersall, 2016; “Human Rights Watch: Turkey silencing,” 2016). Since July 2016, the total number of academics and university administrative personnel who have been dismissed has reached 5583 (Committee of Concerned Scientists, 2017). In this period, Erdoğan repeatedly reiterated his intention to reinstate the death penalty. Within the context of increasing deterioration of Turkish democracy since the failed coup attempt, migratory movements to Greece started to reactivate in August and September 2016 (European Commission, 2016). According to the Commission’s Progress Report on Turkey, 22,636 crossings from Turkey to Greece occurred between April and September, 2016 (Amnesty International, 2017). The discourse used by state officials has further strained relations with the EU. Erdoğan criticized the EU officials for not adequately condemning the attempt. On the other hand, the EU has stated that there would be total abandonment of the deal in the event the death penalty was reinstated (“Europe and US urge Turkey,” 2016).

When I was conducting fieldwork in August 2016, the tension among Coast Guard members and police officers was apparent: “Everyone feels uneasy here after the coup. There were lots of Coast Guard members and police officers discharged from their position or put into jail. Hence, there is a lacuna at the moment. Everyone is walking on eggshells” (Interview 11, August 2016). The sharp changes in the staff of the military

and police department that are organized hierarchically further intensified the ad hoc nature of border practicing in the current Turkish context.

The strategies of superiority

Despite their complaints about the lack of capacity, and political fluctuations and their impacts on the chain of command within the military, the Turkish Coast Guard members were keen on displaying their superiority vis-a-vis the “other side.” Being “one of the best in the world,” “they cannot imagine what would be the situation of Europe in the case of their absence” (Interviews 1–5, 8 and 11–15, August 2016). In their perception, the morally superior self-projection of the Turkish Coast Guard goes hand in hand with its “superior operational capacity” compared to the relatively incompetent European side.

“...Our burden is much heavier. The other side generally expects us to handle everything. Actually, they should thank us. We not only guard our border but also theirs. Their security also depends on us. Turkey’s burden is quite heavy in this regard.” (Interview 14, August 2016).

This indicates that being a “gatekeeper” is perceived in two paradoxical ways: firstly, it is a heavy burden on Turkish border guards imposed by a Europe that is “taking the skilled ones and sending the vagabonds back [to Turkey]” (Interview 15, August 2016); secondly, it becomes capital that demonstrates Turkey’s “superior operational capacity” that the “security of Europe is dependent on” (Interviews 11–15, August 2016). In that sense, seemingly paradoxical politics of condemnation and superiority are entangled as a governing strategy in order to determine their position vis-a-vis Europe.

Concluding remarks

The case of the EU-Turkey Statement indicates that the “externalization” of European borders neither operates in a fully collaborative way nor simply moves outward from the European center. Both diplomatic relations in high-level politics and interviews with Turkish border practitioners demonstrate this tension, indicating that taking the geopolitical subjectivity of the “other” into account is pivotal in order to capture the dynamics of European “externalization.” The strategies of politics of condemnation and the superiority of being a “gatekeeper” have enabled Turkey’s attempts in order to reverse the dependency relationship. It seems that the politics of condemnation and superiority as counter strategy have been internalized by border practitioners consonantly with the discourse of Turkish politicians. They tend to blame Europe for their increasing workload and inadequate equipment, but also simultaneously state their “superior” position in stopping the migratory movement that the “security of Europe is dependent on”. It goes hand in hand with the discourse of morally superior self-projection of Turkish Coast Guard who are “deeply sorry” about this desperateness produced by European policies as if they have not a share in. The legally fuzzy and practically ad hoc nature of the Statement provides the appropriate circumstances to allow maneuvering, escape accountability and create antagonistic relations. In that sense, even insightful attempts that avoid a deterministic approach to border “externalization” by highlighting its variety of forms are not adequate conceptualizations in the case of Turkey. The ambivalent and even contradictory nature of the “EU-Turkey deal” (as an

ENP-like accession partnership) allows Turkey to counteract the EU, utilizing its self-oriented geopolitical strategies, covering its authoritarian rule with the power of “migration diplomacy” (İçduygu & Üstübcü, 2014), blaming the EU for its non-humanitarian practices and thereby transforming the very identity of the European “externalization” project. Turkey -a candidate country pursuing to be a “regional actor” in the Middle East, swiftly moving away from democratic reforms achieved in the negotiation process, reaching its highest records in the violations of human rights, and becoming an authoritarian regime - is a noteworthy case in order to indicate the pivotal role of this “migration diplomacy” in transforming and shaping the character of the EU.

This study does not neglect either the hegemonic position (even “neo-colonial”) of Europe over its neighbors via externalization of migration and border engineering or the tacit collaboration between the EU and Turkey in policing mobility (see İşleyen’s (2018) recent work on Turkey). Instead, by providing new material on Turkey, it aims to contribute to the attempts at “decolonizing” the process by considering the counter strategies of the “other” as a geopolitical subject and by preventing the conceptualization of “the Europe” as an omnipotent actor in its sphere of influence. Nevertheless, it is significant to note that all of these strategies utilized by border practitioners and Turkish politicians do not entail the empowerment of migrants (Baban, Ilcan, & Rygiel, 2017). On the contrary, as the political games become more heated between the two sides, the strategical engineering of the mobility has much influence on migrants with respect to more hazardous and precarious circumstances.

Endnotes

¹In addition to Coast Guard members who have the core authority in controlling border security, I preferred to include customs officers. Although they do not practically involved in the space of mobility control, they share the same spatial habitus with Coast Guards by having the chance of witnessing and observing their acts and discourse in daily life. During the fieldwork, they provided their close observations and even reflexive insights about the actions of Coast Guards which enriched my information gathered from the field.

²In order to protect respondent confidentiality, I will not name my interviewees and not provide information about their particular district of profession in İzmir, but only refer to their occupation throughout the paper.

³Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates

⁴Indonesia, the Republic of South Africa, Kenya, the Bahamas, the Maldives, Barbados, the Seychelles, Jamaica, Belize, Fiji, Mauritius, Grenada and Saint Lucia

⁵<https://sea-watch.org/en/breaking-turkish-coast-guards-attack-refugees/>

⁶In the first principle of the Statement, the statement “all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into the Greek islands” contradicts the rest of the paragraph, which refers to the prevention of collective expulsion, the EU Asylum Directive, international law and the principle of *non-refoulement*. Secondly, the enunciation of a “temporary and extraordinary measure” is not clear about the duration of the arrangement and to what extent the extraordinary will become the rule. Thirdly, the reference to the “migrants arriving in the Greek islands” does not provide any information about the ones who will be “intercepted” before reaching the Greek islands. Similarly, for “migrants not applying for asylum,” the question is whether they will be given any

opportunity to apply for asylum as the Directive requires. Fourthly, the ones “whose application has been found unfounded or inadmissible in accordance with the said directive” will face another controversy. According to the Asylum Procedure Directive, being “unfounded” refers to being examined and lacking based on merits while being “inadmissible” implies two possible scenarios: (i) Turkey is a “safe third country” or (ii) Turkey is a “first country of asylum.” In the first scenario, putting aside the impossibility of assessment on case-by-case basis, at the theoretical level Turkey cannot be considered a “safe third country” due to its insistence on retaining the geographical limitation for non-European asylum-seekers. It means that non-European asylum-seekers cannot obtain refugee status from Turkey. Although Syrians who have “temporary protection status” represent a *sui generis* case, they still do not have the legal rights enshrined in the Geneva Convention. Another critical controversy is about the principle of *non-refoulement*, referring to a prohibition on returning a person to a country where there is a risk of torture, persecution or inhumane treatment. However as indicated by several reports, Turkey has had many instances of deportations, push-backs and violence against asylum-seekers (Amnesty International, 2015). In the second scenario, being a “first country of asylum,” there are two applicable cases for a non-EU country: (i) if the applicant has been recognized as a refugee in that country or (ii) if the applicant enjoys sufficient protection in that specific country, including the principle of non-refoulement. Since the geographical limitation is an obstacle for refugee status, the latter case is the only option for Turkey, but deterioration in the principle of *non-refoulement* is an issue in Turkey, as discussed above.

Abbreviations

AI: Amnesty International; AKP: Justice and Development Party; DGMM: Directorate-General of Migration Management; ENP: European Neighbourhood Policy; EU: European Union; FRONTEX: European Border and Coast Guard Agency; HDP: People’s Democratic Party; NAP: The National Action Plan for Asylum and Migration; UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; VLR: Visa Liberalisation Roadmap

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Availability of data and materials

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Authors’ contributions

This study was designed by the author as a part of her PhD Thesis via conducting interviews, observation, analyzing the data and writing the manuscript. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Competing interests

The author declares that she has no competing interests.

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