

“Securitization from Society” and “Social Acceptance”:
Political Party-Based Approaches in Turkey to Syrian Refugees

M. Murat ERDOGAN

Prof. Dr., Director, Turkish-German University, Migration and Integration Research Center,
Istanbul

To cite this article: M. Murat Erdogan, ““Securitization from Society” and “Social Acceptance”:
Political Party-Based Approaches in Turkey to Syrian Refugees”, *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 17, No. 68, 2020, pp. 73-92, DOI: [10.33458/uidergisi.883022](https://doi.org/10.33458/uidergisi.883022)

To link to this article: <https://dx.doi.org/10.33458/uidergisi.883022>

Submitted: 20 June 2020
Last Revision: 25 December 2020
Published Online: 10 January 2021
Printed Version: 18 February 2021

Uluslararası İlişkiler Konseyi Derneği | International Relations Council of Turkey
Uluslararası İlişkiler – Journal of International Relations

E-mail : bilgi@uidergisi.com.tr

All rights of this paper are reserved by the *International Relations Council of Turkey*. With the exception of academic quotations, no part of this publication may be reproduced, redistributed, sold or transmitted in any form and by any means for public usage without a prior permission from the copyright holder. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the author(s)'s and do not reflect those of the *Council*, editors of the journal, and other authors.

“Securitization from Society” and “Social Acceptance”: Political Party-Based Approaches in Turkey to Syrian Refugees

M. Murat ERDOĞAN

*Prof. Dr., Director, Turkish-German University, Migration and Integration Research Center, İstanbul
E-mail: merdogan1103@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

The number of refugees in Turkey exceeded 4 million in a short period of time due to the civil war in Syria, and Turkey has become the country hosting the largest number of refugees from 2014 onwards. The concerns of Turkish society, which portrayed an extraordinary solidarity initially, have become apparent in terms of refugees, almost all of whom live side-by-side with Turkish society in urban areas. This paper is based on a comprehensive and representative research data about Turkish citizens' attitudes towards Syrian refugees. This study critically analyses traditional securitisation studies and instead puts forward the concepts of the “securitization from society” and “social acceptance” to be able to analyse the views of Turkish public towards Syrian refugees .

Keywords: Syrian Refugees, Social Acceptance, Securitization, Securitization from Society, Social Cohesion

“Toplumdan Güvenikleştirme” ve “Toplumsal Kabul”: Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Mültecilere Yönelik Siyasal Parti Temelli Yaklaşımlar

ÖZET

Türkiye'de mülteci sayısı Suriye'deki iç savaş nedeni ile kısa zamanda 4 milyonu aştı ve Türkiye 2014'den itibaren dünyada en fazla mülteci barındıran ülke haline geldi. Neredeyse tamamı Türk toplumu ile bir arada kent merkezlerinde yaşayan mülteciler konusunda başlangıçta olağanüstü bir dayanışma ortaya koyan Türk toplumunun kaygıları giderek daha görünür hale gelmektedir. Suriyeli mülteciler konusunda çok kapsamlı ve temsili bir araştırmanın verileri dikkate alınarak siyasal parti seçmenleri bazlı bir analizin yapıldığı makalede, geleneksel güvenikleştirme yaklaşımları eleştirel bir şekilde analiz edilerek, “toplumdan güvenikleştirme” ve “toplumsal kabul” yaklaşımlarının Türk toplumunun Suriyeli mültecilere yönelik tutumlarını anlamak için önemli olduğu vurgulanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Suriyeli Mülteciler, Toplumsal Kabul, Güvenikleştirme, Toplumdan Güvenikleştirme, Sosyal Uyum

Introduction

Movements of people that cross national borders are considered to be political issues, as well as security matters, rather than sociological issues, irrespective of their rationales, their voluntary or forced nature, or whether they take place between similar or different cultures.¹ Undoubtedly, the quality of the human mobility, and the issues such as the cultural characteristics of the newcomers, their qualifications, numbers, and to which extent that they are controlled constitute the framework of the security aspect. Especially, since the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) almost “sanctified” borders of the modern nation states, the “imaginary communities”² as B. Anderson puts it, inarguably grant the right to protect the borders to these states.³ As a result, borders can only be crossed by the citizens of the affected states or those permitted by the authorities of the very country, whereas any other entrance is described as the “violation of the private zone” or “illegal” and naturally taken up as a matter of security. However, the issue of migration is not only limited to the borders. As frequently observed in the recent years, even if the borders have been crossed respecting the rules and even based on invitation, the existence of particular socio-cultural immigrant populations in a country can be taken up as a security issue per se. This process also comes up as “ghettoization” and “diaspora”⁴ processes.

First of all, this article studies to what extent migration is a matter of security within the framework of “securitization” that the Schools of Copenhagen and Paris also suggest with a critical view. However, the study also suggests the reasons why the critical security and securitization approach “fall short” in explaining the concerns and fears among the communities against the newcomers in the countries that are exposed to the considerable, massive and instantaneous refugee influx. That is to say, the limitations of the critical approach that considers the issue to be a “construct” of the politicians or bureaucrats when it comes to refugees and talks about “securitization” for this reason are questioned based on the sample of Turkey, and it is claimed that the security concerns may arise from the community itself, i.e. the grassroots, especially during large influx of asylum movements whereby shaping the politics. The concept of “securitization from below”⁵ that A. Hammerstad used in his study on Zimbabwe has been combined with “securitization from society” and evaluated in this study.

This article also claims that the approaches that endeavor to explain the issue based on security or securitization tend to overlook two critical aspects. Firstly, large-scale asylum movements are not differentiated from regular migration and resident immigrants in terms of the processes, actions and reactions. Secondly, the numeric size of the massive movements of people

1 See Elspeth Guild and Joanne van Selm (eds.), *International Migration and Security: Opportunities and Challenges*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2005; Jef Huysmans and Vicki Squire, “Migration and Security”, Myriam Dunn Cavelty and Victor Mauer (eds.), *Handbook of Security Studies*, London, Routledge, 2009.

2 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso, 2006.

3 See Randall Hansen, “State Controls: Borders, Refugees, and Citizenship”, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, , Oxford Handbooks Online, 2014, <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199652433.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199652433-e-032>. (Accessed 25 November 2020).

4 See Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist (eds.), *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods*, Rotterdam, Amsterdam Univ. Press, 2010; Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, London, UCL Press, 1994; Ayhan Kaya, *Populism and Heritage in Europe Lost in Diversity and Unity*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2019.

5 Anne Hammerstad, “Securitisation from below: the relationship between immigration and foreign policy in South Africa’s approach to the Zimbabwe crisis”, *Conflict, Security & Development*, Vol. 12, No 1, 2012, p. 1-30.

are neglected. This is regarded as the main reason why the theoretical approaches to describe the relationship between security and cohesion in terms of refugees are rather limited. More than 270 million international immigrants in the world are in the Western countries, however, only 15% of 30 million refugees, i.e. 4.5 million are present in these countries, which creates a significant difference.

Turkey has been described by the UNHCR as the country hosting the largest number of “refugees”⁶ since 2014. The process started with the civil war in Syria and continued with the “open door policy” pursued by the Turkish Government, however, both the numbers and the periods of stay quickly exceeded the initial assumptions. However, the total number of refugees was 58,000 when Syrians first came to Turkey on 29 April 2011. The number of refugees which exceeded 1.5 million by the end of 2014, 2.5 million by the end of 2015, 3 million in 2016, and 4 million by late 2017, also included newcomers from countries other than Syria.⁷ As of December 2020, there are 3,638,000 Syrians under “Temporary Protection” and 330,000 people in general from other countries who are granted, or applied for, “international protection” in Turkey which has been in the position to accept millions of refugees in a very brief period of time. Also, it is estimated that the number of irregular migrants coming into Turkey during the last 5 years through the Iranian border, most of whom were Afghans, reached at least 1 million.⁸ The indefinite nature of the process and the large numbers create insecurity and concerns among Turkish society that the borders cannot be protected, the process cannot be managed and there will be consequences.

The issue of Syrian refugees in Turkey has been intertwined with accepting those who flee from war as part of the “open door policy” and the foreign policy resolutions concerning Syria and the region. The Turkish government has adopted a “protective” approach to Syrian refugees since 2011, avoiding the discourse that refugees pose a “problem”, as well as criticizing those who use the same discourse. The government presented the refugees as the elements of “religious or cultural solidarity”, (ensar or muhajir)⁹, as “regional actors” and the actors of “strength”¹⁰, as well as “humanitarian foreign policy”.¹¹ The opposition also pursued a cautious policy in this respect and posed criticism to the policy pursued by the government on Syrians rather than the Syrians

6 Even though Turkey is party to both 1951 Geneva Conventions, it retains the geographical limitation in the Convention. The national legislation (as The Law on Foreigners and International Protection) has also been produced in this context. This study, being fully aware of this legal context and its official definition of a refugee, prefers to use the concepts of “Syrians” or “asylum-seekers” to refer to the displaced Syrians arriving in Turkey since 2011. It also occasionally uses the concept of “refugee” to refer to Syrians due to the sociological context and the common use of the concept.

7 DGMM (The Directorate General of Migration Management), “Temporary Protection”, December 2020, <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27> (Accessed 30 December 2020); UNHCR, “MidYear Trends-2020”, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/5fc504d44/mid-year-trends-2020.html> (Accessed 30 December 2020); UNHCR, “Syria Regional Refugee Repons”, 2020, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria> (Accessed 30 December 2020).

8 “Irregular Migration”, DGMM, 2020, <https://en.goc.gov.tr/irregular-migration> (Accessed 30 December 2020).

9 Milliyet, “President Erdoğan, That Man Knows Not What Ensar and Muhajir Mean”, 21 October 2018, <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/yere-haberler/istanbul/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-ensar-ile-muhacir-nedir-o-adam-bilmez-13106854> (Accessed 25 December 2020).

10 Anadolu Agency, “President Erdoğan: Our country has become an unprecedentedly strong regional actor in the recent history”, 04 July 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-ulkemiz-yakin-tarihinde-gorulmedik-olcude-guclu-bir-bolgesel-aktor-haline-geldi/1899671> (Accessed 25 December 2020).

11 See Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Turkey’s Entrepreneur and Humanitarian Foreign Policy”, 2020, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/dis-politika-genel.tr.mfa> (Accessed 25 December 2020); Zeynep Yanaşmayan et al., “Under the Shadow of Civilizationist Populist Discourses: Political Debates on Refugees in Turkey”, *New Diversities*, Vol. 21, No 2, 2019, p. 47.

themselves. Therefore, it can be argued that the securitization of the refugee issue has not been much reciprocated by society in Turkey. Still, it has been observed that Turkish society seems to be concerned at increasing levels.¹²

Therefore, the second theme of this paper focuses on the extent to which “integration” or “social cohesion,” that are frequently mentioned along with migration, takes place in Turkey with a view to the refugees. As known, the concept of “cohesion” applies to immigrants in general, not refugees. As a matter of fact, many countries that are not typically countries of migration, especially those in Europe, tend to avoid initiating cohesion activities unless they are obliged to, for fear that these activities may encourage permanency. Cohesion activities for the large number of refugees who are not very welcome and whose status is indefinite were perhaps experienced in such a systematic manner for the first time in Turkey. The claims that the implementation of the cohesion processes on behalf of the public (state) would be inefficient, society would become a more influential actor in the social cohesion process; therefore the “social acceptance” of the newcomers that would play a determining role has been studied in this article. The broad and complicated nature of the “social acceptance” concept¹³ that was introduced in the literature in 2014 by the author for the first time in the field of migration and also includes security manifests the necessity to firstly distinguish between regular migration and asylum movements. It is also evident that there is a significant relationship between the securitization process that stems from the society/grassroots and the “social acceptance”.

The evaluation of the data from the comprehensive public opinion survey carried out is based on a representative sampling of 2247 participants in 26 provinces of Turkey, with a reliability rate over 95%. The analysis of these data is the most original part of the paper where the hypotheses addressed have actually been tested. The comparative analysis of the ideas and opinions of the voters of the political parties, as well as the political bloc parties in Turkey on Syrians, especially within the context of the power and opposition, provide a significant contribution to portraying the structure of securitization and the social acceptance. This data, shared with the public for the first time with this study, have been reinforced with the comparisons to the studies of the author from 2014 and 2017. This article argues that the issue has still not been included in the elements that determine politics in Turkey, despite more than 4 million refugees in Turkey, the majority of whom are Syrians. However, the security concerns are quite high among society, and these concerns will eventually influence politics. That is to say, securitization is a bottom-up process in Turkey arising from “society/grassroots”, and despite all the efforts from the state and the bureaucracy, it gets stronger day by day. This will create a substantial impact on politics in the upcoming period, and it may even result in the development of political formations to be directly based on anti-refugee perspectives. This part is also complemented by the evaluation of the concepts of migration, asylum, security and social cohesion, and the political party-based findings from the field within the context of social acceptance.

12 M. Murat Erdoğan, *Suriyeliler Barometresi-2019*, Ankara, Orion, 2020.

13 M. Murat Erdoğan, *Türkiye'deki Suriyeliler: Toplumsal Kabul ve Uyum*, İstanbul, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2018.

The Framework of Co-Existence: Social Acceptance and Social Cohesion

Massive movements of people necessitate the co-existence of different social groups. The nature of the co-existence framework is discussed under the concepts such as “cohesion”, “social cohesion”, “integration” etc.¹⁴ However, it can be argued that what is meant by cohesion is an “internalized security approach”. Making one of the well-known definitions of integration, Hynie suggests, in general terms:

“integration, in its broadest sense, refers to inclusion and participation both socially and economically, and that it is a process whereby both the receiving communities and the newcomers change, and change each other”.¹⁵

The “securitization” concept that the “Copenhagen School” led by B. Buzan, O. Wæver and J. de Wilde particularly emphasize manifests the idea that decision-makers take some political matters and issues out of the political context, and “securitize” these matters by placing them within a rhetoric-oriented security framework.¹⁶ The Copenhagen School describes the “reconstruction process” as the reconstruction of a matter that would normally be resolved by means of political instruments within the framework of security, and presenting the same as if it is to be resolved by means of security instruments. Securitization can also be evaluated within the context of migration and cohesion. Therefore, the matter at hand (for instance, immigrants or refugees) is reconstructed as an “existential threat” for the state and society. According to the Copenhagen School, the concept that represents the institution or entity that is posed by the threat, the “referent object” is the determining factor, here. It is important that the “threats outside the military zone” are brought up on the agenda and presented as the referent object for the security of the society. It is also emphasized that the process of convincing society, i.e. the “audience”, that the matter at hand can pose a threat can be reversed, which means that matters that would become “issues” can be resolved by the political discourse and instruments instead of the security discourse and instruments.¹⁷ The “Political Anthropological Research for International Sociology” (Paris School), pioneered by D. Bigo and T. Balzacq, having included two critical aspects to the securitization process suggested by the Copenhagen School, also point out the “practices” and the “other actors” outside the political institution.¹⁸ As a matter of fact, this approach also provides an opportunity to understand the pressure imposed from the community/grassroots.

14 For a quite comprehensive and updated evaluation on “social cohesion”, see “World Migration Report”, IOM, 2020, https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/wmr_2020.pdf (Accessed 25 December 2020); R. Bauböck and M. Tripkovic (eds.), *The Integration of Migrants and Refugees, An EUI Forum on Migration, Citizenship and Demography*, Florence, European University Institute, 2017.

15 Michaela Hynie, “Refugee integration: Research and policy”, *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, Vol. 24, No 3, 2018, p. 265-276.

16 Barry Buzan et al., *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997.

17 See: Birgül Demirtaş, “Mülteciler ve Güvenlikleştirme”, *ÜİK Güvenlik Yazıları*, No 8, September 2019, https://trguvenlikportali.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/MultecilerGuvencilestirme_BirgulDemirtas_v.2.pdf (Accessed 20 November 2020).

18 Didier Bigo, “Security and Immigration: Toward a Critique of the Governmentality of Unease”, *Alternatives*, Vol. 27, Special Issue, 2002, p. 63-92; Didier Bigo and Emma McCluskey, “What is a PARIS Approach to (In)securitization? Political Anthropological Research for International Sociology”, Alexandra Gheciu and William C. Wohlforth (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Security*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 116-130; Thierry Balzacq, “The Three Faces of Securitization: Political Agency, Audience and Context”, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 11, No 2, 2005, p. 171-201.

One can argue that the anti-refugee discourse that has become evident in the post-Cold War period, and especially the resistance against the issue of refugees, is closely related with the “securitization as a process of construction” suggested by the Schools of Copenhagen and Paris.¹⁹ However, it may be an insufficient analysis to consider the issue of the securitization of massive migration flows merely as a “construct”. In this respect, the approach adopted by A. Hammerstad in his study on the security discourse about the Zimbabwean immigrants in South Africa from the aspect of “securitization” is particularly meaningful. Hammerstad describes his observation that the conception of the Zimbabwean immigrants as a security threat was not encouraged by the traditional security elites but by the marginalized urban people of South Africa as the “securitization from below”, and points out that regarding securitization as a construction area may not sufficiently explain some “real” concerns and threat perception among the host communities.²⁰ Although this approach brings to mind the analyses of the realist school, “securitization from below” may prove to be the most critical basis for the securitization in some situations.²¹ In this study, “securitization from society” is used instead, as a new concept that may contribute to the migration literature, which is similar to the “below” concept noted by Hammerstad, however, more comprehensive.²²

It is interesting that many concepts such as the “securitization”, “integration”, “social cohesion” etc. in the relevant literature are associated with the “resident immigrants” but not linked with refugees. It cannot be argued that the irregular migrants take up a significant place in the migration literature. One of the core reasons for this situation is that the developed countries, which are also the source of the migration literature, are safeguarded when it comes to refugees and irregular migrants, and the number of refugees entering these countries is fairly small when compared to both regular migrants and immigrants. In this respect, Berry & Roberts’s emphasis that the content of the cohesion activities that follow forced migrations constitute a social model and a political objective. Therefore, they are differentiated from voluntary migration and exactly point to this differentiation and this gap.²³ Similarly, Özçürümez & İçduygu also point to this “gap” in the “social cohesion” and “social integration” approach in view of those exposed to forced displacement.²⁴

The relationship between migration and securitization necessitates the analysis of the cultural proximity between the host and newcomers, especially when the source of concern is the “loss of identity”. Undoubtedly, cultural, racial and religious proximity is a critical factor for the relations between the “newcomers” and the local community. Although the experiences in the world show that in the initial phases of social encounters, especially when it comes to supporting the people who

19 See Nazif Mandacı and Gökay Özerim, “Uluslararası Göçlerin Bir Güvenlik Konusuna Dönüşümü: Avrupa’da Radikal Sağ Partiler ve Göçün Güvenleştirilmesi”, *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 10, No 39, 2013, p. 105-130.

20 Hammerstad, “Securitisation from below”.

21 For a critical study taking up the social basis for the securitization in view of immigrants in general and Muslim immigrants in particular in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, see Jef Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2006.

22 It is known that there are quite a number of studies on securitization in the relevant literature. However, “securitization from society” is not used in the migration literature. The concept that reminds this one but presents a whole other perspective is the “securitization of society” which Marc Schuilenburg elaborated in his book: Marc Schuilenburg, *The Securitization of Society. Crime, Risk, and Social Order*, New York, New York University Press, 2015.

23 Joanna P. de Berry and Andrew Roberts, *Social Cohesion and Forced Displacement: A Desk Review to Inform Programming and Project Design*, June 2018, <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/125521531981681035/pdf/128640-WP-P163402-PUBLIC-SocialCohesionandForcedDisplacement.pdf> (Accessed 20 December 2020).

24 See Saime Özçürümez and Ahmet İçduygu, *Zorunlu Göç Deneyimi ve Toplumsal Bütünleşme: Kavramlar, Modeller ve Uygulamalar ile Türkiye*, İstanbul, İstanbul Bilgi University Publications, 2020.

flee from a disaster, such religious, cultural and ethnic proximity creates a significant motivation for solidarity. The large scale of human mobility and the lengthy processes may do harm to this motivation. An outstanding study on this subject is the research paper by C. L. Adida entitled “Too Close for Comfort? Immigrant Exclusion in Africa”. The researcher explains what happened in West Africa when communities with similar cultural structures came together following migration as “the analysis indicates that cultural similarities between immigrants and their hosts may limit immigrant integration because they motivate community leaders to highlight group boundaries”.²⁵

The field study of this article shows that Turkish society rejects the claim to be in close cultural proximity with Syrians, and a quite high-level distance is imposed on Syrians. The concerns of Turkish society seem to be related with potentially or actually facing four main threatening conditions that may emerge during massive migration flows. These four concerns are losing jobs or facing a decrease in the wages due to the newcomers, increase in criminality, the risk of a deterioration / decrease in the public services and the loss of identity, also form the basis of the “Social Securitization”.

“Security” as a Construct or Reality?: Securitization of the Human Mobility on Migrants & Refugees

Although this century is described as the “age of migration”²⁶, “human mobility” that can be called the “twin sister” of the history of mankind, whether voluntary or forced, and specifically the cross-border mobility, is evaluated as the subject of politics and security as well as, if not rather than, sociology. Especially, hard or soft security discourse used in the aftermath of the Cold War period, has been a subject of hot debate for the politics and international relations, and naturally for the field of migration. The Schools of Copenhagen and Paris made a significant contribution to such debates in terms of the criticisms expressed by “securitization” in general and “securitization of migration” in particular.²⁷ C. Eroukhmanoff summarizes this contribution as follows:

“securitization theory reminds us that securitization is not a neutral act but a political one. Securitization theory shows us that national security policy is not a natural given, but carefully designated by politicians and decision-makers... Calling immigration a ‘threat to national security’, for instance, shifts immigration from a low priority political concern to a high priority issue that requires action, such as securing borders.”²⁸

Although the perception of threat in the Cold War period was characterized by the potential military attack from the “opponent block”, it can be obviously seen that it has been replaced by the other non-military threats, especially the areas of disagreement such as culture or civilization or religion, as well as the “uncontrolled human mobility”. The theses of F. Fukuyama “the end of history”,²⁹ and

25 Claire L. Adida, “Too Close for Comfort? Immigrant Exclusion in Africa”, *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 44, No 10, 2011, p. 1370-1396.

26 Stephen Castles et al., *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 6th Edition, New York, The Guilford Press, 2019.

27 For a comprehensive analysis on the relation between international relations and security, see: A.Şevket Ovalı, “Ütopya ile Pratik Arasında: Uluslararası İlişkilerde İnsan Güvenliği Kavramsallaştırması”, *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 3, No 10, 2006, p. 3-52.

28 Clara Eroukhmanoff, “Securitisation Theory: An Introduction”, 14 January 2018, <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/01/14/securitisation-theory-an-introduction/> (Accessed 18 December 2020).

29 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York, Free Press, 1992.

S. Huntington's "clash of civilizations",³⁰ actually put forward critical signs regarding the new area of security. Adding to this change and the new "threat/security" perceptions, developments referred to as the "Islamic Terror", and particularly symbolized by September 11, the view of the Western societies to the new human mobilities and existing immigrant groups started to be addressed directly based on the concept of securitization. Instant stigmatization of the resident Muslim immigrants, and those with immigrant origins in Europe, as the groups having the potential to "disturb the peace" and "pose a threat", strengthened the link between the securitization and immigrants. However, a concern much greater than that is felt with regards to refugees.³¹ Underestimating the concerns and worries regarding security that arise from the human mobility, even if they are perceptions only, will make it easier for the securitization actors to convince the society, and also politicize the subject based on such perceptions.

Two dramatic demographic developments that the developed Western countries face, which include the aging populations and decreasing birth rates, create the need for human resources from abroad.³² Albeit this requirement, the doubt and concern over the resident immigrants/those with immigrant origins are getting more and more self-evident every day, and the discussions over the models of co-existence are mounting, which inevitably brings forward the security-oriented discussions and the instrumentalization of the refugees in politics.³³ One of the issues that may come to the fore in this respect is the religious, ethnic or cultural characteristics of the "newcomers", especially the immigrant population or those with immigrant origin, particularly those with a high potential of becoming effective in a country due to the size of their population.³⁴ Such a disturbance has become more prominent as modern diasporas have appeared, and they have been instrumentalized by the governments of their destination countries.³⁵ Although in the EU, the human resources requirement of which has become chronic but deteriorates day by day, receives a migration of over 2 million on average per year from non-EU countries, the issues of the combination of this human resource and the way to "absorb" this resource following which type of governance are fundamentally addressed, not only as a developmental, but also a security-related issue. Despite the existent immigrant requirement of the EU, the restriction of refugee acceptance (for instance in 2019, around 21,200 persons were resettled from non-EU countries to EU Member States, 12% more than in 2018)³⁶ can rather be explained by the security concerns.

30 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1996.

31 See E. Canan-Sokullu, "Mülteciler ve Güvenlik", *Güvenlik Yazıları*, No 30, October 2019, https://trguvenlikportali.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/MultecilerveGuenlik_EbruCananSokullu_v.1.pdf. (Accessed 20 November 2020).

32 In 2018, 2.2 million people immigrated to the EU from outside the EU, and 900 thousand people left the EU for elsewhere. See https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/statistics-migration-europe_en (Accessed 20 November 2020).

33 See: Nazif Mandacı and Gökay Özerim, "Uluslararası Göçlerin Bir Güvenlik Konusuna Dönüşümü".

34 John Baylis' paper entitled "The Security Concept in International Relations", focuses on the evolution of the security approaches from their traditional roots to the development of new perspectives in the post-Cold War period. See John Baylis, "Uluslararası İlişkilerde Güvenlik Kavramı", *Uluslararası İlişkiler*, Vol. 5, No 18, 2008, p. 69-85.

35 See Maria Koinova, "Diasporas and International Politics: Utilizing the Universalistic Creed of Liberalism for Particularistic and Nationalist Purposes", Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist (eds.), *Diaspora and Transnationalism : Concepts, Theories and Methods*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2010.

36 EU-Statistics on migration to Europe, "Snapshot of immigrants in European society", 1 January 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/statistics-migration-europe_en#snapshot-of-immigrants-in-european-society (Accessed 15 December 2020).

Prohibiting “uncontrolled human mobility” is defined as a “right” of the states. Uncontrolled human mobility is considered as one of the most serious security threats especially after the Cold War. Also, the new strategic concept of NATO,³⁷ European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) that the EU established in 2004, and even the Accession Partnership Document established between the EU and Turkey in 2001³⁸ addressed the issue as a security issue with the expression of “preventing illegal migration”. The most recent example of the regulations in practice is the “New Pact on Migration and Asylum,” which was announced by the EU in October 2020, which is one of the most developed regions of the world and which further managed to abolish border controls within its boundaries.³⁹ Here, it is suggested to increase opportunities for “regular qualified immigrants” but take the utmost security measures against refugees, imposing “source” and “secondary source” to ensure that the issue remains outside the boundaries of the EU, in other words, making agreements based on externalization with the countries where refugees usually reach and stay before they can transfer to the countries for better living standards.⁴⁰ All these indicate that migration, i.e. human mobility, has been evaluated as a political, and naturally a security phenomenon, rather than a sociological issue in the post-Cold War period.

Syrian Refugees in Turkey and the Political Arena

Turkey has been one of the neighboring states most affected by the crisis and civil war in Syria, along with Lebanon and Jordan. Turkey considered it appropriate to pursue an “open door policy” with regards to the Syrians who fled from the conflict and massively entered to Turkey, in order to provide them with a “temporary protection” status, providing them accommodation usually at the camps on the border zone for the first two years. The number of camps increased to 26, and the number of those accommodating in the camps almost reached 250,000 in 2016. The overall expectation during the process up to 2014 was a governmental change in Syria and the end of war. However, this did not happen and the influx of refugees continued and therefore the Turkish state provided opportunity for the Syrians to move *de facto* all around the country, more specifically, it did not prevent them from voluntarily changing locations and settling throughout the country. Thus, the possibility of “self-

37 NATO: “Demographic changes that could aggravate such global problems as poverty, hunger, illegal immigration, and pandemic disease” NATO, “Assured Security; Dynamic Engagement Analysis and Recommendations of the Group of Experts on a New Strategic Concept for NATO”, 17 May 2010, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/expertsreport.pdf>, (Accessed 15 December 2020).

38 “Adoption and implementation of the EU Legislation and practices on migration (acceptance, re-acceptance, deportation) to prevent illegal migration” Council Resolution dated 8 March 2001 (2001/235/EC) on Principles, Priorities, Interim Objectives and Conditions included in the Accession Partnership with the Republic of Turkey, 8 March 2001, https://www.ab.gov.tr/files/AB_Iliskileri/AdaylikSureci/Kob/Turkiye_Kat_Ort_Belg_2001.pdf (Accessed 15 December 2020).

39 See: EU Commission, “Migration and Asylum Package: New Pact on Migration and Asylum documents adopted on 23 September 2020”, 23 September 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/migration-and-asylum-package-new-pact-migration-and-asylum-documents-adopted-23-september-2020_en (Accessed 15 December 2020).

40 See: Kemal Kirişçi, M.Murat Erdoğan, Nihal Eminoğlu, “The EU’s “New Pact on Migration and Asylum” is missing a true foundation”, 6 November 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/11/06/the-eus-new-pact-on-migration-and-asylum-is-missing-a-true-foundation/> https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/migration-and-asylum-package-new-pact-migration-and-asylum-documents-adopted-23-september-2020_en (Accessed 6 November 2020); Jeff Crisp, “Disingenuous, dishonest and dangerous: the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum”, 1 October 2020, <https://rli.blogs.sas.ac.uk/2020/10/01/disingenuous-dishonest-and-dangerous-the-eu-pact-on-migration-and-asylum/>, (Accessed 06 December 2020).

settlement” emerged for Syrian refugees.⁴¹ As of December 2020, only 59,077 of 3,641,503 Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey stay in the camps, whereas the remaining, more than 98%, co-exist in Turkish society, mostly in urban areas.⁴²

If the number of newcomers exceed the figures that “can be controlled” and the numbers exceed reasonable levels, considering the context and capacity of the country, the management of the process would become difficult, and typical concerns of losing one’s job, escalating crime rates, problems associated with benefiting from the public services and identity threat would become self-evident among the society. The size of the figures does not only create concern among the host community, but also the confidence and solidarity built on the large figures may result in the formation of the sociological ghettos of the newcomers, and withdrawal of the same, which makes it possible for them to build their internal system. This will make the local community more troubled, and the feeling that the “absorption” of the newcomers will not be possible may trigger clashes. This situation which is defined as “ghettoization” or “parallel society formation”⁴³ in the literature may seem to be sheltering for the newcomers but it also forms the basis of isolation, and sometimes newcomers may even construct their national-cultural identities, in a way to alienate the host community. It can be argued that the main determinant for the cohesion processes that take place in the public domain on one hand, and social domain on the other, would be the social cohesion processes at the center of which lies the “social acceptance”. This situation necessitates addressing the concerns among the society, whether based on facts or perception.

The institutional approach of the political parties in Turkey to Syrians is largely sentimental and on a temporary basis. However, it is observed that the HDP adopted a principled attitude and differentiated itself from the other parties based on the following declarations: “The “geographical restriction” reservation included in the Geneva Convention shall be abolished as we advocate the rights of displaced people who had to leave their homeland that are established under the international law”.⁴⁴ It is observed that the other political parties have rather limited policy recommendations regarding Syrian refugees, and even some political parties totally ignore this issue. It is evident that the ruling party has used a oft-changing rhetoric especially after 2017, instrumentalized the issue within the context of EU relations, and followed a path in internal politics both criticizing the opposition and calming its own voters.⁴⁵ In this respect, Yavaşmayan & Üstübcü & Kaşlı’s⁴⁶ studies are outstanding

41 See Inka Stock et al., “Beyond humanitarianism – Addressing the urban, self-settled refugees in Turkey”, Bielefeld: COMCAD, Working Papers – Center on Migration, Citizenship and Development, 2016.

42 DGMM, “Temporary Protection”, December 2020, <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27> (Accessed 30 December 2020).

43 For discussions over this concept, see: Spiegel, “Zuwanderung wird als Bedrohung empfunden” 24 November 2004, <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/leitkultur-debatte-zuwanderung-wird-als-bedrohung-empfunden-a-329285.html> (Accessed 28 December 2020).

44 HDP, “Büyük İnsanlık Büyük Barış”, November 2015, <https://www.hdp.org.tr/Images/UserFiles/Documents/Gallery/B%C3%BCy%C3%BCk%20%C4%B0nsanl%C4%B1k%20B%C3%BCy%C3%BCk%20Bar%C4%B1%C5%9F.pdf> (Accessed 9 December 2020).

45 Demirtaş describes it as “a cyclical discourse”. See Birgül Demirtaş, “Syrian Refugees and Turkish Political Parties: Domestic Interests versus Universal Values”, Ana Jovic-Lazic and Alexis Troude (eds.), *Security Challenges and the Place of the Balkans and Serbia in a Changing World*, Belgrade, Institute of International Politics and Economics and University of Belgrade, 2020, p. 150-165.

46 Zeynep Yavaşmayan et al., “Under the Shadow of Civilizationist Populist Discourses: Political Debates on Refugees in Turkey”, *New Diversities*, Vol. 21, No 2, 2019. See also: Fulya Memişoğlu and Başak Yavcan, “Beyond ideology – a comparative analysis of how local governance can expand national integration policy: the case of Syrian refugees in

which actually require us to re-evaluate the issue of “securitization”. The following observation has been made in the comprehensive study carried out by the authors who put forward the approaches of the political parties in Turkey toward Syrian refugees:

“through the analysis of an original dataset of political statements between 2014 and 2018, our findings demonstrate that refugees have not been a big part of public policy and electoral debates, despite the increasing societal discontent, mediatization, and politicization around the presence of refugees, particularly Syrians, in Turkey. The anti-immigration rhetoric of political actors only partially subscribes to the transnational populist playbook of right-wing parties in Western democracies”

Analysis Based on the Voters of the Political Parties

In this article, the analysis of the opinions and reactions of Turkish society over the Syrians in Turkey, based on the attitudes of the voters / political parties have been made using an independent module of a comprehensive and independent public opinion research held in 2019 in Turkey.⁴⁷ The data forming the basis of this research have been obtained by mapping the question posed to the respondents of the survey “Which of the political party candidates did you cast a vote for to be mayor during the local elections on 31 March 2019?” with the questions in general throughout the research.⁴⁸ The data are shared with the public for the first time with this article. The analysis undoubtedly does not serve the aim of establishing an absolute link between the political preferences and the perspective on Syrians. Here, an attempt is made to understand the general tendencies in a careful manner without neglecting the limitations of the data at hand. The paper is also linked with the findings in the series of academic studies carried out by the author, including the Syrians Barometer-2019,⁴⁹ Syrians Barometer-2017,⁵⁰ and “Research on Syrian Refugees in the Public Perception-2014”⁵¹ held in 2014.⁵² As known, the “Cumhur Alliance,” formed for the first

Istanbul”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, (online version), 2020, p. 5.

47 As the sampling, reliability level and range of the research for the data used in this paper, the average household size has been determined as 3.4 based on TURKSTAT 2018 data for the research on the opinions of the Turkish society on Syrians. Based on these data, sampling size has been calculated as 2.271 with a reliability level of 95% and within a reliability range of ± 2.06 . Survey application performed in the urban centers of 26 provinces at NUTS-2 level for the Turkish society, having been applied to the persons included in 18+ age group, capable of understanding the questions posed and providing a response. Data forming the basis for this research have been obtained by mapping the question posed to the survey respondents “Which of the political party candidate did you cast a vote for Mayorship during the local elections on 31 March 2019” with the questions in general throughout the survey as well as the analysis of the same. Below is the general distribution of the respondents of this question: Cumhur Alliance (AKP+MHP): 34.3%; Millet Alliance (CHP-İYİ Party, Saadet Party): 33.3%; HDP: 3.6%, Not specifying any party: 27%, Other: 1.8%.

48 General distribution of the responses to this question Cumhur Alliance (AKP+MHP): 34.3%; Millet Alliance (CHP-İYİ Party, Saadet Party): 33.3%; HDP: 3.6%, Not specifying any party: 27%, Other: 1.8%

49 Erdoğan, Syrians Barometer, 2019.

50 M. Murat Erdoğan, *Suriyeliler Barometresi: Suriyelilerle Uyum İçinde Yaşamın Çerçevesi*, İstanbul, İstanbul Bilgi University Yayınları, 2018

51 M. Murat Erdoğan, *Türkiye’deki Suriyeliler: Toplumsal Kabul ve Uyum*, İstanbul, İstanbul, İstanbul Bilgi University Yayınları, 2015.

52 Syrians Barometer-2017 study and Syrians Barometer-2019 rather share the same structure. However, the response to the question “which of the parties/individuals did you vote for during the recent election?” has been differentiated in 2019 due to the alliances. “Cumhur Alliance” of AKP and MHP and “Millet Alliance” of CHP-İYİ Party and Saadet Party hinders a party-based analysis as in 2017. Only HDP from among the parties in the Parliament relatively seems to be possible to follow up. HDP also participated in the recent election as “the Independent” (BDPs) before the 2014

time in 2018, includes the AKP and the MHP, whereas the CHP, the İYİ Party and the Saadet Party were united under the framework of the “Millet Alliance”.⁵³ Therefore, an evaluation in view of the alliances has been taken into consideration in the study. Since the HDP participated in both elections as a party, it provides the opportunity to make a direct comparison.

Policies of the State/Government towards Syrian Refugees

When an analysis is made based on the the achievement or the properness of the policy pursued by the Government (state) on Syrians, 73% of the Turkish society on average consider the policies to be improper or very improper, whereas only 10.7 % consider the same as proper and very proper. Although the ratio of those among the AKP and the MHP (the “Cumhur Alliance”) voters in the recent elections who consider these policies as “improper and very improper” remain below the general average, the result has been at a quite high level at 53.6%. It is observed that the ratio of those who consider the Syrians’ policy as “proper, very proper” has been 23.6%. As can be expected, all the other opposition parties agreed that the policies have been “improper” (90.1%).⁵⁴ However, it is interesting that more than half of the voters of the government party and the alliance party consider the Syrians’ policy “very improper or improper” and there is an increasing trend of this dissatisfaction in the process. General dissatisfaction in 2014 and 2017 research was 49.7% and 62.4%, respectively, and its increase to 73% manifests already increasing level of dissatisfaction among the society.

Table-1: What do you think about the policy pursued by the State regarding the Syrians? (%) 2019

	Very Improper	Improper	Very Improper+ Improper	Neither Improper Nor Proper	Proper	Very Proper	Very Proper + Proper	No Idea/ No Response
‘Cumhur’ Alliance	21.3	32.3	53.6	18.5	20.3	3.3	23.6	4.3
‘Millet’ Alliance	51.9	38.2	90.1	7.1	1.3	-	1.3	1.5
People’s Democratic Party (HDP)	62.2	26.8	89.0	7.3	2.4	-	2.4	1.3
Other	36.6	39.0	75.6	9.8	4.9	-	4.9	9.7
Political party not mentioned	32.4	42.0	74.4	13.4	6.2	1.0	7.2	5.0
Overall	36.2	36.8	73.0	12.8	9.3	1.4	10.7	3.5

study. Due to the reasons above, it is not possible to compare these three studies from an academic and methodological aspect, although 2014 and 2017 studies are used for observing some tendencies. Therefore, SB-2019 data are taken into consideration in the study, whereas those of 2014 and 2017 studies will be evaluated as the secondary data.

53 Two elections have been performed in Turkey by means of official alliances, one for Members of Parliament elections and the other for local administrations. During the MP elections on 24 June 2018, Cumhur Alliance received 53.66% of the votes (AKP: 42.56%, MHP: 11.10%). Millet Alliance received a total of 33.94% of the votes in 2018 elections (CHP: 22.64%, İYİ Party: 9.96%, Saadet Party: 1.34%). HDP, which did not take part in the alliances, received 11.70% of the votes. During the 31 March 2019 local elections, Cumhur Alliance received 51.64% of the votes (AKP: 44.33%, MHP: 7.31%), Millet Alliance 37.57% (CHP: 30.12%, İYİ Party: 7.45%, Saadet Party: 2.71%), and HDP 4.24%.

54 In 2014 study, the ratio of those who agreed with the proposition that “State ensures good management regarding the asylum-seekers” was 52%, while 33% disagreed; in SB-2017 (Annex Table-2) the ratio of those among AKP voters who considered the Syrians’ policy of the government is proper was 32.5%, while 44.9% regarded the same as improper.

Did The Policy Pursued by Turkey on Syrians Make Turkey a Powerful State?

Undoubtedly, the issue of Syrians in Turkey was related to an internal and foreign political decisions beyond just humanitarian concerns. One of the final remnants of the process termed as the “Arab Spring” in 2010-2011 started to become evident in Syria in March 2011. It was a quite commonly held belief in Turkey and the world that the Esad government was to come to an end soon. Turkey tried to convince the Syrian government to give up power on the one hand, and started to pursue an open door policy to the Syrians who fled from war on the other hand. Turkey pursued different policies during that period.⁵⁵ However, the data at hand suggest that this opinion among the Turkish society has been considerably revised over time. The support from Turkish society for the proposition that “We have shown the world that we were a powerful state by accepting Syrians” remains at a considerably low level of 1.8 (36%) when scored out of 5. Looking at the issue from a political party point of view, it is observed that even the support of the Cumhuriyet Alliance is considerably low with 2.4 (48%). The support of the opposition parties to such proposition was around 1.4 (28%).⁵⁶

The Perception of Cultural Proximity/Similarity

“Cultural proximity” between Turkish society and Syrians, and the contribution of this proximity to the solidarity and then the cohesion processes are frequently discussed. However, the studies on this subject indicate that there is a serious level of alienation among Turkish society toward Syrians, and it is understood that the tendency to reject Syrians as a society with similar cultural features is quite strong. It is observed in the responses to the question “To what extent Syrians are culturally similar to us?” that 81.9% responded “they are not similar at all” and “they are not similar”, and the ratio of those who responded “they are similar” and “they are very similar” is only 7% in total.⁵⁷

Table-2: To what extent are Syrians culturally similar to us?

	Not similar at all	Not similar	Not similar at all + Not similar	Neither similar nor not similar	Similar	Very similar	Very similar + Similar	No Idea/ No Response
‘Cumhur’ Alliance	39.5	34.6	74.1	10.7	12.0	0.6	12.6	2.6
‘Millet’ Alliance	61.8	29.2	91.0	5.4	2.0	0.1	2.1	1.5
People’s Democratic Party (HDP)	48.8	29.3	78.1	6.1	13.4	-	13.4	2.4
Other	58.5	34.1	92.6	2.4	-	2.4	2.4	2.6
Political party not mentioned	50.3	30.0	80.3	10.7	5.5	-	5.5	3.5
Overall	50.5	31.4	81.9	8.6	6.7	0.3	7.0	2.5

55 For a quite significant evaluation in view of how the world saw the “powerful state” image of Turkey based on the refugee policy, see: Juliette Tolay, “Mass Migration and Images of State Power: Turkey’s Claim to the Status of a Responsible Rising Power”, *Rising Powers Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No 2, 2016, p. 135-149.

56 Among the responses to the question in SB-2017 “What is your opinion on the Government’s policy on Syrian refugees?” with the options “very improper”, “improper”, “proper”, “very proper”, the total of “improper-very improper” was 62.4 % in total, with 44.9% from AKP voters, 85.2% from CHP voters, and 75% from HDP voters.

57 This ratio was observed to be 70.6% in 2014, and 80.2% in SB-2017 study.

Social Distance⁵⁸

It is observed that Turkish society imposes an increasing level of social distance to Syrians. It is observed that the distancing within Turkish society has become more evident between SB-2017 and SB-2019 (distant and very distanced) (66.3%).⁵⁹ The relationship between social distance and political preferences significantly reveals that HDP voters impose a distance with a ratio of 40.2%, which is considerably lower than the average. Looking at the total of “similar and very similar”, the average is 16.8%, which is 26.4% among Cumhur Alliance, 7.2% among Millet Alliance, however, 28.1% among HDP voters.

Table-3: Social Distance Groups (%)

	Very distant	Distant	Very Distant + Distant	Neither distant nor close	Close	Very close	Very close + Close
Cumhur Alliance	37.8	15.7	53.5	20.1	16.5	9.9	26.4
Millet Alliance	67.7	13.6	81.3	11.5	4.8	2.4	7.2
HDP	26.8	13.4	40.2	31.7	19.5	8.6	28.1
Other	63.4	17.1	80.5	9.8	7.3	2.4	9.7
Political party not mentioned	49.7	17.0	66.7	18.0	10.0	5.3	15.3
Overall	51.0	15.3	66.3	16.9	10.8	6.0	16.8

Concerns

It can be observed in many studies that the concerns within Turkish society over Syrians are prevalent. Normally, it may be argued that there are four main concerns felt among the local community in the face of massive human mobility in relation to the newcomers: Losing jobs, escalating crime rates and disturbance of peace, failures in public services and identity deformation. It is observed that the intensity of concerns in these areas are quite high with 71.7%. Looking at the relationship between the political preferences of the respondents in the latest elections and their concerns, the highest level of concern is observed among the voters of Millet Alliance with 81.8%, and the lowest level is observed among the voters of HDP with 60.6%, whereas the level of concern among the Cumhur Alliance is 64%.

58 “Social distance scales” developed by E. S. Bogardus in 1925 to better understand co-existence and identify the problems are used in this study. See Emory S. Bogardus, “Social Distance and Its Origins”, *Journal of Applied Sociology*, 1925, p. 216-226; Emory S. Bogardus, “Measurement of Personal-Group Relations”, *Sociometry*, Vol. 10, No. 4 1946, p. 306-311.

59 Social distance measured as -0.36 in SB-2017 increased to -0.51 in SB-2019.

Table-4: To what extent do you feel the following concerns because of Syrians? (Score:0-5)

	I think Syrians will take away our jobs	I think Syrians will get involved in crimes such as violence, burglary, smuggling and prostitution and disturb social morals and peace	I think there will be a decrease or a deterioration of quality in the public services provided by the state because of Syrians	I think Syrians will deform the identity of the Turkish society	Average Percentage of Concern
Cumhur Alliance	62.6	65.7	65.0	61.5	64.0
Millet Alliance	79.0	82.4	83.1	80.8	81.8
HDP	62.9	61.5	61.2	56.6	60.6
Other	77.1	72.7	73.2	74.6	74.2
Political party not mentioned	67.7	72.6	72.2	69.9	70.6
Overall	69.7	73.1	73.0	70.3	71.7

Syrians: From “Aggrieved/Victim” To “Threat”

It is evident that the concerns and worries expressed over Syrians in Turkey are quite high, and more importantly, they are no longer described as the “aggrieved”/victim as they were previously, but rather described as a “threat” now. As can be seen in the table below, the responses to the question “What are the most appropriate expressions to describe Syrians” show that, 58.5% of HDP voters and 47.3% of the voters of Cumhur Alliance opt for “Syrians are the aggrieved people fleeing from violence/war” as the most powerful description. However, the overall picture depicts the disturbance caused by Syrians. The opinions of the voters of Millet Alliance are quite different, and it is observed that they are more inclined to describe “Syrians as a threat” rather than “Syrians as the aggrieved/victim”.

Table-5: The most appropriate expressions to describe Syrians (Multiple choice %)

No.		Cumhur Alliance	Millet Alliance	HDP	Other	Political party not mentioned	Overall
1	They are dangerous people who will give us trouble in the future	33.9	58.5	28.0	46.3	33.6	42.0
2	They are people who did not defend their country	35.7	49.5	35.4	29.3	40.2	41.4
3	They are people who are burden on us	29.9	54.4	32.9	39.0	34.0	39.5
4	They are victims fleeing from violence/war	47.3	18.9	58.5	26.8	36.5	35.0
5	They are guests in our country	33.3	9.0	26.8	12.2	23.0	21.8
6	They are quite different and foreign to us	15.6	23.7	15.9	22.0	20.5	19.7
7	They are our religious fellows	32.1	5.6	34.1	14.6	19.5	19.6
8	They are beggars/they only live on aid	10.9	21.3	8.5	12.2	13.8	15.1
9	They are people exploited as cheap labor	12.5	12.2	26.8	9.8	15.1	13.6
10	They are quiet and harmless people	12.0	3.7	8.5	2.4	4.7	7.0

Faith in Permanence is Strong But There is No Desire for Co-Existence

Despite the strong faith among the Turkish society that Syrians would be permanent, the will for co-existence seems to be rather weak. Turkish society quite strikingly prefers “isolation” when responding to the question “Where should Syrians live?”. Although Turkish society, in fact, managed to co-exist with Syrians relatively smoothly, it still shows a high level of concern and reluctance to share a future together at the same time. In this respect, as can be seen in Table 6, 87.2% of Turkish society indicates that they would prefer a “repatriation-isolation” policy for Syrians in a way that they could be sent to safe regions to be allocated within Syria, repatriated to Syria, and only permitted to live in camps or provinces particularly built for them. In fact, Syrians have been co-existing with Turkish society, especially in the last five years. Despite this, the demand for isolation raises concerns.

Table-6: Where should the Syrians in Turkey live? (%)

	They should be sent to safe zones to be established in Syria to live there	They should definitely be sent back	They should only live in camps	Special cities should be established for them in Turkey	They should be distributed around Turkey in a balanced way	They should be able to live in any city they want	No Idea/ No Response
Cumhur Alliance	46.5	16.8	13.5	3.0	9.5	9.0	1.7
	79.8				18.5		
Millet Alliance	45.4	33.6	13.6	1.9	2.5	1.6	1.4
	94.5				4.1		
HDP	24.4	11.0	48.8	7.3	3.6	4.9	-
	91.5				8.5		
Other	56.1	12.2	21.9	-	4.9	4.9	-
	90.2				9.8		
Political party not mentioned	43.8	27.5	13.7	1.8	4.6	5.2	3.4
	86.6				9.8		
Overall	44.8	25.0	15.0	2.4	5.5	5.3	2.0
	87.2%				10.8		

What is the Priority Rank of the Issue of Syrians in Turkey & Do Syrians Have an Effect on Voting Behaviour?

According to the findings of the survey, Turkish society sees Syrians in Turkey as Turkey’s most important problem. As a matter of fact, according to 27.2% of society, Syrians are the top problem in Turkey. However, in the responses to the question in the SB-2019 study concerning the local elections held during the study period “to what extent did the promises and approaches of the mayor candidates concerning Syrians during the elections held on 31 March affect your voting behavior?”, it is interesting that 18.9% noted “they did”, 2.5% noted “they absolutely did”, therefore 21.4% of Turkish society admitted that they were affected by it. Such influence was 16.8% in total among the voters of Cumhur alliance.

Although the Syrian issue is considered the top problem of Turkey, there does not seem to be considerable evidence that the issue has been influential in the elections held, so far. With a rough analysis, the change in the votes for AKP which was the ruling party during 2011-2018 and seems to be in the position to be “punished” for having taken all decisions so far regarding Syrians on its own also manifests that such an influence has not been evident yet. There is a decrease of 7.27% in AKP votes in overall Turkey during 4 elections held between 2011-2018. This decrease is 7.86% in large (metropolitan) cities with higher number of refugees but lower population density of the refugees, whereas it is 5.16%, even lower than average, in four provinces in the border zone (Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Hatay and Kilis) which are expected to be seriously troubled. In fact, this table manifests that the entire tension and rejection among the Turkish society still has a considerably low effect on politics, and the issue of Syrians still remains at the lower ranks in the priority listing.

Table-7: Vote Loss of AKP in 2011-2018 Elections

REGION	Change in 2011-2018 %	Ratio of Syrians %	Number of Syrians
Turkey	-7.27	4.34	3,610,000
Metropolitan cities (İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir)	-7.86	2.78	740,000
Border Provinces with Intensive Population of Syrians (Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Hatay, Kilis)	-5.16	36.20	1,414,000

Syrians and Political Rights / Citizenship

It is also known that Turkish society is considerably concerned with the possibility of granting Syrians political rights, also including citizenship.⁶⁰ Currently 87% of the Turkish society argues that Syrians “should not be given any political rights”. Such rejection also reaches up to 80.5% among Cumhur Alliance also including the ruling party. Also, 94.7% of the voters of Millet Alliance, and 92.7% of HDP are against to any political rights of Syrians.

As for citizenship, there seems to be a differentiation. Although 76.5% of Turkish society on average state that they are against citizenship (68.6% among Cumhur Alliance, 85.6% Millet Alliance, 79.3% HDP), however, it is observed that “conditional citizenship” is accepted, though at lower levels, by means of granting citizenship to those “living in Turkey for a particular period” and “those educated”.

Conclusion

Cross-border human mobility, whether regular or irregular, poses a political and inevitably a security-related issue. In this respect, it can be argued that there is a complicated network of relationships within the scope of ‘inter-relations’ between the state, society and the newcomers with a view towards “border protection”, “securitization”, “social cohesion” and “social acceptance”. Even the concept of “cohesion”

⁶⁰ See: Şebnem K. Akçapar and Doğu Şimşek, “The politics of Syrian refugees in Turkey: A question of inclusion and exclusion through citizenship”, *Social Inclusion*, Vol. 6, No 1, 2018, p.176–187.

or the “social cohesion” concepts actually constitute an “internalized security-oriented approach (for prevention)”. Whether the societies are “convinced” by the politicians or opinion-leaders based on a “construct” or reactions and concerns evolve around the experiences of the communities themselves, human mobility becomes a political challenge and a security issue for both the state and the society, especially when it reaches uncontrolled and serious levels. That the typical migration countries which take their “precautions” at the earliest phases even link the migration policy primarily with security, can be considered to be an approach that provides a response to the securitization of the society, instead of just proving to be a construct.

Four main concerns within the society described above (job loss, criminality, failure in public services and identity loss) over the newcomers of the “immigrant” communities, each with a different cultural belonging despite having lived there for long, may be specifically provoked from time to time by the politicians but sometimes the society itself may carry these concerns from the grassroots to the political arena, and may even punish the politicians who it assumes to have “ignored” the issue.

One quite significant and even determinant factor of the management of the massive human mobility naturally with regards to the concerns it arises among the society is whether the newcomers are “immigrants” or “asylum-seekers”. Developed countries need immigrants as human resources and they receive immigrants from outside their borders in a controlled manner. Naturally, the country origin, cultural background, personal skills and criminal record of the persons play a significant role in decision processes. When the newcomers are asylum-seekers, the attitude of the developed countries is quite clear: To develop preventive and externalizing policies in order not to see the asylum-seekers in their countries all of a sudden, and to identify yearly asylum-seeker quotas and accept some of those whose registration from UNHCR is completed, analyzed, decision-making processes are complete and who are decided to be refugees – in numbers that they have decided. It is evident that security concerns are contained in this approach.

Although the government has made an effort to make policies extremely welcoming and far from securitization since the beginning of the arrival of Syrians in Turkey in 2011, and Turkish society has portrayed a considerable level of resilience and solidarity in terms of social acceptance, it is understood that the concerns among the society have seriously increased in the recent years, and the issue has been described as the third top problem of Turkey.

It is also understood that the government needs to use the instruments of foreign policy to ease the pressure from society.⁶¹ An interesting example is the events taking place on the Greek border in February-March 2020. The Government decision “Greek border not to be controlled /to be opened” made right after 36 Turkish soldiers on the observation spot in Idlib, Syria were killed by the Syrian state forces, showed the intensity of the discomfort among the society over Syrians, as well as the rage against Europe. It will not be a surprise that what happened in February-March 2020 in Pazarkule on the Greek border be brought up during the upcoming critical periods, considering the reciprocation within society irrespective of the figures of border crossing.

The research forming the basis of this article states that the worries within Turkish society over Syrians and the criticism of the government have already outworn political belonging, and over time the concerns have been on the rise. Despite these, Turkish society, which found itself in a position of

61 See Kemal Kirişçi, *Turkey and the West: Fault Lines in a Troubled Alliance*, Washington DC, Brookings Institution Press, 2017.

having to co-exist with over 4 million refugees all of a sudden, seems to have had a high level of “social acceptance”, albeit fragile and with a decreasing trend. It is possible to observe that Turkish society seems to adopt a “passive” attitude despite the concerns and rejection of Syrians that also are reflected in the study, and the reactions concentrate neither on Syrians nor the policy-makers. In that sense, despite the discomfort, there is no “political action”.

Although Turkey has become the country hosting the largest number of refugees in the world since 2014, and the issue of Syrians whose numbers reach 4 million (also including non-Syrians as of 2020) create increasing levels of concern within society, it cannot be argued that it has become a factor dominating politics in Turkey. Even in spite of the increasing concerns, it can be argued that social acceptance has been high within Turkish society that has co-existed with them in cities since the end of 2015. In fact, there were not many problems regarding two important concerns in the society in the face of such massive human mobility, namely “losing their job due to cheap labor” and “rapidly increasing crime rates”. It was also easier to tolerate. More importantly, with the ‘unregistered’ economy being one of the most critical structural problems of the Turkish economy (which mounted to 32.2% as of September 2020) enabled Syrians in Turkey to get employed and make a living.⁶² Although the unregistered economy is a sector that can never be preferred due to insecurity and labor exploitation, as well as being unsustainable, the existence of the unregistered economy (also including over 10 million citizens of the Republic of Turkey), has played a significant role in decreasing tension while seeming to contribute to cohesion processes.⁶³ In some studies carried out,⁶⁴ it has been found that Syrians are preferred instead of Turkish workers in some regions and sectors due to the cheap labor. However, it cannot be argued that it has created a problem affecting the whole of Turkey.

Although there is an overall consensus on the intensity of negative views about Syrians, as well as the social distance, it can be observed from a further detailed analysis that the government party AKP and HDP voters relatively differentiate themselves from the other opposition parties. Still, despite this differentiation, the voters of AKP and HDP also apparently consider the issue of Syrians to be a serious problem. Although the concerns and reactions among the voters of both parties remain lower when compared to the other parties, they are still at an exceptionally high level.

According to the findings of the Public Opinion Survey, the reflex of the AKP voters concerning Syrians primarily serves to support the Government policies and Erdoğan’s leadership. The way that AKP places the Syrians policy on an Islamic solidarity framework based on an “ensar or muhajir” approach also softens the reactions of the religionist and the conservative.

It is understood from the survey that those who explicitly state that they vote for the HDP support Syrians more than the AKP voters, as well as empathizing with them further. It can be linked with both the international law and rights-based rhetoric of the party and solidarity with Kurds among Syrians with an approximate ratio of 16-20%.

The negative attitude towards Syrians among the MHP voters, which was evident in previous

62 Turkstat, “Labour Force Statistics”, September 2020, <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Labour-Force-Statistics-September-2020-33793&dil=2> (Accessed 18 December 2020).

63 See Inka Stock et al., *Beyond humanitarianism*

64 Ege Aksu et al., *The Impact of Mass Migration of Syrians on the Turkish Labor Market*, IZA Institute of Labor Economic, IZA DP No. 12050, 2018.

surveys, seems to have changed with the Cumhur Alliance. The İyi Party, however, is observed to be the most critical party when it comes to its attitude toward Syrians. This situation can create a different rivalry in the future and cause a change of rhetoric in MHP.

It should be understood that the Millet Alliance formed by CHP, İYİ Party and Saadet Party presents the highest level of pessimistic and rejectionist attitude toward Syrians. However, the issue most highlighted by their voters is not the refugees themselves but the “improper” foreign policy pursued by the Government.

It should be understood that the concern within society over securitization that has been specifically addressed in this paper is quite high. The isolation request of society, plus the concerned and pessimistic expectation when it comes to “co-existence with Syrians in peace” evidently states that the security concerns are considerably high, despite all the endeavors of the public authority to console society. This indicates the presence of a concern and securitization that comes bottom-up from the society half based on experience, half based on perception rather than a construct.

Turkey is experiencing not an immigration but an asylum phenomenon along with a concern that arises from society. Turkish society managed to co-exist with Syrians and the conflicts remained quite lower than expected despite the fact that 4 million refugees exceeds 5% of the Turkish national population. Although the level of social acceptance decreased, it is possible to argue that it continues to be a high level of “tolerance”. It is critically important to strengthen the resilience of the Turkish society in the upcoming process, and to implement cohesion policies for Syrians starting with the local level, first. Still, it should be borne in mind that bringing forward cohesion policies seeks to ensure the prevention of conflicts and restoring peace, although it entails an honorable living for anyone involved. Therefore, this approach is a “soft” security approach after all, whether it is a construct or it originates from a reality. When uncontrolled/irregular human mobility takes place with figures exceeding millions and within a brief period of time, it cannot be expected not to result in concerns among the society.

It is assumed that this article has made a contribution to the literature from several aspects. First of all, the concept of “social acceptance” has been developed as the most important element in the social cohesion/integration processes. With this concept, the priority of the society is emphasized in the integration processes and the concerns of the society are also taken into account. The meaning of this concept introduced to the migration literature by the author and the role it plays in these processes have been expressed in this paper. Secondly, political party-based analyses have been based on the concepts of social acceptance and securitization, using original data that centralize the securitization from society/ a bottom-up securitization. Yet another significant element in terms of the ever-developing theoretical integrity of the field of migration and asylum is the issue of cohesion/ social cohesion and social acceptance. This paper describes the cohesion processes as an “internalized and soft security” area. Securitization from above is a reality and it is the most used instrument by populist politicians in the recent years. However, this fact does not change that the securitization phenomenon coming from society is also a reality. This should be seen as a reflection of reality. Integration is the way of life in which different communities, whether they have come together voluntarily or involuntarily, could live in peace and harmony on a common ground of belonging where pluralism is embraced in a framework of mutual acceptance and respect.