

**Political Party Positions towards Syrian Refugees in
Turkey: An Overview between 2011 and 2021**

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the
Graduate School of Social Sciences and Humanities
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
the Degree of
Master of Arts

in

International Relations



September 21, 2023

Political Party Positions towards Syrian Refugees in Turkey: An Overview between 2011 and 2021

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To my mother and sister with love...

The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect
the views of the United Nations.

ABSTRACT

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The current thesis presents a comparative study of Turkish political parties' policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees in Turkey between 2011 and 2021 and tries to reveal similarities and differences in their policy choices on Syrian refugees. While doing so, it aims to explore the contributions of mainstream international relations theories (MIRTs) to explain the factors influencing policy decisions of political parties regarding Syrian refugees, along with other factors like national security/domestic politics, economy/social development, and the international refugee regime. Having built upon existing literature and research on the drivers of forced migration governance, this thesis designs an analytical framework that sheds light on the factors behind the policy positions of the five largest political parties in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (GNAT) on Syrian refugees. The proposed analytical framework comprises four dimensions: international politics of forced migration, national security and domestic political agenda, national economy and social development, and the international refugee regime. To utilise this analytical framework, data for the study has been collected through semi-structured elite interviews with political party officials responsible for their parties' foreign policy vision and migration agenda and through various forms of political communication strategies used by political parties, including party programs, election manifestos, reports and policy notes, and public statements. The data collection process has been complemented with secondary data based on desk research and analysis of laws and regulations related to asylum. The findings of the current study indicate that policy decisions of political parties regarding Syrian refugees in Turkey could not be adequately analysed without putting them into the context of domestic and international politics. In this regard, the four-dimensional analytical framework offers a comprehensive and multifaceted sense of understanding of party-based approaches towards Syrian refugees in Turkey. Given the insights of international relations theories into how refugee policies are formulated, the current thesis reveals the importance of linking the discipline of international relations with the literature on refugee/forced migration studies.

ÖZETÇE

Siyasi Partilerin Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Mültecilere Yönelik Pozisyonları: 2011-2021 Arasına Genel Bir Bakış

Ebru Aras

Uluslararası İlişkiler, Yüksek Lisans

21 Eylül 2023

Bu tez, Türk siyasi partilerinin 2011-2021 yılları arasında Türkiye'deki Suriyeli mültecilere ilişkin politika kararlarını karşılaştırmalı olarak sunmakta olup, söz konusu politika tercihlerindeki benzerlik ve farklılıkları ortaya çıkarmaya çalışmaktadır. Bunu yaparken, ulusal güvenlik/iç politika, ekonomi/sosyal kalkınma ve uluslararası mülteci rejimi gibi diğer faktörlere ek olarak, anaakım uluslararası ilişkiler teorilerinin siyasi partilerin Suriyeli mültecilere ilişkin politika kararlarını etkileyen faktörleri açıklamadaki katkılarını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Zorunlu göç yönetişiminin itici güçlerine odaklanan mevcut literatür ve araştırmalar üzerine inşa edilen bu tez, Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi'nde grubu bulunan en büyük beş siyasi partinin Suriyeli mültecilere ilişkin tutumlarının ardındaki faktörlere ışık tutan bir analitik çerçeve tasarlamaktadır. Önerilen analitik çerçeve, zorunlu göçün uluslararası politikası, ulusal güvenlik ve iç siyasi gündem, ulusal ekonomi ve sosyal kalkınma ve uluslararası mülteci rejimi olmak üzere dört boyutu içermektedir. Söz konusu analitik çerçeveyi kullanmak için çalışmanın verileri, siyasi partilerin dış politika vizyonu ve göç gündeminden sorumlu yetkilileriyle yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış elit görüşmeleri ve siyasi partiler tarafından kullanılan, parti programları, seçim beyannameleri, raporlar, politika notları ve kamuoyu açıklamaları dahil olmak üzere çeşitli siyasi iletişim stratejileri aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Veri toplama süreci, masa başı araştırması ve sığınma ile ilgili ulusal yasaların ve düzenlemelerin analizi temelinde ikincil verilerle tamamlanmıştır. Bu çalışmanın bulguları, Türkiye'deki Suriyeli mültecilere yönelik parti temelli yaklaşımların, onları iç ve uluslararası politika bağlamına yerleştirmeden yeterince analiz edilemeyeceğini göstermektedir. Bu bağlamda, dört boyutlu analitik çerçeve Türkiye'deki Suriyeli mültecilere yönelik parti temelli yaklaşımların anlaşılmasına ilişkin kapsamlı ve çok yönlü bir anlayış sunmaktadır. Uluslararası ilişkiler teorilerinin mülteci politikalarının nasıl oluşturulduğuna dair kavrayışlarını göz önünde bulundurarak, bu tez, uluslararası ilişkiler disiplini mülteci/zorunlu göç çalışmaları literatürüyle ilişkilendirmenin önemini ortaya koymaktadır.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my dear thesis advisor, Prof. Ahmet İcduygu, for his guidance and endless support throughout my studies. Before anything else, this thesis would not have been completed without his guidance, constant support, and patience. He has been more than just an advisor throughout the whole time of writing this thesis. Also, he has been a great source of inspiration for me to study migration starting with my undergraduate studies, and I really admire his immense knowledge in the field. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you again for supporting and believing in me since the first day I started graduate school.

I also would like to thank Prof. Deniz Sert and Assoc. Prof. Reşat Bayer for serving as a member of my thesis committee and helping me to improve this thesis through their insightful comments. I would also like to thank Prof. Bahar Rumelili for her valuable suggestions for the current study.

I am also grateful to the political party officials who accepted to participate in this study despite their busy agendas. I would also like to express my gratitude to Mr. Vahdettin Çetiner, who helped me to contact political party officials.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Onur, my love and my best friend, who relentlessly supported me and made me believe in completing this thesis even in the most desperate times.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family, my mother Hülya and my sister Burcu, for always being there and supporting me spiritually throughout writing this thesis. Your unconditional love, support, and encouragement helped me to complete this thesis. Without you all believing in me, I would never have been successful in my graduate studies. I am very lucky to have you in my life. Therefore, I dedicate all the success I will achieve in my life to you. And I would like to thank my dear cat Cookie, with whom I have been together during sleepless nights while writing this thesis.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi / Justice and Development Party
BDP	Bariş ve Demokrasi Partisi / Peace and Democracy Party
CHP	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi / Republican People's Party
CHR	Committee on Human Research
CSS	Critical Security Studies
DEVA	Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi / Democracy and Progress Party
DGMM	Directorate General of Migration Management
DP	Demokrat Parti / Democrat Party
ECRE	European Council on Refugees and Exiles
EU	European Union
FRIT	Facility for Refugees in Turkey
GNAT	Grand National Assembly of Turkey
GP	Gelecek Partisi / Future Party
HDP	Halkların Demokratik Partisi / People's Democratic Party
HTS	Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham
INTERPOL	International Criminal Police Organization
IR	International Relations
IRB	Institutional Review Board
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
IYI Party	İYİ Parti / Good Party
JAP	Joint Action Plan
LFIP	Law on Foreigners and International Protection
MGH	Milli Görüş Hareketi / National Outlook Movement
MHP	Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi / Nationalist Movement Party
MIRT	Mainstream International Relations Theories
MoI	Ministry of Interior
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
PKK	Kürdistan İşçi Partisi / Kurdistan Workers' Party

PMM	Presidency of Migration Management
PYD	Democratic Union Party
SB-2021	Syrians Barometer 2021
SGD	Security General Directorate
SP	Saadet Partisi / Felicity Party
SU	Soviet Union
TACs	Temporary Accommodation Centres
TAF	Turkish Armed Forces
TİP	Türkiye İşçi Partisi / Workers' Party of Turkey
TP	Temporary Protection
TPR	Temporary Protection Regulation
TSS	Traditional Security Studies
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
US	United States
YPG	People's Protection Units
ZP	Zafer Partisi / Victory Party

Chapter 1:

INTRODUCTION**1.1 *Aim and Significance of the Study***

The current thesis explores how Turkish political parties' positions on Syrian refugees¹ connect to their foreign policy priorities and internal political dynamics. It questions the drivers behind the policy choices of political parties on Syrian refugees in the Turkish context and identifies respective shifts in their policy responses between 2011 and 2021. While doing that, it will try to shed light on what MIRTs, namely realism, liberalism, and constructivism, can offer for the reasoning behind this two-level game (Putnam, 1988) that consists of diplomacy and domestic politics. On the one hand, national state actors seek to manage the repercussions of international migration on domestic politics. However, international migration also brings equally important outcomes for various issue areas that go beyond matters of domestic policy by affecting relations between global political actors (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019, p. 115). Having described the mutual relations between the bargaining states as "double two-level games", Carbone (2022) sheds light on how these national negotiators, on behalf of their own states in the bargaining process on refugee protection, engage with each other and domestic political actors in their own countries (p. 750). During such a political bargaining process, these negotiators adopt various policy strategies to manage the demands coming from the international sphere while also trying to respond to domestic sensitivities and appease domestic political actors in their home countries (p. 758). In other words, these negotiators could not shut their ears to the domestic political dynamics since doing so would be politically costly for these negotiators.

¹ Turkey has not granted legal refugee status to Syrians who crossed its national borders because of the geographical reservation it puts on the 1951 Convention Relating to Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Throughout the thesis, the term refugee is used in its broadest sense to refer to people who are forced to leave their countries due to well-founded fear of persecution for one of the following five reasons indicated in the Convention mentioned above: "race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion" (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2010, p. 14).

This study aims to reveal similarities and differences in the policy formulations of the Turkish political parties on Syrian refugees. The current thesis benefitted from the existing literature on refugee governance while designing an analytical framework to explain the drivers behind the political parties' positions on Syrian refugees. In this respect, Şahin-Mencütek's (2019) book titled "*Refugee Governance, State and Politics in the Middle East*" is path-breaking. Mencütek creates an analytical framework in her book to question how domestic political considerations, economic and development trajectory, and foreign policy objectives affect Syrian refugee governance in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. When we look at the relevant literature on refugee governance with a specific focus on Turkey, it is identified that the main focus has been on the issues related to foreign policy strategies (Gökalp-Aras & Şahin-Mencütek, 2015; Memişoğlu & Ilgıt, 2017; Altıok & Tosun, 2019; Tsourapas, 2019), diplomatic interests as part of negotiations with external actors, such as the European Union (EU) (İçduygu & Demiryontar, 2019; Üstübeci, 2019; İçduygu & Aksel, 2014), and identity-driven concerns (Aytaç & Elçi, 2019; Elçi, 2019; Aydemir, 2022; Balta et al., 2022). Available studies also shed light on the domestic politics-related drivers of policy choices on refugees in Turkey (Ilgıt & Memişoğlu, 2017; Yanaşmayan et al., 2019; Demirtaş, 2020; Aydemir, 2022; Balta et al., 2022) and those related to the socio-economic order (Tümen, 2016; İçduygu et al., 2017).

Given its political, security, economic, and cultural impacts, international migration has been a matter of intense debate for host states. Despite the rising salience of the issues relating to immigrants over the years (Castles et al., 2014, p. 1), international migration attracted less attention from IR scholars compared to other global political issues. However, some types of international migration, like refugee movements, appear to be a growing concern for IR, given their implications on international security, global order, and international cooperation (Betts, 2011, p. 135). Similarly, issues relevant to forced migration started to be increasingly discussed within the discipline of political science in general and comparative politics in particular. When we look at the responses of host states, it is observed that they seek to take measures to relieve the concerns of host community members on the likelihood of competition regarding rights and services, which brings refugee-related issues into the realm of domestic politics. It is equally necessary to mention that refugee movements pose a grave concern to global political

actors since they have repercussions for more than one state, turning it into a major foreign policy issue (Betts, 2011, p. 1). Therefore, the political actors' policy decisions regarding refugee movements are shaped by various domestic and international factors.

In such an environment, mass refugee flows present major challenges to state actors, calling on them to implement well-designed policies that would respond to the needs of the refugee population without aggravating host community members. Turkey encountered mass refugee movements from Bulgaria and northern Iraq before. However, with the Syrian mass refugee movement to the country, Turkey has been an ongoing top refugee-hosting country in the world for nine consecutive years (UNHCR, 2023). The total number of Syrian refugees in the country – officially named as those benefiting from temporary protection (TP) – reached 3,443,219 in March 2023 (Presidency of Migration Management [PMM], 2023a).

Turkey has had multifaceted involvement in the Syrian conflict through its cross-border operations and bargains with external actors, such as the United Nations (UN) and the EU. In such an environment, it is worth noting that Turkey's open-door policy towards Syrian refugees has represented a crucial foreign policy matter for the Justice and Development Party - Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) from the very beginning. Therefore, the Turkish opposition parties, for a while, only restricted themselves to accusing the AKP government of pursuing erroneous foreign policy goals in Syria. As the stay of Syrians in Turkey lengthened and the internal difficulties of hosting them in the country began to be felt more, the presence of Syrian refugees emerged as a controversial domestic policy issue, initially just for opposition parties and later for the ruling AKP. Concerning the domestic policy concerns associated with Syrian refugees in the Turkish context, scholars generally point to the following issue areas: internal security (Secen, 2021), labour market participation (del Carpio & Wagner, 2015; Ceritoğlu et al., 2017; İçduygu & Diker, 2017), healthcare (Saleh et al., 2018), education (Çelik & İçduygu, 2019), and housing (Balkan et al., 2018).

Questioning the motivations behind migration and refugee policies is an integral part of the relevant academic and policy debate, particularly in the Western context, in light of the various difficulties that have been perceived to be caused by migratory movements. The existing literature generally addresses migration as a domestic political agenda by

separating it from foreign policy-making since states try to ensure that migrants and refugees do not undermine socio-political dynamics and economic structure. However, advancing these interests would not prevent migration- and refugee-related issues from being a crucial part of a foreign policy agenda, which encourages interstate and interinstitutional cooperation in addition to presenting excellent opportunities for states to collaborate with international organisations (Carbone, 2022, p. 752). Bearing in mind the above discussion, it would be in good taste to refer to the concept of “migration diplomacy” (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019, p. 125), which sheds light on how domestic political interests and mutual relations between states are shaped by migration and refugee movements.

The current concept also focuses on other drivers shaping state interests regarding refugee governance, which are relevant to security, economy, identity, and international prestige (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019, pp. 124-125). According to Hollifield and Foley (2022), the following four factors determine migration policy: “security, cultural and ideational concerns, economic interests (markets), and rights” (p. 7) (See Figure 1. 1). Economic concerns and procedures to be followed for status determination for migrants have been traditionally main policy areas that shape migration policy of states. However, state actors must find a way to balance concerns over the economic dimension of the

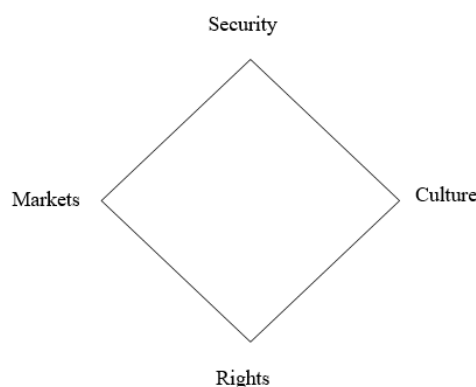


Figure 1. 1: Four drivers of migration policy

Note. The figure indicates the four factors that shape migration policy relevant to national security considerations, socio-economic order, identity-driven concerns and access to rights and services. Adapted from Hollifield and Foley (2022, p. 7). Understanding Global Migration.

migration policy and the issue of accessing rights as migrants that their status entails if they want to govern migration on different levels effectively.

At the same time, national migration policy contains a robust security dimension, which the 9/11 terrorist attacks reminded us of (Hollifield & Foley, 2022, p. 8). Since states are in charge of protecting their national borders and citizens in line with the sovereignty principle, political actors also need to consider the security dimension of migration policy. On the other hand, the final dimension of migration policy emerges when the issues relevant to cultural sensitivities and national identity considerations come into play. As can be seen in Figure 1. 1, the migration policy is a four-dimensional game. However, playing it at more than one level, namely local, national, and international, complicates the migration policy (p. 9). We know that debates on migration and refugees have been intensely happening on a local level. For example, in the Turkish case, the discussions on the perceived demographic threat posed by Syrian refugees mainly focus on Hatay and Kilis, in which these refugees are highly populated.

Keeping in mind the salience of sub-national politics and local governance for refugee-related issues (Betts et al., 2021), it should be mentioned that policies targeting migrants and refugees in the Turkish context are created at the national level. Besides the local and national levels, the policy-level debates on migration and refugees are also conducted internationally. For example, controlling the irregular migration of Syrians who use Turkey to reach Europe and expanding the third-country resettlement of Syrian refugees from Turkey have been vital issues in determining the trajectory of Turkey's relations with the EU (İçduygu & Demiryontar, 2019). When a state shapes its migration policy, other states in the migration system are impacted, bringing consequences for their migration policies (Hollifield & Foley, 2022, pp. 7-9). Therefore, national state actors are required to engage in a two-level game (Putnam, 1988), where domestic political interests and international political considerations interact while determining their migration policy, including those on refugee protection.

In light of the above discussion, one should underline the weight of cultural sensitivities and national identity considerations in determining migration policy, especially targeting refugees. As mentioned before, the security dimension of migration policy is also equally significant. The 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States (US) and

severe terror attacks in Europe, such as the Paris attacks in 2015, have revealed that “immigration and refugee policy-making shifted to a national security dynamic” (Hollifield & Foley, 2022, p. 8). In today’s world, we started to increasingly witness the construction of immigrants and refugees as a threat to national security. On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic further strengthened the weight of national security concerns within the scope of migration and asylum policies by providing populist leaders with a great opportunity to “pursue illiberal, xenophobic, and nativist policies” (p. 8).

The 2015 refugee crisis, where many immigrants and refugees arrived in Europe, also confirmed this trend. Many East European countries refused to accept these people during that time. For example, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban blamed former German Chancellor Angela Merkel for pursuing “moral imperialism” (France24, 2015, September 23) by trying to compel Hungary and other European states to accept refugees. Regarding the Ukrainian refugee movement today, we see that European states, mainly East European states, were quick to open their borders to Ukrainian refugees, which reveals the wider significance of the cultural dimension of the migration policy of states.

The dilemmas between these four dimensions of migration policy have shed light on the salience of national security concerns and domestic political interests, considerations relevant to identity politics, the principles of the international refugee regime, and socio-economic concerns in migration policy-making. In this sense, these discussions bring real insights into the different dimensions of the national responses to refugee movements. However, the motivations behind the political parties’ policy choices regarding mass refugee flows have yet to be sufficiently studied.

Another crucial gap identified in the literature is the lack of adequate attention to how political parties determine their policy responses towards refugees in the Global South. The relevant literature on party-based approaches towards refugees has mainly concentrated on the positions of political parties in the Global North (Morales et al., 2015; Hogan & Haltinner, 2015; Grande et al., 2019; Hadj-Abdou et al., 2022; Hutter & Kriesi, 2022). For example, Hogan and Haltinner (2015), in their seminal article, shed light on how the construction of immigrants and refugees as a threat to the dynamics relevant to the security, economy, and culture contributes to the politicisation of migration in Western Europe. As part of domestic political discussions, refugees are frequently

presented as undermining the host society's socio-economic order due to their perceived negative impact on the labour market and welfare provisions. Concerning this, Gülmez (2019) notes that the right-wing political parties in Europe, in order to realise their electoral aims, often appeal to the perceptions among host community members regarding refugees' negative impact on the economic trajectory of the host state. In France, the National Front, for example, strengthens its electoral popularity by describing the newcomers "as a primary cause of rising unemployment, crime rates, and other social woes" (Jolly & DiGiusto, 2014, p. 464), thereby shedding light on the politicisation of migrants and refugees in France's domestic politics. However, given that developing countries host the most significant number of refugees worldwide, academic and public debate should focus more on the policy formulations of political parties on refugees in the Global South. In this respect, Turkey provides us with a suitable case study to investigate the drivers behind the political parties' policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees and how their policies changed over time due to shifting domestic political interests and foreign policy priorities.

Although the electoral popularity of the ruling AKP has decreased in Turkish politics (Aydemir, 2022, p. 658), there is much less work on the drivers of Turkish political parties' policy choices towards Syrian refugees in the country. At this point, it should be noted that during the literature review, promising studies on the party-based approaches in Turkey towards Syrian refugees are encountered (İlğit & Memişoğlu, 2017; Yanaşmayan et al., 2019; Demirtaş, 2020). For example, İlğit and Memişoğlu (2017) have investigated how Turkish opposition parties domestically present Syrian refugees as "a rival victim group, a voter or demographic threat and (those) having unfair access to public services" (p. 86). Later, Yanaşmayan et al. (2019) examined to what extent Syrian refugees are constructed as a threat to the host community's safety, socio-economic order, and cultural sensitivities by Turkish political parties. However, they lack a clear theoretical and analytical framework that would account for the role of domestic political interests and issues relevant to international politics in shaping party positions on refugees. More to the point, promoting domestic political interests in creating immigration and refugee policies across political parties does not prevent the Syrian refugee issue from becoming a foreign policy issue for these political parties, which all these studies fail to grasp.

Equally important to note is that these studies fail to capture the dynamic character of the political parties' policy responses towards Syrian refugees. Given the dynamic character of refugee politics and the complex interplay between the security, economic, rights-based, and identity dimensions of refugee policy-making, more research is necessary to examine the shifts in the policy responses of the political parties towards refugees as time passes. Thus, one of the most significant contributions of this thesis is bringing a new analytical framework that would shed light on the weight of a particular group of factors, namely, the international politics of forced migration, national security and domestic political agenda, issues relevant to political economy, and normative dimension of refugee protection on the party-based approaches. Additionally, through a tripartite continuum typology that will be detailed in the following pages, the newly proposed analytical framework tries to reveal the respective shifts over time in the weight of the factors behind the Turkish political parties' approaches towards Syrian refugees.

As suggested by Caponio and Jones-Correa (2018), "the multi-levelness and multi-actorness of migration policy is first and foremost an everyday reality" (p. 2005). However, the migration policy's multi-stage nature should also be considered, which is as important as the other two components mentioned above. With the recognition that there have been changes in Turkey's refugee politics, the policy responses of the Turkish political parties towards Syrian refugees are expected to be quite dynamic. In light of this, the current thesis benefitted from the ongoing debate in the literature regarding the evolution of Turkey's Syrian refugee governance (İçduygu, 2017; Şahin-Mencütek, 2019), which will be discussed in the research design section.

As the earlier literature indicates, Turkey implemented an open-door policy towards Syrians and portrayed them as guests since they were anticipated to stay in the country temporarily. The possible permanent nature of their presence in the country called for the Turkish state to create well-calculated policies focusing on their long-term implications in different issue areas. Within the scope of Turkey's Syrian refugee governance, 2014 appeared to become a significant turning point in which we witnessed the growing concerns among host community members surrounding the host state's capacity with refugees' increased access to public services (İçduygu, 2017, p. 28). This thesis uses a similar periodisation used by Şahin-Mencütek (2019), which aligns with the relevant

literature in a different context. The employed periodisation enables us to distinguish between the phases regarding the changing impact of proposed factors on the political parties' policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees. On the other hand, through a tripartite continuum typology, this thesis aims to identify the shifts in the weight of the proposed factors on political parties' policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees from the beginning phase to the protracted one.

Another contribution of this study is the utilisation of the IR theory to strengthen our understanding of the motivations behind the policy decisions on refugees across political parties, along with other factors like national security concerns and domestic political dynamics, considerations relevant to economy and development, and the international refugee regime. The present thesis employs the IR theory in an issue area outside its original domain. In light of the feasibility of IR theory in studying forced migration, such a research attempt will be significant. As Acharya (2008, October 27) suggests, mainstream IR theories are "excellent tools for understanding the politics of forced migration" (p. 1). In explaining the relevance of IR theory to domestic- and systemic-level factors behind refugee policy-making, considering their focus and main assumptions, the current thesis only addresses three mainstream IR theories: realism, liberalism, and constructivism. Therein, it is crucial to note that there are many different IR theory labels. However, it is not possible to focus on all the different strands of mainstream IR theories within the scope of the current thesis. This study is aware that each selected IR theory gives different insights into the drivers behind refugee policies. In this direction, Betts (2009) suggests that no theory has the strength to account for all global political issues, which is also valid for studying policy responses towards mass refugee flows (p. 16).

Despite the absence of any established theory on the drivers behind the party-based approaches towards refugees in any discipline, it is thought that IR theory might be helpful in this regard. This is because the refugee issue is a crucial part of the international political agenda. At first, the current thesis only aimed to explore how the positions of Turkish ruling and opposition parties towards Syrians connect to their foreign policy priorities. However, during the research, we recognised that it would not be a complete analysis of the issue without looking at how these parties' positions on Syrian refugees

intersect with domestic political dynamics, as the extended stay of Syrian refugees in Turkey has led to their politicisation. Mitchell's (1989) work is one of the pioneers that identifies the need to distinguish between the domestic and foreign policy dimensions of immigration policy-making (p. 687). In a similar direction, Duncan (2020) differentiates between the domestic and foreign policy dimensions of immigration and refugee policy (p. 15). As mentioned before, upholding domestic political interests, such as ensuring socio-economic order while formulating refugee policy, does not prevent the simultaneous functioning of other issues relevant to refugees as a foreign policy matter. Therefore, the current thesis argues that party-based approaches in Turkey towards Syrian refugees could not be adequately analysed without addressing them in relation to domestic and international political realities.

Intending to promote the mutual interaction between IR theory and literature on refugee/forced migration studies, the current study focuses on understanding how mainstream IR theories can offer for the motivations behind political party positions on Syrian refugees in the Turkish context, along with other factors like national security concerns and domestic political dynamics, considerations relevant to economy and development, and the international refugee regime. Through its emphasis on the main elements of refugee policy-making, namely national self-interest and border security (realism), economic cooperation, humanitarianism, international organisations, and responsibility-sharing (liberalism); and culture, identity, reputation, politicisation, and securitisation (constructivism), the mainstream IR theories can contribute to providing insight to analyse the multifaced nature of political party positions on refugees.

This study has a policy-related significance as well. Given the increase in anti-immigrant and -refugee attitudes in host societies, it is necessary to understand how the Turkish ruling and opposition parties put the Syrian refugee issue on their political agenda. Indeed, how they approach the Syrian refugee issue in domestic and international politics may have repercussions on public attitudes towards refugees. The presence of Syrian refugees has created a heated debate among political parties, representing a kind of fault line in Turkish domestic politics. The role of Turkish political parties in portraying Syrian refugees as a threat to host community members in different aspects has increased the politicisation of their presence in the country. Like other issue areas, securitisation is

an “intersubjective” process (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 31) in the migration field, requiring political party officials to convey their political agenda on refugees to host community members. The politicisation of refugee-related issues has led political parties to respond to the resentment among host community members regarding socio-economic order and cultural dynamics (Yanaşmayan et al., 2019, p. 39), besides trying to shape public attitudes. In line with the identified “need for a top-down level of analysis” (Betts, 2009, p. 2), the current study focuses on the way the political parties securitise or desecuritise the presence of Syrian refugees in the Turkish context. However, it is aware of the fact that securitisation does not only stem from political parties but can also be brought about by the society itself by building on their own concerns about refugees, as explained through the concept of “securitisation from society” (Erdoğan, 2020, p. 78). Thus, in light of the electoral concerns, the role of public opinion in shaping policy decisions of political parties towards Syrian refugees has been addressed within the scope of the current thesis.

1.2 Research Design

The current thesis focuses on the five largest political parties in the GNAT according to their number of representatives in the 27th legislative term: (1) the AKP, with a conservative orientation, has been the ruling party since 2002, (2) the Republican People’s Party - Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP), with a secular stance, is the main opposition party, (3) the People’s Democratic Party - Halkların Demokratik Partisi (HDP) stands for the sensitivities around Kurdish identity, (4) the Nationalist Movement Party – Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (MHP) is a right-wing nationalist party, and (5) the Good Party – İYİ Parti (IYI Party) is a Turkish nationalist party for voters from opposition bloc. Whereas AKP and MHP have been collaborating under the People’s Alliance since 2018, two other Turkish political parties included in this study, namely, CHP and IYI Party, established the Nation Alliance². Hence, the current thesis underlines the importance of the shifting alliances between political parties in understanding their policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees in the Turkish context.

² It consists of the following six parties: CHP, IYI Party, Felicity Party – Saadet Partisi (SP), Democrat Party – Demokrat Parti (DP), Democracy and Progress Party – Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi (DEVA), and Future Party – Gelecek Partisi (GP).

Considering that there were 15 political parties in the Turkish Parliament in the 27th legislative term, and only five of them had more than five seats, implementing such a criterion while selecting political parties to be studied was necessary. For example, there exists a considerable gap in terms of the number of representatives between the IYI Party, which was the fifth political party with 36 representatives and the Workers' Party of Turkey - Türkiye İşçi Partisi (TİP), which was the sixth party with four representatives in the Turkish Parliament. On this account, SP and DP were excluded from the analysis in the selection phase despite their partnership with the CHP and IYI Party under the Nation Alliance. The study did not also incorporate the GP and DEVA into the analysis. Although they are members of the Nation Alliance, they had no representatives in the Parliament. On the other hand, it is also significant to identify the change and continuity in the policy formulations of the political parties on Syrian refugees. In this respect, all of the five selected political parties allow us to see the evolution of their policy responses towards Syrian refugees over time. Regarding party leadership, it should be noted that the CHP and MHP were led by the same party leaders from 2011 to 2021. However, the AKP and HDP experienced changes in their leadership cadre within the studied period.

IYI Party was added to the qualitative analysis despite its absence in the initial phase of Turkey's response to the Syrian mass refugee flow and in the period when the country reached the turning point in terms of the Syrian refugee-hosting experience. The IYI Party was established under Meral Akşener in 2017 in a context where the protracted phase of Syrian refugees' stay in the country had already started. However, this does not prevent us from examining the shifts in the IYI Party's policy responses towards Syrian refugees. The approaches of recently established political parties towards Syrian refugees, including the DEVA, GP, and Victory Party - Zafer Partisi (ZP), are also remarkable. However, it is worth underlining that they have been excluded from the analysis first because they have no representatives in the Turkish Parliament. It is equally important to point out that if we added them, we would fail to capture whether these parties' policy responses towards Syrian refugees have changed since they were recently established.

In analysing the positions of Turkish political parties on Syrian refugees, the current study developed a four-tier framework based on the existing literature and research (İçduygu et al., 2017; Ilgıt & Memişoğlu, 2017; Memişoğlu & Ilgıt, 2017; Altıok &

Tosun, 2019; Aytaç & Elçi, 2019; Elçi, 2019; Tsourapas, 2019; Yanaşmayan et al., 2019; Aydemir, 2022; Balta et al., 2022; Hollifield & Foley, 2022; İçduygu & Demiryontar, 2022). The newly proposed framework consists of four main pillars: international politics of forced migration, national security and domestic political agenda, national economy and social development, and the international refugee regime, which will be explained later in this chapter.

At this point, we should mention that the aim of this thesis is two-fold. First, it tries to understand the role of each factor in driving political party positions on Syrian refugees. Second, it attempts to present the shifts in the impact of these factors on shaping the political parties' policy responses towards Syrian refugees between 2011 and 2021. In light of the changes in Turkey's refugee politics and the dynamic nature of political party positions on Syrian refugees, it would be appropriate to revisit Şahin-Mencütek's (2019) "multi-stage refugee governance model" (p. 54), which aims to show that there are more than one phases in the national refugee governance of countries. Benefitting from this model enabled us to distinguish between the phases regarding the changes in the political parties' policy decisions, as discussed in detail below (See Figure 1. 2).

According to the multi-phase typology of party-based approaches, there are three phases: the initial phase, a turning point, and the protracted phase. In the first phase, political parties may view the mass refugee flow as a temporary crisis. In this sense, political parties are expected to develop short-term approaches that do not pay attention to the permanent nature of refugees' stay in the country (Şahin-Mencütek, 2019, p. 55). The second phase, which is called a turning point, emerges from the interplay of several factors. The first one relates to the growing refugee population in the host state. The second one derives from recognising that the presence of refugees in the host country would not be temporary. The third one is about increasing real or perceived threats to the border and societal security. In this respect, political parties may come with more structured policy proposals compared to the initial phase (İçduygu, 2017, p. 29; Şahin-Mencütek, 2019, p. 55). On the other hand, their attitudes towards refugees can be worsened, given the increasing concerns and sensitivities stemming from the presence of refugees. The final phase, the protracted one, calls on political parties to determine their policy decisions in light of the permanency of refugees. Political parties are expected to

produce such policies in the ideal sense, although a certain set of factors prevent them from doing this (pp. 55-56).

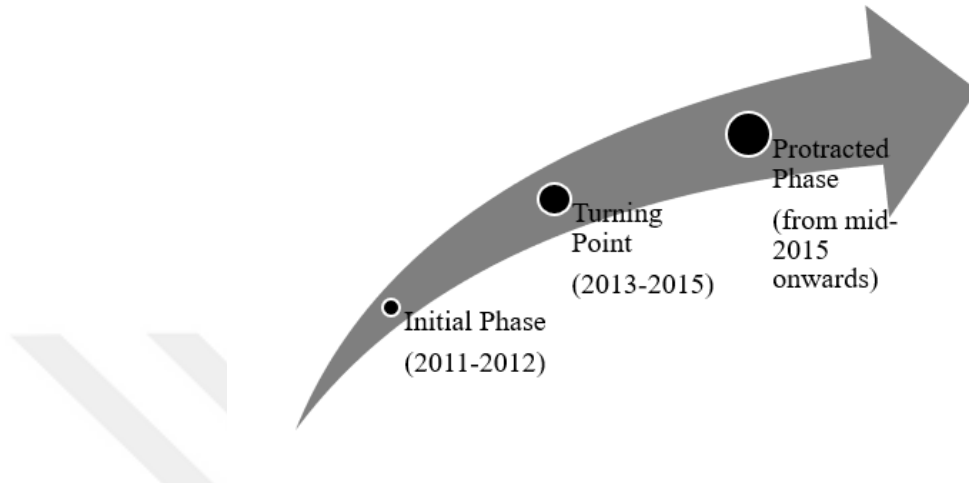


Figure 1. 2: A multi-phase model of party-based approaches

Note. The figure demonstrates a multi-phase model of party-based approaches to distinguish between the phases regarding the changing impact of proposed factors on the political parties' policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees from 2011 to 2021 within the Turkish context. Adapted from İçduygu (2017, pp. 28-31). Türkiye'deki Suriyeli sığınmacılar: "Siyasallaşan" bir sürecin analizi. Adapted from Şahin-Mencütek (2019, p. 54). Refugee Governance, State and Politics in the Middle East.

Turkey's open-door policy during the first two years upon the arrival of Syrian refugees in the country was shaped in accordance with the ruling AKP's ambitious foreign policy goals in Syria. The willingness of the ruling AKP to host Syrian refugees stemmed from its assumption that the presence of Syrian refugees in Turkey would be temporary (Şahin-Mencütek et al., 2020, pp. 100-101). Then, the following three factors played a defining role in changing the political parties' initial attitudes towards Syrian refugees. First, the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey further increased and exceeded the previously determined limit of 100,000 in October 2012 (Memişoğlu & Ilgıt, 2017, p. 324; Şahin-Mencütek, 2019, p. 105). Second, the prospects for the temporary stay of Syrian refugees in Turkey and their immediate returns to Syria diminished. Third, societal and border security concerns increased with the growing number of Syrian refugees in the country (İçduygu, 2017, p. 28).

Regarding the transition phase, the criminality and public security issues associated with Syrian refugees were not frequently voiced by Turkish political parties in domestic politics (Şahin-Mencütek et al., 2020, p. 102). Compared to the initial phase, more structured and long-term oriented policies were introduced in that period by the ruling AKP, and the national legal framework on asylum was strengthened. The *Law on Foreigners and International Protection* (LFIP) numbered 6458, adopted in April 2013 (Legislation Information System, 2013, April 11), and the *Temporary Protection Regulation* (TPR) (Legislation Information System, 2014, October 22), enacted in 2014 represented a milestone.

The last phase has brought an increasing politicisation of the Syrian refugee issue. One of the most significant reasons for this politicisation stems from the fact that the long-lasting nature of the Syrians' presence in the country calls for acknowledging "the long-term economic, social, and political responsibility of supporting these refugees" (İçduygu & Şimşek, 2016, p. 60). For the first time, all the studied political parties (except the IYI Party since it had yet to be established during that period) included the issues relevant to Syrian refugees in their election manifestos for the June 2015 elections. The 2018 parliamentary and presidential elections contributed to the further politicisation of the presence of Syrian refugees in Turkey, with the prevalent discourse among the political party officials on the need to ensure the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland (Yanaşmayan et al., 2019, pp. 41-42). While this protracted stage is still ongoing, there were elections in Turkey in 2023 in which the refugee issue dominated the electoral campaign. This thesis investigates how political parties formulated their positions on Syrian refugees between 2011 and 2021. In this respect, it excludes how the 2023 election eve has affected their policy formulations of political parties on Syrian refugees.

Similar to Şahin-Mencütek's (2019) study, the current thesis uses a tripartite continuum typology to capture the level of the effect of a specific factor and its shift over time in understanding the political parties' policy responses towards Syrian refugees (p. 257). The continuum typology consisting of low, moderate, and high levels tries to identify the change in the weight of each of the seven factors over time as part of the newly proposed analytical framework in the current thesis in shaping the political parties' responses towards Syrian refugees (See Figure 1. 3).

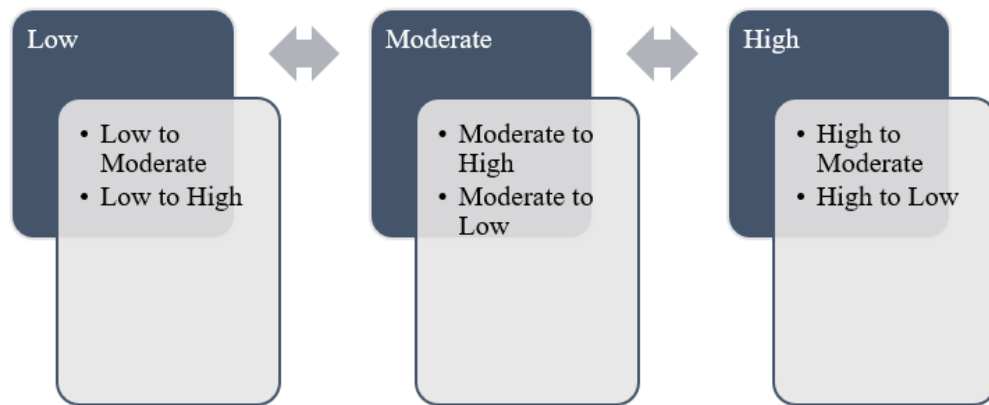


Figure 1. 3: A tripartite continuum typology of the levels of influence of the factors behind party-based approaches

Note. The figure presents a tripartite continuum typology that aims to identify the change in the levels of influence of the proposed factors on the decisions of political parties regarding Syrian refugees over time in the Turkish context. Adapted from Şahin-Mencütek (2019, p. 257). *Refugee Governance, State and Politics in the Middle East*.

In this respect, a high level of influence implies that the factor plays a significant role in determining the decisions of political parties regarding Syrian refugees. This thesis examines whether the determining role of the factor in question on the policy decisions of political parties is relatively higher than what is observed for the same factor in the other four political parties. Moderate level of influence refers to the proposed factor's relevance in explaining the political parties' policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees, although the extent of its pertinence is relatively minor compared to the former. Finally, a low level of impact signifies that the pertinence of the factor in question cannot be totally ignored, but its relevance to account for the political parties' policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees is relatively less insightful compared to a moderate level of impact. Given that the influence of the factor can change from the initial phase to the protracted phase, the direction of change will be identified as can be seen in the following examples: low to high, moderate to low, and moderate to high (Şahin-Mencütek, 2019, p. 257). Therefore, there is a two-way transition between the phases of party-based approaches towards Syrian refugees in terms of the levels of influence of factors in the Turkish context. To give an example regarding the working principle of the typology

mentioned above, it is observed that the socio-cultural realities did not play a significant role in shaping Turkish political parties' policy responses towards Syrian refugees in the beginning phase. However, when political parties started to increasingly perceive the threat to societal security with a transition to the protracted phase, national identity concerns played a more critical role in determining their policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees.

1.3 Data Collection

For this study, we used a multi-level data collection technique to improve the validity of findings as follows:

First, the current study conducted desktop research through which the academic literature on the drivers of refugee policy-making has been reviewed. The existing secondary literature has contributed to the theoretical and methodological development within the scope of this thesis.

Second, the current study reviewed the Turkish legal framework on asylum since 2011. Given that one of the political parties included in this thesis is the ruling party, it was of utmost importance to look at the national laws, regulations, and policies on asylum.

Third, the current thesis analysed the party programmes and general election manifestos (June and November 2015 - except for IYI Party - and 2018). It should be noted that the current thesis does not consider the 2023 election process and, therefore, does not analyse these political parties' 2023 election manifestos.

Fourth, this thesis analysed some reports and policy notes on issues relevant to migration and refugees prepared by political parties' relevant commissions and research units. For AKP, the current study analysed one report on Syrian refugees and harmonisation policies targeting them prepared by the AKP's Directorate of Social Policies. As to CHP, this thesis examined one report on the current situation in Turkey for migrants and refugees prepared by CHP's Commission to Monitor Migration and Migrants' Problems and three policy notes relating to the Syrian refugee issue. For HDP, the current study examined one report on the problems refugees faced in Turkey prepared by the HDP's Research Unit. Finally, concerning MHP, this thesis analysed one report

on cross-border international movements published as part of the party's research and development activities.

Fifth, the current thesis examined the public discourses of the party administrators and deputies of the selected five political parties in the media. This study established a dataset through desk-based research consisting of news items for specific periods retrieved from web archives of national media sources and official party websites. While collecting online news items for specific periods, certain keywords were used as guidance. Concerning the analysis of news reports, one should specify that the current study does not seek to address the language the media sources use in representing refugees. Instead, it aims to comprehend what the political party administrators and deputies comment about Syrian refugees. While searching for statements, we initially used general keywords, which are “refugee”, “asylum seeker”, “migrant”, “Syrian”, “Syria”, and “temporary protection”. After the preliminary analysis, we distinguished the gathered news articles across various broad categories related to international politics of forced migration, national security concerns and domestic political dynamics, considerations relevant to the economy and development and the international refugee regime per the framework developed within the scope of the current thesis.

Overall, we analysed statements gathered from 231 news items. The database includes statements from June 2011 until December 2021. Even though the Syrian conflict and the subsequent refugee issue influenced Turkey from the beginning, the Syrian refugees have become an important part of domestic contestation only after 2014. As put by İçduygu (2017), between 2011 and 2014, the Syrian refugee issue did not show a clear politicisation trend (p. 36). The salience of the Syrian refugee issue in the statements of the political party officials has been showing changes across the years per the developments in domestic and international politics. Relatedly, it is worth mentioning that the distribution of news items is not proportional across years. As a last point, before passing to the interviews as the last type of data collection method within the scope of the current thesis, it should be mentioned that all statements of political party officials in Turkish collected from news items were translated into English.

Finally, this thesis conducted six semi-structured elite interviews with officials from five selected political parties to contextualise their policy formulations on Syrian

refugees. The semi-structured interview is a type of interview in which the researcher asks the respondents predetermined questions by pursuing a standard interview form followed by the possible final questions depending on the flow of the interview. Therefore, such an interview allows the researcher to have certain flexibility. The interviews were conducted in Ankara between April 11 and July 1, 2022. Four of the six interviews were conducted face-to-face. Two others were conducted as video conferences using digital communication platforms such as Zoom due to the two officials' unavailability.

The sample of the elite interviews consists of six political party officials, ensuring that at least one official from each selected political party is present. The most important consideration about the sample is interviewing political party officials dealing with the selected political parties' foreign policy and migration affairs. Each participant was informed about the study to get their consent. All the data in the fieldwork were collected anonymously, as explained to the interviewees. The interviews were conducted in Turkish. The researcher translated all the data gathered from interviews into English. The duration of the interviews varied between 60-90 minutes. During the interviews, the participants were asked open-ended questions (See *Appendix A*) about their parties' positions on Syrian refugees from the perspective of security, economy, culture/identity, and rights at domestic and foreign policy levels. The elite interviews allowed us to identify the final patterns regarding political party positions on Syrian refugees.

This multi-level data collection technique enabled the researcher to understand better how these selected political parties' approaches towards Syrian refugees have evolved. Before continuing with a newly designed analytical framework built on existing literature and research to explain the political party positions on Syrian refugees, it is crucial to note the significant difficulties faced regarding the fieldwork. First, it was challenging to reach political party officials because of their busy agendas. As a researcher, I selected to reach out to some of them using my previously built-up networks of personal contacts. Another significant limitation that impacted the data collection process was not ensuring the diversity of participants within the scope of the in-depth interviews. The gender of participants is unevenly distributed in the sample. It is crucial to note that the number of male participants outweighed the number of female respondents since the people in

charge of addressing foreign policy and immigration- and refugee-related issues within the body of selected political parties are generally male.

1.4 Framework for the Political Party Positions on Syrian Refugees

The analytical framework used in the current thesis to understand the factors behind the political parties' decisions regarding Syrian refugees in the Turkish context combines the discussions in the existing literature on the drivers of forced migration governance. The factors that will be used within the scope of the current thesis relate to foreign policy and diplomatic interests, national security and domestic political agenda, national economy and development trajectory, and international refugee regime.

The international politics of forced migration is the first pillar of the current analytical framework used in this thesis. This pillar has two dimensions, namely, foreign policy strategies and diplomatic interests (Jacobsen, 1996; Gökalp-Aras & Şahin-Mencütek, 2015; Memişoğlu & Ilgıt, 2017; Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019; Altıok & Tosun, 2019; Şahin-Mencütek, 2019; Tsourapas, 2019; Duncan, 2020; İçduygu & Aksel, 2022).

While questioning the role of drivers in explaining the policy decisions of political parties regarding Syrian refugees in Turkey, the current thesis bears in mind what mainstream IR theories can offer in this regard. Under the pillar of international politics of forced migration, the current thesis will first examine the role of the “*foreign policy aims of the political parties in the Syrian conflict*”. All the political parties selected within the scope of the current thesis have their foreign policy agenda regarding the Middle East in general and Syria in particular. When it comes to the second component of the international politics of forced migration dimension, this thesis will analyse the impact of “*concerns about the role of the EU in the Syrian refugee issue*” in shaping the decisions of political parties regarding Syrian refugees. The reason for solely focusing on the role of the EU as an external actor in the Syrian refugee issue in the newly created framework stems from the fact that the EU's asylum policies have led to heated debates among Turkish political parties (İçduygu, 2017, p. 37; Yanaşmayan et al., 2019, pp. 46-47; Aydemir, 2022, p. 672).

The second pillar of the current analytical framework focuses on national security concerns and domestic political dynamics, which is pretty much relevant to the understanding the policy choices of Turkish political parties on Syrian refugees (İlgıt & Memişoğlu, 2017; Aytaç & Elçi, 2019; Elçi, 2019; Şahin-Mencütek, 2019; Yanaşmayan et al., 2019; Demirtaş, 2020; Aydemir, 2022; Balta et al., 2022). In this regard, Şahin-Mencütek (2019) brings the role of sensitivities surrounding the bitter experiences regarding past mass refugee movements for understanding the policy decisions regarding the current mass refugee movements (p. 258). Turkey faced mass refugee movements from Bulgaria and northern Iraq, although their scales differed from the mass migration from Syria. Whereas Turkey paved the way for the integration of incoming Turks of Bulgaria, it took policy measures to ensure the repatriation of northern Iraqis. Evaluation of the responses of the Turkish state against the previous mass refugee migration from Bulgaria and northern Iraq demonstrates that the country did not have experiences concerning these two mass refugee movements upsetting them (Kirişci, 2014; Altıok & Tosun, 2019; İçduygu & Aksel, 2022). It is worth bearing in mind the inapplicability of the abovementioned factor within the scope of the current thesis.

Concerning the role of viable factors under this pillar, the current thesis will start with the “*concerns over border security because of refugee arrivals*” (Memişoğlu & İlgıt, 2017; Şahin-Mencütek, 2019; Şahin-Mencütek et al., 2020). In this respect, political parties may be concerned about losing control over borders because of refugee arrivals. Furthermore, the doubts about the refugees’ involvement in the armed conflict and the infiltration of terrorists among the genuine refugees (Lischer, 2005; Bove & Böhmelt, 2016; Savun & Gineste, 2019) have exacerbated the perceptions about Syrian refugees as potential terrorists. Such a link may induce political parties to increasingly voice concerns relevant to national security and sovereignty because of refugee movements.

Within the scope of the national security and domestic political agenda pillar, the current thesis will second analyse the role of “*sensitivities relevant to perceived identity difference and demographic balance*” (İlgıt & Memişoğlu, 2017; Memişoğlu & İlgıt, 2017; Aytaç & Elçi, 2019; Elçi, 2019; Şahin-Mencütek, 2019; Yanaşmayan et al., 2019; Müller-Funk et al., 2020; Aydemir, 2022; Balta et al., 2022) in shaping political party positions on Syrians in Turkey. In this respect, we should delve into how the construction

of newcomers with different ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds as a threat to the national identity, demographic stability, and cultural realities of the host community affects Turkish political party positions on Syrian refugees. At this point, it would be in good taste to refer to Ole Waever's (1993) societal security concept, which he defined as "the ability of a society to persist in its essential character under changing conditions and possible or actual threats" (p. 23). We can expect political parties to adopt a security-oriented agenda if they perceive a threat to their national identity understanding in ethnic, national, and religious terms.

On the other hand, the cultural similarities and ethnic and sectarian ties between host community members and refugees may encourage political parties to have more favourable attitudes towards refugees, bringing about more liberal policy decisions for them. Besides sensitivities surrounding national identity, the considerations relevant to demographic balance and stability within the host country can play a role in determining the policy choices on refugees. Such considerations may also be accompanied by the concerns among political parties relevant to refugees' access to the right to vote with the citizenship debate (İlgi & Memişoğlu, 2017, p. 86).

Another factor that will be questioned under the pillar relevant to national security concerns and domestic political dynamics is the "*criminalisation and securitisation of Syrian refugees*" (Karadağ & Rumelili, 2017; Şahin-Mencütek, 2019; Yanaşmayan et al., 2019). In the words of Ibrahim (2005), securitisation is the "process in which migration discourse shifts towards an emphasis on security" (p. 167). While examining the policy decisions of Turkish political parties regarding Syrian refugees, one should question the reasons behind their securitisation and the implications of this process (Betts, 2009, p. 65). For example, refugees may increasingly be portrayed as a threat to public safety, socio-cultural reality, and access to livelihoods (Huysmans, 2000, p. 752) in host communities.

Besides the sensitivities surrounding the cultural values of the host community members because of refugees, which is addressed within the scope of the previous factor, the concerns over the crime potential of refugees have led to the securitisation of refugees (Yanaşmayan et al., 2019, p. 44). Political parties, from time to time, link their fears about public safety and increasing crime rates with the presence of refugees. Accusations

towards refugees' high potential to be involved in the incidents of ordinary crime, gender-based violence, and organised crime find a substantial place in the discourses of political party officials while criticising their presence. Therefore, it is necessary to question the role of such concerns in determining Turkish political parties' policy choices on Syrian refugees.

On the other hand, refugees can be portrayed as creating a “financial burden to the host society, taking jobs away from the natives and/or draining social benefits” (Mudde, 2012, pp. 11-12). Such portrayals bring considerations relevant to the prioritisation of refugees in public services as well as their negative impact on the host states' welfare regimes, leading to the securitisation of the refugee issue at the political party level in an economic sense. Given that political parties are willing to attribute the economic problems of host community members to the presence of newcomers by making them scapegoats, their refugee-related discourses can contribute to their securitisation (İlğit & Memişoğlu, 2017; Yanaşmayan et al., 2019). However, the role of discursive strategies leading to securitisation in a socio-economic sense would be addressed under the new analytical framework's third pillar, focusing on considerations relevant to the economy and social development.

As mentioned before, the policy responses targeting refugees can also be shaped by considerations relevant to the economy and development, which compose the third pillar of the current analytical framework. On the side of host states, mass refugee flows can negatively affect the trajectory of the national economy and social development. Under this pillar, the current thesis analyses the role of “*economic and development-related concerns*” in shaping the positions of political parties on Syrian refugees in Turkey. With the extended stay of Syrian refugees in Turkey and their access to livelihoods, the resentment among host community members towards them has increased. In this respect, investigating to what extent Turkish political parties attribute the economic difficulties of the host community members and the perceived problems in the socio-economic order to the presence of Syrian refugees would be a valuable initiative. Paying attention to the economic cost of hosting refugees, Turkish political parties may present Syrian refugees as a “rival victim group” and “having unfair access to public services” (İlğit & Memişoğlu, 2017, p. 86) in domestic political discussions. On the other hand, it is

discussed in the literature that refugees can create economic benefits for the host society by responding to the needs of the labour market in the host state through their skills and establishing businesses (Başbay, 2019, pp. 9-11). Despite such opportunities for the host community, the political discourse mainly focuses on the economic cost of hosting the refugees.

In addition to the three pillars of the newly proposed analytical framework, the current thesis recognised that Turkish political parties' policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees cannot be understood in isolation from the normative dimension of refugee protection (Müller-Funk, 2020, pp. 24-25). As reasonably put by Brown (2011, p. 158), humanitarianism requires political actors to assume responsibility for refugee protection. More to the point, norms of the international refugee regime are expected to play a significant role in determining policy responses towards refugees. On the other hand, the study of İçduygu et al. (2017) reveals that refugee policy-making is influenced not only by international legal obligations but also by political, cultural, and economic priorities. Therefore, we can witness that political parties can consider the integration potential of Syrian refugees while determining their decisions on them. Having been informed by the above discussion, under the fourth pillar of the analytical framework, the influence of the "*international rights-based protection approach to refugees*" in shaping Turkish political parties' policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees will be questioned.

This thesis uses the newly designed four-sided analytical framework while examining Turkish political parties' policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees. After doing that, the present thesis suggests utilising IR theory, given that it has the potential to shed light on various systemic- and domestic-level factors behind party-based approaches, which are connected to other areas of refugee policy-making. When we question what the three mainstream IR theories can offer for understanding refugee policy-making, which will be discussed in greater detail in *Chapter 2*, we should emphasise that each IR theory gives different insights into how refugee policies are formulated. In this respect, the concerns about national self-interest and border security all matter for their significance on the policy decisions regarding refugees and will be addressed from the perspective of the realist IR theory. The concerns about economic cooperation, humanitarianism, the role of international institutions, and responsibility

sharing are also important and will be addressed from the perspective of the liberal IR theory. Finally, the concerns over culture, identity, reputation, and the considerations on the processes of politicisation and securitisation are all significant in shaping political party positions on refugees and will be addressed from the perspective of the constructivist IR theory.

1.5 Ethical Considerations

Given that there have been ethical dilemmas in field research, the Koç University Committee on Human Research (CHR) reviewed the objectives and methodology of the current study. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) ethically approved the current study before conducting interviews, as can be seen in *Appendix B*. Therefore, the potential ethical issues stemming from the current research have been paid attention to and ensured that they are minimised within the framework of universal ethical principles.

Before the interviews, the participants were informed about the study's objectives, procedures to be used, and potential benefits and risks of participation in the current study. The researcher also reminded the participants that their participation in this study would be voluntary, and they could withdraw from the study whenever they wanted without losing any of their rights or being subject to any sanctions. The participants were also made aware of their right to leave any questions unanswered if they felt uncomfortable. Some of the interviews were recorded with a voice recorder on my personal encoded computer after obtaining the participants' approval before starting the interviews. In cases of not getting permission from the participants regarding the voice recording, the answers provided by the interviewees were taken notes on my personal computer. Since the researcher has "a strong moral obligation to uphold the confidentiality of data" (Neuman, 2014, p. 469), the participants' identities, such as their names and other personal identifiers, were not included in the audio recordings, field notes, and transcripts.

In order to ensure anonymity for the political party officials participating in this study, the participants' names and other personal identifiers were not used in this thesis. Additionally, the investigator in charge and faculty member supervising the project will not share the research data with anyone or any institution to ensure the participants' confidentiality. In this respect, it is crucial to note that all these points are clearly

mentioned in the Informed Volunteer Consent Form attached to the appendix (See *Appendix C*). Before the interview, the participants were kindly asked for their written consent to participate in the current study. Those who did not want to sign the Informed Volunteer Consent Form stated their willingness to participate in the study orally. The interview data and participants' identifiers will be kept in the researcher's encoded computer. The interviews were conducted in a safe and silent place where both the participants and the researcher could feel comfortable. The potential ethical considerations concerning the current research have been paid attention to during all phases of the research following the guidelines of the CHR.

1.6 *Outline of the Study*

This study aims to understand how Syrian refugees became a domestic and foreign policy issue for political parties between 2011 and 2021.

The current thesis consists of five chapters. The second chapter introduces the conceptual and theoretical background. After introducing the conceptual framework, a detailed review of what mainstream IR theories can offer to study refugee policy-making based on security, humanitarian, economic, and identity dimensions is provided to show applicable and inapplicable ideas and draw the theoretical base of the present study.

The third chapter contextualises Syrian migration to Turkey since 2011, followed by a discussion on the functions of the political parties and the role of ideology in shaping party positions on immigrants and refugees. Then, it sheds light on the selected five political parties' brief historical background, their positions in the political system, their ideological orientations, as well as political parties' proposed solutions to the Syrian refugee issue. Finally, it puts the political parties' responses to Syrian refugees within the context of significant political events in Turkey.

The fourth chapter presents a data analysis composed of four sections. Each section is devoted to the role of one of the following four issue areas and examines how international politics of forced migration, national security concerns and domestic political dynamics, considerations relevant to economy and social development, and the international refugee regime shape political party positions on Syrian refugees in the Turkish context. While doing that, it traces the changes in the driving forces behind

political party positions on Syrian refugees from the initial stage to the protracted stage. Under each pillar of the analytical framework, a follow-up section reviews the findings regarding alternative policy formulations of political parties from the perspective of three mainstream IR theories in relation to other issue areas.

The last chapter of the thesis summarises the main findings, followed by a discussion on the current study's main contributions to the literature, limitations, and suggestions for future research. There will also be several concluding remarks based on this study's main findings using the lens of mainstream IR theories.



Chapter 2:

**LITERATURE REVIEW WITH CONCEPTUAL AND
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this study, how Syrian refugees have become a domestic and foreign policy issue for Turkish ruling and opposition parties between 2011 and 2021 is tried to be understood. In light of the analytical framework introduced in *Chapter 1*, the current thesis questions the impact of a particular set of drivers - foreign policy aims and diplomatic interests, national security considerations and domestic political interests, economic and development-related concerns, and the international refugee regime - in shaping party-based approaches to Syrian refugees in Turkey. While doing that, the current thesis takes the main assumptions and concepts of the mainstream IR theories that may apply to refugee policy-making and improves them with additional arguments. How the complex interplay between security, humanitarian, economic, and identity dimensions of refugee policy-making manifests itself in the Turkish political parties' policy responses towards Syrian refugees and makes Syrian refugees a domestic and foreign policy concern for them is examined using qualitative data gathered.

The current chapter conceptualises refugee policy-making first. After introducing the conceptual framework, a detailed review of what mainstream IR theories can offer to study refugee policy-making, along with other factors like national security considerations/domestic political interests, national economy/social development, and the international refugee regime. Such a review is provided to show applicable and inapplicable ideas of these theories for refugee policy and contribute to the theoretical development of the present study.

2.1 Conceptualising Refugee Policy-Making

International migration plays a crucial role in world politics since the movements of people crossing borders have far-reaching implications for nation-states (Betts, 2011, pp. 1-2). The question of what to do about immigrants and refugees is high on the agenda of political actors because of their political, security, economic, and cultural impacts. This thesis contextualises the refugee policies of political parties. The current study focuses on

forced migration, which is supposed to be driven by political reasons, such as conflict, violence, war, and persecution (Betts, 2009, p. 4). More specifically, the study addresses “mass refugee influx”, which Jacobsen (1996) defines as the one “which occurs when within a relatively short period (a few years), large numbers (thousands) of people flee their places of residence for the asylum country” (p. 657).

Due to the magnitude of mass refugee flows, host countries face several challenges. In this respect, the discussion of actual or perceived domestic and foreign policy challenges posed by refugees to policymakers in host states has a relatively long history in the relevant literature. Regarding the domestic policy challenges, scholars mainly refer to the following policy areas: internal security (Loescher & Milner, 2005; Rüegger, 2019; Fisk, 2019), labour market integration (Taylor et al., 2016), healthcare (Lupieri, 2020), education (Khansa & Bahous, 2021), housing (Carter & Osborne, 2009), and culture (Karacan, 2019). On the other hand, the literature sheds light on how mass refugee movements can be seen as creating interstate conflict in a way that poses a challenge to regional and international security and, therefore, requires working on political solutions besides the ones created on the axis of humanitarianism (Loescher & Milner, 2004, p. 7).

According to the sovereignty principle, deciding the extent of immigration and who can enter or not into state territory is under the state authority. States can facilitate or restrict human movements to their own territories through their immigration policies (Duncan, 2020, pp. 9-11). However, it is observed that their immigration policies do not always bring the intended consequences. For example, contrary to their aim, further border controls may fail to stop international migration; instead, they may increase irregular migration movements (Castles et al., 2014, p. 5).

As presented so far, the formulation of immigration policy is within the jurisdiction of the state in line with the sovereignty principle. Adamson and Tsourapas (2019) regard the sovereign state as the primary actor in governing international migration despite the increasing role of many non-state actors in world politics with globalisation (p. 116). At this point, one should note that the global system lacks a “universal international law governing immigration” (Duncan, 2020, p. 6). However, we have witnessed increasing optimism around global migration governance, as revealed in the adoption of the *Global*

*Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration*³ (UN, 2018) and the *Global Compact on Refugees*⁴ (UNHCR, 2018) in late 2018. However, it is worth mentioning that these Compacts are not legally binding.

Contrary to these Compacts, the *1951 Convention Relating to Status of Refugees*⁵ (UNHCR, 2015), currently signed and ratified by 145 countries, is binding. In this respect, states are not entirely free to develop policies addressing asylum- and refugee-related issues. States which signed this agreement and/or its 1967 Protocol cannot send back an individual to a country where he or she faces a well-founded fear of persecution, as stipulated in *Article 33* of the 1951 Convention titled “*non-refoulement*” (UNHCR, 2010, p. 30). The principle of non-refoulement is integral to customary international law, and therefore, all countries are legally subject to this norm regardless of whether the state is a party to the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol (UNHCR, 2005, p. 28). It is a fundamental undisputable human right and has become *jus cogens* – peremptory norm of international law. Nevertheless, the 1951 Geneva Convention still puts forward certain limitations to the principle of non-refoulement.

Despite the lack of ratification by all the countries in the world, this agreement represents a significant achievement. However, as Duncan (2020) argues, it is still far from creating an ideal order regarding global refugee governance (p. 19). Whereas the 1951 Refugee Convention is binding contrary to the two Compacts mentioned above, many countries that are party to the Convention “ignore its principles, interpret them to serve their self-interests, refuse to resettle refugees, and even engage in refoulement” (p. 19). In today’s world, for example, we have increasingly witnessed European states which try to run from their responsibilities as part of non-refoulement by preventing asylum seekers from demanding international protection in their territories. In this sense, the externalisation policies of the EU and European countries have implications for three durable solutions proposed by the traditional international refugee regime – “local

³ To read Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration, please visit: https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/180711_final_draft_0.pdf

⁴ To read Global Compact on Refugees, please visit: <https://www.unhcr.org/5c658aed4>

⁵ To read the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, please visit: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3be01b964.html> - <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3ae4.html>

integration [in the first country of asylum], [third-country] resettlement, and voluntary repatriation” (UNHCR, 2005, p. 137).

During the Cold War, the potential of local integration and resettlement options to serve for ideological considerations of Western regimes led them to be recognised as favourable alternatives. However, nation-states have not usually preferred these policy options in the post-Cold War period since their popularity decreased due to national security concerns (İçduygu & Demiryontar, 2022, p. 321) besides socio-economic and cultural realities. The increasing politicisation of the presence of refugees in several host countries has led to the dominance of return as a viable alternative in refugee protection regime and the unwillingness of these states to develop harmonisation, integration, and resettlement policies (Newland, 2019, pp. 2-4).

As reasonably argued by İçduygu and Nimer (2020), given the relationship between the considerations relevant to domestic and international politics, the popularity of local integration and resettlement declined vis-a-vis the voluntary return option. Particularly in the 1990s and 2000s, the security-based understanding of refugee issues has increasingly made these two options inaccessible (p. 415). Against such a background, “protection and non-refoulement that are accepted as the most critical two principles of the international refugee regime” (İçduygu & Demiryontar, 2022, p. 322) started to be increasingly vulnerable to the violations of states. Furthermore, the perception of “permanent temporariness” (p. 322) regarding refugees has provided a suitable ground for states and other political actors to instrumentalise refugee policies in domestic and international politics.

2.2 *Refugee Policies from the Perspective of Mainstream IR Theories*

The growing interest in the role of mass refugee migration in global politics has made having a well-developed theoretical framework to study it increasingly necessary. Betts (2009, p. 11) conceptualises the relationship between forced migration and global politics on three levels by addressing the drivers and implications of forced migration, as well as policy responses to it. The current thesis focuses on the third level by studying the policy responses of the Turkish political parties towards Syrian refugees. In this respect, the central question to be asked is how the motivations behind the policy formulations of

political parties on refugees can be situated in the IR discipline, along with other factors like national security concerns and domestic political interests, issues relating to economy and development, and the international refugee regime and how the IR theory, as a theoretical framework, gives insight into party-based approaches towards refugees. In light of the applicability of IR theory to studying responses towards refugees, such a research attempt will be highly significant.

The current thesis is aware that each selected IR theory gives different insights into policy responses towards refugees. At this point, it is useful to remind that refugees do not have, by definition, favourable or unfavourable outcomes for the host societies from the perspective of political actors (Betts, 2011, p. 136). Such negative or positive perceptions have the potential to shape responses to refugee movements. The following section will try to answer what each selected IR theory can offer for the drivers of refugee policies by showing its strengths and limitations.

2.2.1 *Realism*

Realism is one of the mainstream theories of IR. The realist IR theory portrays “international affairs as a struggle for power among self-interested states” (Walt, 1998, p. 31). In this respect, realists see focusing on another issue area apart from considerations relevant to national security as an irrational action for states (Betts, 2009, p. 61). For realists, states are the primary actors in international affairs. Since the nature of the international system is anarchic due to the absence of a world government, states try to increase their power as much as possible. In this respect, the power considered necessary for pursuing self-interest is the defining characteristic of state behaviour. By power, realist IR theory refers to military or physical strength. Finally, international institutions are considered to have a minimal role in international politics, and, for realists, they can be effective only if states let them play a role (Acharya, 2008, October 27, p. 3; Steans et al., 2010, p. 57; Weber, 2010, p. 15). Having been informed by these assumptions, modern realists say that if states argue that they behave in line with the interests of others, “they are either lying or fooling themselves” (Snyder, 2011, p. 30). Under the umbrella of realism, neorealism is one of the most well-established contemporary IR theories. According to neorealism, the likelihood of international cooperation is limited due to

considerations relating to the relative gains. It is worth underlining that states cannot be sure whether their gains would be more significant than vis-à-vis their competitors (Mearsheimer, 2013, p. 82).

Regarding the rationality principle, the realist perspective expects states to make a cost-benefit calculation, act accordingly, and define their interests in terms of power (Betts, 2009, p. 22). After presenting the main assumptions of the realist IR theory, it would be appropriate to question the relevance of the realist IR theory to understanding refugee policies. According to Meyers (2000), the insights realism can bring into the picture to study immigration policy has been minimal (p. 1265). The only exception is the refugee policy since refugees may be portrayed as a threat to state security. The emphasis on military issues and power politics previously led the majority of IR scholars to overlook refugee-related issues (p. 1264).

Although some scholars, such as Posen (1993) and Krickovic (2016), focus on internal conflicts through the lens of realist IR theory, realists generally oppose broadening the nature of security in a way that embraces areas of security outside inter-state military conflicts (Acharya, 2008, October 27, p. 3). However, the realist tradition later has been influenced by studies analysing the nexus between foreign policy and international migration (Weiner, 1985; Mitchell, 1989; Jacobsen, 1996; Weiner & Münz, 1997; Greenhill, 2010; Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019; Duncan, 2020; Freier et al., 2021). Although none of these studies pursue a pure realist approach, such a research focus is vital in revealing how states perceive refugees as undermining or serving their interests in international relations. In this respect, two core elements of the realist IR approach to the drivers of refugee policies identified in the literature would be:

Responses to Refugees from the Lens of National Security

Traditional approaches to security have their roots in the realist theory of IR. According to the realist approach to security, the state is seen as the primary referent object⁶, and the military power of other states is defined as the critical source of threat to the state's national security in this regard. The literature on the link between refugee policies and security examines how refugees may pose severe military threats to states,

⁶ In "*Forced Migration and Global Politics*", Betts (2009) refers to two primary components of the security concept: "firstly, a threat; secondly, a referent object." (p. 60).

such as interstate conflict and terrorism. At this point, we should underline that the realist IR theory sees refugees from the dimension of national security (Betts, 2009, pp. 61-62).

From the perspective of realist IR theory, refugees become a significant issue area when they only have implications for national security. Although the actual focus is on the conflicts between states and their implications for national security in the realist IR theory, refugees can also be seen as a threat to national security, even if it is not directly. The real or perceived national security considerations drive states to take appropriate measures to ensure protection from security threats associated with refugees. For example, the Turkish state's national security considerations were important in shaping its responses to Kurds fleeing Northern Iraq because of Turkey's ongoing Kurdish issue (Snyder, 2011, p. 36; Altıok & Tosun, 2019, p. 698). The Turkish state perceived the mass refugee migration from northern Iraq to Turkey as a threat to its national security because of its sensitivities surrounding the possible establishment of a Kurdish state alongside the Turkish border.

Furthermore, combatants in exile can use refugees as a tool of conflict. Having referred to Palestinian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon and those in Zaire fleeing the Rwandan genocide, Betts (2009) notes that combatants have used the refugee camps in these countries and international assistance to strengthen their human resource and material power, respectively (p. 63). In a similar vein, Lischer (2005) sheds light on the conditions under which refugee movements may exacerbate conflicts. Having examined the relationship between refugee movements and state security, Lischer discusses the problem of refugee camp militarisation and the use of humanitarian assistance as a tool for creating further conflict.

As part of national security considerations, the relevant literature widely discusses the refugees' role in increasing the risk of political violence in the host countries (Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006; Bove & Böhmelt, 2016; Wright & Moorthy, 2018; Rüegger, 2019). In this respect, there is broadening literature on the relationship between refugees and terrorism (Choi & Salehyan, 2013; Ihlamur-Öner, 2019). Following the September 11 attacks, refugees have been increasingly discussed concerning security matters and seeking asylum is regarded as a pathway for the infiltration of terrorists into host states. Due to the fears of Islamic terrorism, mainly Afghan and Syrian refugees are

currently seen as potentially threatening national security. Especially during the protracted refugee situations, states are mainly concerned with preventing the radicalisation of refugee camps (Betts, 2009, p. 64).

In foreign policy terms, the terror threat associated with refugee movements may require the host states to carry out cross-border military operations in the territories of refugee-producing states to fight against terrorist groups. Although refugees do not directly threaten national security in most situations, they have frequently been associated with safety issues accompanied by perceptions of their crime potential. Furthermore, the realist IR theory would expect that refugees may negatively affect the national security of host states by increasing the competition with host community members for scarce resources, thus leading to inter-communal tensions (Loescher & Milner, 2004; Betts, 2009, p. 78). This competition, in most cases, has a socio-economic character.

Self-Interested Reasons and Refugee Policies

The realist IR theory expects that states formulate their refugee policies in a way that serves their egoistic self-interests. According to the realist perspective, states do not tend to uphold humanitarian responsibilities while determining their refugee policies (Betts, 2009, p. 24). It anticipates that rather than giving importance to the welfare of refugees, states try to maximise their national self-interests, which can be related to different issue areas, such as security, demography, economy, and ideology, through their refugee policies.

With a focus on third-country resettlement as one of the three durable solutions to forced displacement, Hashimoto (2018) has underlined the role of foreign policy objectives in determining states' responses to refugees, such as jeopardising the reputation of refugee-producing states (p. 166). The realist IR theory may better explain the underlying motives behind the states' responses towards the refugee movements during the Cold War (Betts, 2009, p. 25). In that era, power relations between the US and the Soviet Union (SU) and their respective allies shaped the foreign policy strategies of the competing sides and, consequently, their refugee policies. Amid the ideological and geopolitical contestation for global supremacy between two blocs, competing sides used refugees as a foreign policy tool to undermine their rivals ideologically (Loescher, 2001, p. 35). As a real-life example, Zolberg et al. (1989) shared that the US had granted refugee

status to Cuban people fleeing from the communist country despite the lack of evidence for their persecution. In contrast, asylum seekers from Haiti could not obtain such a status (p. 273).

While offering international relations as a factor in determining host states' policies towards mass refugee flows, Jacobsen (1996) refers to two sources of this factor: "the international refugee regime and the bilateral relations with the refugee-sending country" (p. 662). As part of the foreign policy objectives, Jacobsen noted that relations between refugee-sending and refugee-receiving countries affect the host governments' responses towards refugees (p. 664). She further suggested that refugee-sending and -receiving countries may instrumentalise refugee flows to "embarrass or pressure each other" (p. 665), which would serve their egoistic self-interests. As discussed above, states tend to focus on beneficial outcomes that may be brought about by hosting refugees.

However, the nature of relations between refugee-sending and refugee-receiving states does not explain the hosting state's responses to refugees under all circumstances (Jacobsen, 1996, p. 665). For example, Turkey implemented an open-door policy towards the mass migration from Bulgaria and treated those fleeing well despite the tense relations between Turkey and Bulgaria. The ethnic affinity with the displaced population rather than self-interested considerations of Turkey for ideological gains played a crucial role in shaping Turkey's response to the mass refugee movement from Bulgaria. Hosting Turks of Bulgaria served the interest of the Turkish state, which can be explained with a focus on identity-related considerations. The national interest of Turkey, in this case, focused on strengthening national identity through the ethnic affinity between the host community members and Turks of Bulgaria (Kirişçi, 2014, p. 7).

Besides diplomatic calculations, states' material interests, such as those relevant to demography and economy, which would eventually affect national security, can explain their policies towards refugees. As Zolberg (1981) argues, immigrants and refugees may provide a source of military strength for host states by fulfilling demographic shortages (p. 11). For example, France promoted the immigration of people from several European countries into the country after World War II with its immigration policies. The reason for implementing such policies is associated with France's concerns over a possible German attack on the country due to its war-related population loss and low birth rate.

Similarly, Israel encouraged the immigration of the Jewish diaspora to the country because of its demographic concerns relating to Arabs (Meyers, 2000, p. 1264).

Regarding refugee policy-making, the realist IR theory anticipates that states help refugees as long as it benefits them. The rationality principle in the realist IR theory requires political actors to make a cost-benefit calculation in determining their responses to refugees. From the realist IR perspective, if a country expects to benefit from hosting refugees, it is more likely to implement an open-door policy towards them. Today, many European countries come up against suffering from labour shortages and ageing populations. According to İçduygu and his colleagues (2017), the possible economic benefits that are associated with refugees have played a crucial role, for example, in shaping Germany's policies towards Syrian refugees (p. 466).

Critique of the Realist IR Perspective

As portrayed so far, the realist IR perspective supposes that states will prefer closing the doors to refugees if they see them as a threat to their national security. The threat perceptions mostly emerge because of the political concerns over anti-refugee attitudes, communal tensions between host community members and refugees, and the tendency of politics to gain a populist nature (Weiner, 1993, p. 93). Although economic considerations play a role in states' reluctance to provide protection to refugees, political concerns override economic ones. Concerning the role of egoistic self-interests in the realist IR theory's conceptualisation of refugee politics, one should note that the political interests of Western states have shaped the global refugee regime following the end of the Second World War (Betts, 2009, p. 40). Western states kept their borders open to refugees during the Cold War. However, their stance changed after the end of the Cold War, especially with the September 11 attacks. As a reflection of such a change, we have witnessed increasingly restrictive policies towards refugees (Weiner & Münz, 1997, p. 25).

Based on the above discussion, the realist IR theory has the potential to explain the states' reluctance to open their borders to refugees if doing so is not in line with their interests. However, the realist perspective fails to understand why states contribute to providing solutions for refugees even if doing so does not serve their interests. There are real-life cases in which states provide protection to refugees, although political realities, security and socio-economic conditions are not favourable to such action (Haddad, 2008,

pp. 15-16). In this respect, the realist IR perspective cannot comprehend the role of humanitarian principles and international norms around refugee protection in shaping states' policy responses towards refugees. Additionally, the realist tradition in IR cannot explain the ongoing international cooperation on refugee-related issues and states' continued commitment to the international refugee regime, given its assumption that states are concerned with their relative gains. Other than that, the inherent shortcomings in the assumptions of the realist IR theory limit the theory's explanatory power for refugee policy-making and domestic politics. For example, it overlooks the role of non-state actors and domestic political considerations in refugee governance.

The realist perspective has also difficulty explaining non-military threats to security. The sensitivities around preserving national identity associated with refugee movements can make states place refugee-related issues at the top of their political agenda. However, the realist IR theory is not interested in the potential threats to security that can stem from identity-related issues. In short, realist approaches in IR ignore threats posed to referent objects other than the state (Betts, 2009, p. 65). It is equally important to note that the realist IR perspective takes the national interest and states' identity for granted without questioning how it changes over time. Accordingly, the realist perspective would ignore the role of identity affinity with refugees from the perspective of the host state in bringing favourable policies towards them. Besides, the realist perspective associating itself with Traditional Security Studies (TSS) equates national security with individual security (p. 65). However, today's forced displacement figures show this is not the case. Often, individuals flee from the persecution against which their own states are unwilling or unable to protect them. Indeed, states, from time to time, can be the greatest source of insecurity for individuals.

Another shortcoming of the realist IR perspective, which impacts the theory's strength in explaining the responses to mass refugee movements, is "cultural bias" (Acharya, 2008, October 27, p. 7). In the literature, while discussing the increase in restrictive policies towards refugees, scholars are generally based on the experiences of the Western states. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate how underdeveloped and developing countries respond to mass refugee flows and formulate their refugee policies. Despite its significant shortcomings, the liberal theory, which will be discussed in the

next part, can explain the role of liberal democratic values, interdependency, economic cooperation, and international institutions in determining refugee policies.

2.2.2 *Liberalism*

Liberalism is another mainstream IR theory, and liberal IR theorists are associated with “a more optimistic worldview” (Meyers, 2000, p. 1265) compared to realists. The liberal theory of IR upholds international liberal norms. Such liberal norms put a responsibility on states to protect the human rights of their citizens and other nationals. The breaking of these norms by states brings certain costs for them. Given the role of international organisations in respecting such norms, the liberal IR theory focuses on international cooperation between states. It should be noted that whereas realism is seen as a “theory of conflict” (Acharya, 2008, October 27, p. 4), liberalism is regarded as the theory aiming to understand the “causes of cooperation” (p. 4).

In contrast to realists, liberal IR theorists point to the possibility of witnessing positive changes in world politics. Such a worldview stems from liberalism’s strong belief in the likelihood of achieving international cooperation. In this regard, it is suggested that the underlying factors behind international cooperation are attributable to the increasing economic cooperation, the role of international organisations and the promotion of liberal democratic values (Meyers, 2000, p. 1265). In the global world, the economic interests of the states, for example, have significant implications for increasing interdependence in trade. Having pointed out that states are economically interdependent, Jervis (1999) sheds light on how this interdependency strengthens cooperation between states.

Akin to realism, rationality is one of the defining characteristics of the liberal IR theory. However, one should underline that the rational thing for liberal IR theorists is to cooperate with other states rather than come into conflict with them (Steans et al., 2010, p. 32). Another critical point distinguishing liberalism from the realist perspective is its emphasis on the importance of non-state actors in international relations. Besides, for liberals, economic and social issues are as significant as security issues (Meyers, 2000, p. 1266).

Compared to other strands of liberalism, neoliberal institutionalism is particularly relevant to immigration and refugee policy-making (Meyers, 2000, p. 1266). Given that

realism fails to comprehend increasing international cooperation, the emergence of liberal institutionalism represents a significant development. As to achieving cooperation in the international system, liberal institutionalism draws attention to the importance of absolute gains vis-à-vis relative gains (Betts, 2009, p. 25). This viewpoint has significant implications for international cooperation since it paves the way for mutual gains.

The more recent stream of liberal institutionalism, neoliberal institutionalism, similarly focuses on the possible impact of international institutions' proliferation for increasing international cooperation. For neoliberal institutionalists, international institutions encourage states to collaborate by contributing to "overcome dilemmas of common interests and common aversions" (Meyers, 2000, p. 1266). International institutions can persuade states to collaborate instead of acting in isolation by showing that such cooperation will yield more desirable outcomes for them. In this regard, eliminating uncertainty regarding the outcomes of the actions of states will likely affect states' willingness to cooperate (Betts, 2009, p. 26). Considering the main assumptions of liberal IR theory, two core elements of the liberal IR perspective identified on refugee policies would be:

Refugee Protection from the Perspective of Liberal Norms and Principles

As discussed above, the liberal IR theory pays attention to universal liberal norms and values, such as international human rights, which are as significant as security issues. According to this school of thought, states are expected to uphold the human rights of refugees and fulfil universal duties to them. For liberals, the idea of a "universal community of humankind" (Steans et al., 2010, p. 32) holds accountable states to non-citizens. It is well-known that liberal democratic states are committed to ensuring their citizens' welfare. However, the "egalitarian values" (Gibney, 1999, p. 173) prevent these states from paying more attention to the rights of their citizens vis-à-vis those of outsiders. Given that seeking asylum is an international human right, states, under some conditions, are required to provide protection to persons who flee from persecution in their countries of origin. When the person's home country is unable or unwilling to fulfil its commitment to providing fundamental human rights to its own citizens, universal liberal norms and values put responsibilities on the international community to ensure that the displaced persons enjoy their fundamental human rights (Betts, 2009, p. 2).

Regarding the politics of forced migration, some notions in the relevant literature are closely linked with the liberal IR perspective, including humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect. Having become more prevalent after the Cold War compared to the previous period in which sovereignty was seen as absolute (Betts, 2009), the humanitarian intervention turned states' domestic affairs into an international concern (p. 49). Thus, protecting internally displaced persons has become a matter of serious concern for the international community (Loescher, 2001, p. 51).

Besides, the concept of human security emerged in the 1990s (Betts, 2009), which is vital in showing liberal IR theory's particular relevance to refugee protection (p. 66). By leaving the traditional understanding of security, the liberal perspective points to new sources of threats, including human rights violations (Acharya, 2008, October 27, p. 4). As Betts (2009) argues, the concept of human security that came into the picture as an alternative to the state-centric and military focus of TSS has two main components. First, individuals are seen as the main object whose security needs to be ensured instead of the states. Second, it widens the scope of security beyond military threats (p. 67). The considerations relevant to human security are instrumental in calling on the states to contribute to durable solutions for refugees (p. 68).

However, Suhrke (2003) has concerns over the functionality of the human security concept within the context of forced migration (p. 101). This critical attitude comes from the fact that individuals can face threats from almost any source. Furthermore, the concept of human security fails to provide a tool to understand the conflicting interests (p. 102). Accordingly, it is necessary to question how the individual's core values are defined. For example, Betts (2009) sheds light on competing interests between host community members and refugees (p. 69). Nevertheless, it should be underlined that the concept still maintains its relevance, given that the challenges to human security have played a crucial role, for example, in justifying the extended stay of Syrian refugees in Syria's neighbouring countries.

On the other hand, altruistic humanitarianism, drawing on idealism under the roof of liberalism, lies the opposite of egoism (Betts, 2009, p. 24). Idealists would expect that states only consider the vulnerability of refugees while providing protection to them rather than being concerned about the beneficial outcomes that refugees are likely to

bring. These considerations, for example, manifest themselves in a humanitarian-utitarian divide proposed by Noll and van Selm (2003) regarding the motives behind the resettlement decisions of states. Similarly, this divide is also valid for another durable solution to the displacement of refugees, namely local integration. In this respect, the integration policies towards refugees can be shaped based on factors beyond the vulnerability of refugees, including vocational skills, professions, and ties with the refugee community. In other words, we can witness the political actors' "selective humanitarianism" (İçduygu et al., 2017, p. 464) with refugees in host societies based on the cultural or religious backgrounds of the latter as well as demographic and economic concerns.

Role of Interdependence in Refugee Protection

From the liberal IR perspective, interdependence between states provides a conducive environment for human mobility (Steans et al., 2010, p. 32). At this point, the role of international institutions in mitigating concerns relating to refugee movements should be underlined. The neoliberal institutionalist strand of liberal IR theory expects states to become more willing to open their borders to outsiders when it is guaranteed that there exists an international regime regulating refugee movements (Hollifield & Wong, 2015, p. 256).

Neoliberal institutionalism has particular relevance in explaining the emergence of the international refugee regime and its maintenance. According to Betts (2009), states' mutual interests can better explain their willingness to formulate and sustain the international refugee regime (p. 27). In this regard, it is believed that upholding the international refugee regime would make states better off for two reasons: promoting international security thanks to providing durable solutions for refugees under the leadership of sovereign states and achieving humanitarian goals. Even though opening borders to refugees poses some challenges to states, the international refugee regime encourages these states to cooperate, providing that other states would also do the same thing. In this context, refugees may create prospects for international cooperation through the responsibility-sharing discourses in the refugee regime (p. 124) since some refugee situations are beyond the capacity of one state.

According to the sovereignty principle, states have the ultimate authority to decide who will enter or exit their territory (Duncan, 2020, pp. 9-11). However, the international refugee regime regulated by the 1951 Geneva Convention is a notable exception to that rule (Hollifield & Wong, 2015, p. 233). States sometimes prefer opening their borders to refugees, even when doing so would not serve their interests. From the neoliberal institutionalist perspective, international organisations play a profound role in that process. For example, UNHCR has a significant role since it oversees whether states fulfil their commitments within the scope of the international refugee regime (Keely, 2001, p. 310).

Scholars who question the relevance of the institutional perspective to immigration policy-making suggest that international institutions do not exert a powerful influence in shaping countries' immigration policies. However, one may consider the EU and the international refugee regime a partial exception to that rule (Meyers, 2000, p. 1266). According to Meyers, upholding freedom of movement within the Schengen Area and commitment to cooperation on immigration- and refugee-related affairs within the EU have increased the applicability of the neoliberal institutional perspective to study the approaches to refugee governance (p. 1266). As mentioned before, neo-liberal institutionalism is more applicable to issue areas where states have mutual interests, like trade and responsibility sharing. For example, being concerned with the beneficial outcomes that hosting refugees will bring in a way that serves mutual interests, such as trade promotion with the refugee-sending countries following refugees' return, can be explained by the neoliberal institutionalist perspective. Furthermore, host states can focus on enhancing international financial responsibility-sharing to mitigate the negative impact of hosting refugees, which the liberal IR theory can explain (Şahin-Mencütek, 2019, p. 29).

Critique of the Liberal IR Perspective

As Acharya (2008, October 27) argues, the liberal IR theory needs to overcome the problem of why liberal democracies, from time to time, act contrary to the values of the international liberal order, such as international human rights (p. 4). Based on this criticism, we should emphasise one of the main shortcomings of the liberal IR theory, which is also relevant for its insights into refugee policies. This limitation stems from the

theory's "probabilistic statements" (Russett, 2013, p. 102). Since no democracy is flawless, the liberal IR theory fails to make sense, for example, of European liberal democracies' unlawful acts towards asylum-seekers and refugees. Similarly, questions like whether "liberal democracies are better able to offer protection to forced migrants than non-democracies" (Acharya, 2008, October 27, p. 5) remain unanswered as there is evidence to the contrary sometimes. Like the realist IR perspective, liberal and neoliberal IR theories do not examine the construction process of identities. Given the theory's focus on identity-related issues for refugee policy-making, the insights constructivism can offer into refugee policies will be discussed in the upcoming section.

2.2.3 *Constructivism*

Constructivism, which emerged as a critique of the rationality principle inherent in realism and liberalism, has become one of the most influential IR theories for understanding world politics (Betts, 2009, p. 32). Contrary to realist and liberal IR perspectives taking states' identities and interests for granted, constructivism suggests that "behaviour, interests, and relationships are socially constructed, and can therefore change" (Newman, 2001, p. 247). In this regard, interests and identities are expected not to be constant in the international system. According to the constructivist perspective, addressing how identities and interests are constructed through interactions is crucial. As long as states interact, for example, a friendship or enmity will emerge between them to a certain extent. Therefore, the constructivist theory underlines the importance of identity for making sense of global politics.

Acharya (2008, October 27) underlines three assumptions in constructivism, distinguishing it from realism and liberalism. First, constructivism sees the structure of international politics not only in the material but also in the identity-related sense. Therefore, ideas and norms are significant for constructivists with their potential to change actors' identities. Second, constructivists do not accept the rationality principle. Third, the international system may experience changes since international institutions and regimes can socialise states by encouraging them to internalise various norms (p. 6). Considering the main assumptions of constructivist IR theory, two core elements of the constructivist IR approach relevant to refugee policies would be:

Identity as an Intersubjective Factor in Refugee Protection

From the perspective of constructivism, the notion of identity matters to explain why states respond to refugee movements as they already do. The mutual interaction between the identity of the host state and that of refugees, which realism and liberalism fail to grasp, has the great potential to account for responses to refugee movements. As Gibney (1999) put it, the ethnic ties between host community members and refugees frequently play a more critical role than the socio-economic concerns in determining the nature of policy responses towards the newcomers (p. 176). In other words, similarity in the ethnic origin between host society and refugee populations can help states justify their open-door policy towards displaced communities. Based on this, it can be suggested that the identity and its construction process in constructivism are relevant to making sense of policy formulations on refugees. It is crucial to note that this identity does not have to be ethnicity-related. Religious identities can also play a determining role in this process. For example, the Turkish government continues to emphasise the religious identity of the majority of Syrian refugees in its domestic policy discussions. Such an attitude manifests itself in the government discourse surrounding the idea of responsibility for welcoming and protecting Turkey's Muslim brothers and sisters.

Based on the above discussion, one can observe that states construct not only the identity of their own citizens but also the identity of non-citizens. In this respect, states even "whose national identity and nation-building myths incorporate migration" (Czajka, 2014, p. 157) can describe refugee movements as an existential threat to their national survival. However, it should not be forgotten that refugee groups can also be portrayed in a way that strengthens national identity.

Furthermore, Betts (2009) suggests that the international refugee regime can make states change their practices by socialising them (p. 33). From the constructivist perspective, Betts refers to the role of non-state actors in world politics. These actors can play a prominent role in shaping states' behaviours. According to constructivists, the diffusion of norms and ideals can encourage states to fulfil the requirements of the international refugee regime. It is observed that states generally comply with the norms of the 1951 Refugee Convention. The constructivist paradigm expects states to uphold domestic legislation in accordance with those norms. In that respect, we can give the

example of Turkey's upholding the non-refoulement principle in the LFIP that came into effect in 2013.

However, it is significant to question the concepts of refugee and nation-state. In this respect, it is problematic to take these notions for granted. The 1951 Refugee Convention puts forward criteria defining who a refugee is. Although states uphold the principles of international refugee law, they make some changes while integrating international norms into their domestic law. In this regard, politicians may adopt relatively narrower definitions for the status of beneficiaries of international protection to reduce the burden stemming from the international refugee regime. As Haddad (2008) suggests, a "narrow definition" (p. 25) may create significant problems since refugees can suffer from the lack of adequate protection.

On the other hand, the motives behind states' contribution to the protection of refugees can be explained by those relating to international reputation. For example, while explaining the motives behind states' decisions to resettle refugees, Hashimoto (2018) points to their aims to promote their international reputation (p. 167). Such considerations relevant to the international image have led political actors to differentiate their states' identities from others during social interactions.

Securitisation and Politicisation of Refugees

The constructivist perspective highlights the importance of discourses, such as those related to securitisation and politicisation, which have been extensively studied by the Copenhagen School with a particular emphasis on the concept of threat (Şahin-Mencütek et al., 2020, p. 97). Critical Security Studies (CSS) has extended the scope of security beyond military security in a way that embeds economic, cultural, and societal security (Betts, 2009, p. 69). Having been informed by the expanding scope of security, constructivist IR theory underlines the significance of identities and norms besides power in defining security. In this direction, constructivists adopting a broader definition of security suggest that threats are socially constructed (Karacan, 2019, p. 155). On the other hand, scholars identifying themselves with the legacy of TSS have opposed efforts to broaden the scope of the security concept by arguing that the security agenda should be limited to military issues between states (Karadağ & Rumelili, 2017, p. 71). Nevertheless,

one should question how “an issue comes to be seen as a security issue and whose interests this securitisation serves” (Betts, 2009, p. 65).

Since CSS covers extensive literature, this thesis will focus on only certain concepts drawing on constructivism. In this respect, the Copenhagen School, whose approach is primarily identity-driven, is important and based mainly on the work of Ole Waever and Barry Buzan. On the one hand, the Copenhagen School criticised the state-centred, military-focused security approaches. It expanded the scope of the security concept by incorporating economic, environmental, and societal security besides military and political security (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 22). In “*Security: A New Framework for Analysis*”, Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde take security in relation to these five sectors, which makes their study pioneer in the sense that they bring a new security understanding.

The concepts of securitisation and societal security are the most important contributions of the Copenhagen School to CSS, which increased its importance for migration studies. For the issues relevant to migrants and refugees, the concepts of societal security and securitisation have been frequently addressed (Karadağ & Rumelili, 2017, p. 72). Ole Waever (1993) defined the concept of societal security, which is vital in terms of the migration-security nexus, as “the ability of a society to persist in its essential character under changing conditions and possible or actual threats” (p. 23). In this direction, Waever expects a group to behave by paying attention to the sensitivities around security if it perceives a threat to its identity in ethnic, national, and religious terms (p. 23).

Within the scope of the societal security concept, the Copenhagen School differentiates between state and security. Here, it would be in good taste to underline that “the referent object of societal security is society” (Waever, 1993, pp. 25-26). Based on this concept, Karadağ and Rumelili (2017) state that the discursive strategies suggesting that “immigrants threaten social peace” focus on society as a referent object rather than the state. As the migration-security nexus stipulates, the securitisation steps have made society a referent object(pp. 76-77).

In constructivist terms, the Copenhagen School addresses refugee movements as one of the issues perceived as a potential threat to social identity. The concept of societal

security within the body of Copenhagen School underlined that refugee flows threaten the sociocultural homogeneity of the host society (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 121). Similarly, Bigo (2002) notes that the refugees are a reminder that cultural homogeneity is undermined by raising the sensitivities surrounding the national identity of the host community members (p. 65). As can be seen above discussion, the concept of societal security generally anticipates threats to emerge against the identity of the society instead of material entities (Betts, 2009, p. 71). Building upon the issues of identity to which constructivism attaches particular importance, Waever (1993) has questioned the relevance of the concept of societal security in explaining how the link between immigration and security is created in Europe.

The concept of securitisation is another significant contribution of the Copenhagen School to security studies. The concept refers to the process in which an issue is intersubjectively perceived as being linked to security (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 23). In other words, a problem becomes a security issue, not because of its specific characteristics but because it is perceived and interpreted as a security issue (Karadağ & Rumelili, 2017, p. 73). Buzan et al. (1998) argue that the concept of securitisation is a form of speech act (p. 25). On this account, engaging in such a process may justify implementing extreme measures, although they cannot be legitimised in normal times (Betts, 2009, p. 71).

For instance, when a political leader states that “refugees threaten social peace, cultural homogeneity and national identity in host communities”, this statement cannot be considered a basic situation assessment. According to the theory of securitisation, this statement transforms the presence of refugees from a non-politicised issue area to a politicised one and eventually into a security issue area (Karadağ & Rumelili, 2017, p. 73). In this context, Betts (2009) articulates how the media has contributed to the further politicisation and securitisation of refugees by strengthening the link between them and terrorism and presenting them as a threat to the host community's socio-economic order and cultural values (p. 72).

Critique of the Constructivist IR Perspective

As can be seen above, the constructivist theory offers much for studying refugee policy. It assumes that political actors' responses to refugees are not only shaped by interests and power politics but also by ideational concerns. To the question of why states

open their borders to refugees in times of doing so seems contrary to the national interest, constructivism may give a convincing explanation by pointing to the role of identities.

However, the constructivist theory also has some limitations. The constructivist theory fails to question the categorisation of displaced people, such as asylum seekers and refugees, that perpetuate power relations between global political actors. According to the critical theory, these concepts “have been created for someone and for some purpose” (Betts, 2009, p. 36). The constructivist theory does not examine the motives behind creating such labels. Another common criticism, especially from critical theorists and postmodernists, is that constructivists consider the state an unproblematic category (Steans et al., 2010, p. 201). Despite these limitations, we should underline the importance of the interaction between the identity of states and the identity of refugee groups, as well as the securitisation/politicisation of the presence of refugees for understanding policy responses to these groups.

Chapter 3:

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN THE TURKISH POLITICAL ARENA

3.1 *Historical Background: Turkey's Responses to Syrian Mass Migration*

The Syria crisis that entered its twelfth year has made Turkey a country “hosting the largest population of persons under temporary and international protection” worldwide (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] & UNHCR, 2021, p. 4). Initially, Turkey demanded that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad be more tolerant towards protests against the government starting in March 2011 within the scope of Arap uprisings and make democratic reforms in line with the demands of the civilian population (Kirişçi, 2014, p. 5). In such an environment, the first group of Syrians escaping from the violent conflict in their country came to Turkey in April 2011 (Makovsky, 2019, p. 3). However, Turkey's call on the Syrian regime for a political resolution did not produce the desired result, and bilateral relations between the two countries worsened. Turkey's stance vis-a-vis the Syrian regime radically changed after the Syrian regime army shot down a Turkish fighter jet in 2012 (Altıok & Tosun, 2019, p. 692). It was against such a background that Turkey declared its support for the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, established with the alignment of Syrian opposition groups, which seeks to overthrow the Assad government (Şahin-Mencütek, 2019, p. 104).

Starting from the early days of the Syrian conflict, Turkey implemented an open-door policy towards refugees who fled from Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's increasing repression and violence. The Turkish government treated Syrians arriving in the country as guests in parallel with the expectation that the conflict would end and they would return to Syria in a short while (Kirişçi, 2014, p. 5). Thus, Turkey began implementing temporary refugee governance. One should note that Turkey did not grant refugee status to Syrians who arrived because it had ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol by putting a geographical restriction. While Turkey gives refugee status only to asylum-seekers from Europe, asylum-seekers outside Europe have only the right to temporarily stay in Turkey while waiting for their resettlement to third countries. Such a geographical limitation that Turkey retains “creates

an obstacle for Syrians seeking to settle in the country” (İçduygu & Millet, 2016, pp. 5-6).

At the beginning of the Syrian mass migration, Turkey was unwilling to request assistance from the international community for its humanitarian effort since it wanted to show that the country had sufficient capacity to handle the consequences of migration of such magnitude on its own (Şahin-Mencütek et al., 2020, p. 101). However, as of mid-2012, the country began to ask the international community to share the responsibility regarding the cost of hosting Syrian refugees (Ahmadoun, 2014, p. 2). In this respect, the calls on the international community to provide financial support have increased.

Assuming that the presence of Syrians in the country would be temporary, the Turkish government sought to host all Syrians in camps established in border provinces in the early years of the refugee flow (Makovsky, 2019, p. 17). Up to 2013, nearly all Syrian refugees arriving in Turkey were settled in these camps or temporary accommodation centres (TACs) (İçduygu, 2015, p. 7). However, as time passed, it became clear that the camps “failed to serve as a sustainable solution for hosting refugees” (İçduygu & Diker, 2017, p. 14). Because of the camps’ insufficient capacity vis-à-vis the growing refugee population, most Syrians started to live in urban areas. By December 8, 2022, only 47,702 Syrians were living in TACs, and the number of TACs in Turkey is seven, and they are based in five provinces near the Syrian border (PMM, 2022).

As the stay of Syrians in Turkey took longer, they started to increasingly face severe problems in daily life because of their lack of legal status. Also, as can be seen in Figure 3. 1, the number of Syrians rose from 14,237 in 2012 to 224,655 in 2013, which passed over the formerly determined critical threshold of 100,000 (Memişoğlu & Ilgıt, 2017, p. 324; Şahin-Mencütek, 2019, p. 105). This increase widened the scope of problems Syrians faced, given the increased strain on the capacity of the Turkish state. Having recognised that the guest status failed to meet the needs of a growing Syrian population, the Turkish government started to improve Syrians’ life conditions through new legal arrangements (İçduygu, 2015, pp. 7-9). Turkey had already taken significant steps in reforming the Turkish migration and asylum system in line with the requirements of the EU accession process before the Syrian conflict erupted (İçduygu & Millet, 2016, pp. 3-4; Okyay, 2017, p. 5). However, it is essential to note that the Syrian refugee flow forced

the Turkish state to speed up its ongoing initiatives in this regard (İçduygu, 2015, p. 9). In this direction, the LFIP, numbered 6458, was adopted in April 2013.

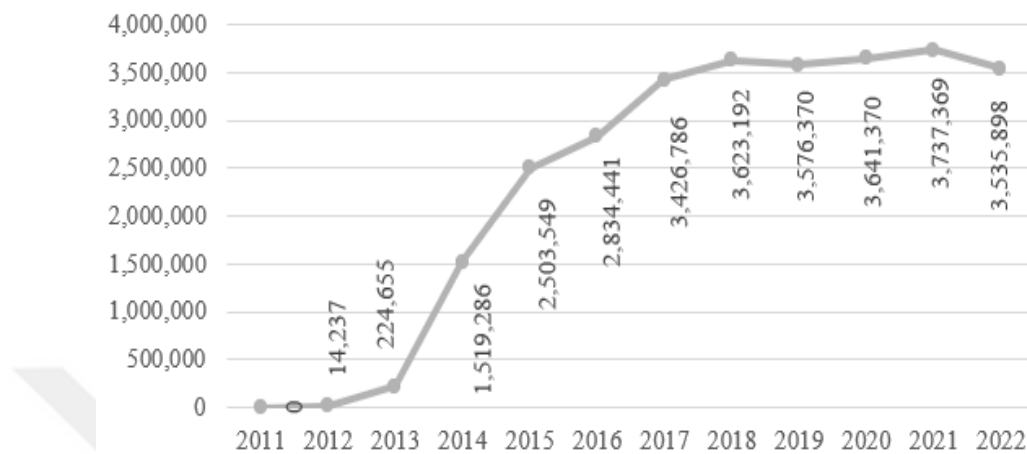


Figure 3. 1: Distribution of Syrians under TP across years (2011-2022)

Note: The figure indicates the distribution of Syrians under TP between 2011 and 2022. Adapted from PMM (2022).

One of the distinguishing features of the LFIP in Turkish legal history is its focus on foreigners' harmonisation, as stipulated in *Article 96* (Açıkgöz & Arıner, 2014, p. 22). This law represents a turning point in Turkey's legal and institutional framework for migration and asylum since it aims to bring the country's migration management system in harmony with international and European standards (İçduygu & Millet, 2016, p. 4). After the new law, Turkey clarified which status will be granted to asylum-seekers coming outside Europe (Okyay, 2017, p. 5). While dealing with the repercussions of the Syrian refugee issue on the country's domestic and foreign policy, Turkey guaranteed the principle of non-refoulement and provided TP for Syrians fleeing civil war based on *Article 4* and *Article 91* of this new law, respectively. The LFIP, in its *Article 103*, stipulated the establishment of a civilian authority titled the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM)⁷ to implement Turkey's new migration and asylum policies (Legislation Information System, 2013, April 11). As put by İçduygu and Diker

⁷ The name of the DGMM was changed to the PMM with the Presidential Decree on the Amendment of Some Presidential Decrees No. 85 (Official Gazette, 2021, October 29).

(2017), the establishment of the DGMM demonstrated the transition from an understanding that presents refugees as a security problem that needs to be tackled to one prioritising the governance of migration (p. 16). In this respect, it shifted responsibility to this civilian body from the Security General Directorate (SGD).

As of mid-2013, Turkey realised the Syrian conflict would not come to an end in the short run, given the reluctance of global political actors to take military measures in Syria (Şahin-Mencütek et al., 2020, p. 101). In light of the concerns surrounding the spillover of the Syrian conflict, the Turkish government adopted a security-oriented approach at the discursive level. However, such a discursive process did not immediately bring the securitisation of Syrian refugees to the centre of domestic political discussions (p. 102). Having understood that the protracted nature of the Syrian conflict will increase the likelihood of the extended stay of Syrian refugees in the country, the Turkish state enacted the TPR in 2014 to provide Syrians already in Turkey with better access to public services. With the implementation of this regulation, Syrians were given TP identification documents. This new regulation has facilitated Syrians' access to healthcare, education, livelihoods, and interpretation services (İçduygu & Millet, 2016, p. 4). Whereas this TP document enhances the living conditions of Syrians, it does not give the foreigners under TP access to residence permits and naturalisation (pp. 4-5). Such a restriction shows that the state mentality on the temporariness of Syrian refugees in Turkey continued during that period, where the issue of granting citizenship was absent from the domestic political agenda of the host country (İçduygu & Demiryontar, 2022, p. 323).

With the announcement of the Caliphate (state) by the terrorist organisation called the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), national security concerns of Turkish political actors increased. Following the siege on Kobane, Turkey encountered a massive flow of Syrian Kurds from northern Syria (Şahin-Mencütek, 2019, p. 85). As part of Turkey's migration management efforts, border security measures increased. Such developments made the Syrian conflict increasingly complicated, which dashed any hopes in the host countries that Syrian refugees would imminently return to their countries of origin.

The gradual increase in the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey and no hope of a peaceful solution to the Syrian conflict in the near future necessitated the Turkish government to formulate harmonisation policies, especially with a focus on ensuring

Syrian refugees' access to livelihoods through sustainable economic inclusion (İçduygu, 2017, p. 29). Therefore, the *Regulation on Work Permits of Foreigners under Temporary Protection* came into effect in 2016 (Legislation Information System, 2016, January 15). This regulation points to various conditions facilitating Syrians' access to the formal labour market. It is important to note that this regulation, in *Article 5*, requires employers to apply for work permits on behalf of their employees. However, as stipulated by *Article 8* of this regulation, the proportion of people entitled to TP cannot exceed 10 per cent of the employed host community members in the same workplace. Although this regulation represents a significant policy step towards integrating Syrians into the formal labour market, there is a need for a great effort to ensure the actual transition of Syrians from informal to formal employment (İçduygu & Diker, 2017, p. 19). In this regard, the insufficient number of work permits granted to Syrians reveals the problems regarding the implementation of this regulation⁸.

With the loss of prospects for the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland and inadequate resettlement options provided by third countries for them, many Syrian refugees in Turkey increasingly used irregular channels to go to Europe. Thus, the Syrian refugee issue was not only the concern of Turkey and neighbouring countries of Syria but also the European countries as well. In the summer of 2015, the number of refugees reaching Europe via Turkey peaked. Given that over one million refugees, mostly Syrians, reached Europe during the summer and autumn of 2015, the EU and European countries perceived such border crossings as a crisis (Sert & Danış, 2020). According to İçduygu and Demiryontar (2022), this situation put the concerns surrounding the responsibility-sharing on refugee protection at the centre of EU-Turkey relations, which brings a significant political agenda where the EU-Turkey cooperation can revive (p. 324).

⁸ Based on the official figures, the total number of work permits granted to Syrian Arab Republic nationals in Turkey from 2011 to 2020 was 140,310. However, the actual figure is lower than 140,000 since it contains those whose period of work permits is extended (Erdoğan, 2022, p. 82).

As an initial response to the 2015 refugee crisis, the EU introduced the European Agenda on Migration⁹ (European Commission, 2015a) in May 2015. Besides calling for responsibility sharing among EU member states, the agenda underlines the importance of cooperating with the countries of origin and transit, making Turkey a critical actor in the external dimension of the EU's migration policy. Then, a Joint Action Plan (JAP)¹⁰, (European Commission, 2015b), through which both the EU and Turkey demonstrated commitment to accelerate cooperation on the Syrian refugee issue, came into force on October 15, 2015 (European Commission, n.d.). As per its commitments indicated in the JAP, Turkey implemented restrictive border policies, particularly towards Syrians and Iraqis (Şahin-Mencütek, 2019, p. 112). In this direction, on January 8, 2016, it imposed visa requirements on Syrians arriving in Turkey by air and sea (Kearney, 2016, January 9). Furthermore, the EU's externalisation of its migration management resulted in the EU-Turkey Statement of March 18, 2016¹¹. This Statement has shown the importance of migration and asylum issues in EU-Turkey relations. According to the EU-Turkey Statement, Turkey agreed to receive "all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into Greek islands as of March 20, 2016" (European Council, 2016, *Article 1*).

Additionally, the Statement stipulates that "for every Syrian being returned to Turkey from Greek islands, another Syrian will be resettled from Turkey to the EU taking into account the UN Vulnerability Criteria" (European Council, 2016, *Article 2*). This provision was anticipated to create safe and legal alternatives for refugees who would like to go to Europe while simultaneously preventing these people from experiencing dangerous journeys (İçduygu & Demiryontar, 2022, p. 324). The expectations of decreasing irregular entries into Europe were met within the scope of commitments made in the EU-Turkey Statement. However, the promise of resettlement through a one-to-one policy was realised much lower than expected. According to official figures, only 37.748 Syrians under TP were resettled to Europe within the scope of the one-to-one policy (PMM, 2023b). As İçduygu and Demiryontar (2022) reasonably put, the "externalisation

⁹ For more details about the European Agenda on Migration of May 13, 2015, please visit: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/european-agenda-migration_en

¹⁰ To read the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan of October 15, 2015, please visit: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/de/MEMO_15_5860

¹¹ To read the EU-Turkey Statement of March 8, 2016, please visit: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/>

policies of the EU” through conducting deals with arguably safe third countries on border controls and financial assistance besides the “emphasis on providing protection in the first country of asylum” (p. 325) have reduced the tendency of third countries to resettle refugees as a durable solution.

The Statement also foresaw “the disbursement of the initially allocated 3 billion euros under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRIT)” and the mobilisation of an additional 3 billion euros until the end of 2018 (European Council, 2016, *Article 6*). Another significant issue concerning this Statement relates to Turkey’s expectations from the EU to ensure visa-free travel for Turkish citizens (*Article 5*). However, Turkey’s expectations on this issue have not been fulfilled. Furthermore, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, at the International Migration Conference in İzmir, underlined that the pledged 3+3 billion euros within the scope of the EU-Turkey Statement had not been given to Turkey with the full amount yet (Yeni Şafak, 2021, February 22). At this point, it should be noted that both sides of the EU-Turkey Statement have had difficulties in justifying their commitment to the deal both in domestic and international realms, as İçduygu (2017, p. 31) argues.

Within the framework of asylum and migration-related issues, one of the most critical developments in EU-Turkey relations is President Erdoğan’s threatening approach to the EU. In response to the European Parliament’s calls for temporarily suspending the negotiations with Turkey in November 2016, President Erdoğan threatened the EU with opening the border gates to asylum seekers and refugees willing to go to Europe (BBC News Türkçe, 2016, November 25). At the opposite end, President Erdoğan announced his proposal for Syrian refugees’ acquisition of Turkish citizenship in July 2016, representing a milestone in the Turkish government’s approach to Syrians regarding local integration (Al Jazeera, 2016, July 3).

As the number of Syrian refugees increased and their stay extended, public attitudes towards Syrians started to change in a negative direction in the Turkish context. The recent opinion poll conducted by Murat Erdoğan (2022) titled the Syrians Barometer 2021 (SB-2021) reveals “a serious erosion in the level of social solidarity and social acceptance towards Syrians in Turkey” (p. 50) compared to earlier periods. Having been informed by the diminishing prospect of Syrians’ return to their homeland, a change in the attitudes

of host community members “from hospitality to intolerance” (Demirtaş, 2020, p. 155) brings profound consequences for Turkish domestic politics. The changing public opinion on Syrian refugees in a negative direction over time led the government to change its position on them and increasingly encourage the return of Syrian refugees both through its discursive strategies and policy attempts (pp. 159-160).

The Turkish government felt obliged to demonstrate a military presence in Syria because of rising national security concerns. In light of these concerns, Turkey conducted a set of military operations in Syria (Şahin-Mencütek, 2019, p. 102). Within the scope of Operation Euphrates Shield, which lasted between August 2016 and March 2017, the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) entered into northern Syria to fight two separate terror organisations, namely ISIS and Kurdistan Workers’ Party (Kürdistan İşçi Partisi) (PKK). Then, intending to restrict the sphere of influence of the People’s Protection Units (YPG), Turkey launched Operation Olive Branch in 2018 against Kurdish fighters in Afrin, which continued until April 2018 (pp. 250-251).

Turkey further carried out Operation Peace Spring between October and November 2019. Before the operation, President Erdoğan, in September 2019, gave a message to Europe about the possible opening of border gates to those who would like to go to Europe unless the international community demonstrate support for the creation of a safe zone where Syrian refugees returning from Turkey would be settled (Euronews, 2019, September 5). As can be seen, Turkey sought to use Syrian refugees as a bargaining tool in its relations with the EU (Şahin-Mencütek et al., 2020, p. 102). To call for international support, President Erdoğan, in the 74th session of the UN General Assembly in September 2019, introduced the plan that Turkish and US military officials agreed to establish a safe zone in northern Syria (Zontur, 2019, September 22).

Besides cross-border operations, one can observe strict policy measures taken on migration management within the country. In this direction, the İstanbul Governorate issued a press statement requiring the transfer of Syrian nationals not registered in İstanbul to their provinces of registration and deporting unregistered foreigners (NTV, 2019, July 22). Following the implementation of this decision, several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and human rights organisations expressed their concerns and doubts about the violation of the non-refoulement principle. Against this backlash,

Minister of Interior (MoI) Süleyman Soyulu in 2019 explained that this policy seeks to deport irregular migrants who came from Afghanistan and other countries from the Middle East and Africa, not Syrians who are under TP in Turkey (NTV, 2019, July 24). During that time, the issue of the Syrians going to their homeland during Eid was an equally important topic of discussion for the political parties (Euronews, 2019, July 31).

At the beginning of 2020, Turkey's policy of controlling the EU's external borders to prevent the tide of irregular migration to Europe, stipulated in the EU-Turkey Statement, dramatically changed. On February 27, 2020, 34 Turkish soldiers died following the attack of Syrian Regime Forces on the Turkish Army in Idlib. Following the regime attack, Turkey carried out Operation Spring Shield between February 27 and March 5, 2020 (NTV, 2020, March 1). On the other hand, Turkey implemented a kind of "punishment mechanism" (İçduygu & Demiryontar, 2022, p. 325) by opening the border gates for migrants and refugees who would like to go to Europe. In this sense, it terminated the border controls between Turkey and the EU vis-à-vis the indifference of the European countries to the killing of Turkish soldiers in Syria. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan underlined that the decision to open borders would continue if the EU did not fulfil its commitments regarding refugees (Sözcü, 2020, February 29).

As Tsourapas (2021) put it, Turkey aimed to create a second "European refugee crisis" (p. 254) by utilising refugees as diplomatic leverage against European countries. The EU called Turkey to fulfil its commitments regarding border controls. In such an environment, Greece adopted an increasingly assertive policy for those wanting to go to Europe. However, in light of the COVID-19 measures, Turkey closed the border gates after negotiations conducted with the European countries (İçduygu & Demiryontar, 2022, p. 325). As portrayed so far, Turkey's military operations in Syria have provided a "new leverage over the EU when it comes to the management of refugee flows" (Siccardi, 2021, p. 15). After the Spring Shield Operation, 560,000 civilians who had fled the Assad regime's violent attacks and took shelter in the regions close to the Turkish border returned to their homes. Turkey started building more than 50,000 briquette houses to settle civilians in Idlib (TRT Haber, 2021, February 27).

Having accepted that all of the Syrian refugees in Turkey would not return to Syria, the Turkish government already incorporated the integration plans for Syrian refugees

into the following state documents: 11th Development Plan (2019-2023)¹² (Presidency of Strategy and Budget, 2019) and Turkey's Harmonisation Strategy Paper and National Action Plan (2018-2023)¹³ (PMM, 2020). Having been aware of such attempts, İçduygu and Demiryontar (2022) argue that the social cohesion process of Syrian refugees develops through the "host state's discursive strategies and policy measures as well as by itself" (p. 327). In this regard, the Social Cohesion and Life Education started to be given to foreigners in 2019 is a crucial example of the Turkish state's attempts regarding harmonisation. However, large-scale political discussions have also been conducted on the problems faced during the harmonisation of Syrian refugees. In light of Syrian refugees' harmonisation problems, their voluntary return to Syria has become an increasingly debated topic in domestic political agenda, especially with the use of this issue as an election promise by the political parties during the 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections (Yanaşmayan et al., 2019, p. 41).

In line with the worsening public attitudes towards refugees, the Turkish government continued to adopt various discursive strategies and take foreign policy steps to facilitate the return of Syrian refugees to their country of origin (İçduygu & Nimer, 2020, p. 420). In December 2019, the Turkish Parliament made amendments to the LFIP by adding provisions on return (European Council on Refugees and Exiles [ECRE], 2021, p. 40). In this respect, DGMM (today, the institution transformed into PMM) was entitled to cooperate with public institutions and NGOs to provide in-kind or monetary support to irregular migrants who have been deported and want to return (Legislation Information System, 2013, April 11, *Article 60/3*). This support is also valid for those who want to return voluntarily despite having international protection application status or being an international protection beneficiary (*Article 87*).

From 2011 to 2021, public attitudes towards Syrian refugees in Turkey, as well as the policy formulations of the Turkish government targeting Syrians, demonstrated crucial changes compared to the beginning of the Syrian mass migration to Turkey. With

¹² To read the 11th Development Plan (2019-2023), please visit: https://www.sbb.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Eleventh_Development_Plan_2019-2023.pdf

¹³ To read Turkey's Harmonisation Strategy Paper and National Plan of Action (2018-2023), please visit: <https://www.goc.gov.tr/kurumlar/goc.gov.tr/Yayinlar/UYUM-STRATEJI/Uyum-Strateji-Belgesi-ve-Ulusal-Eylem-Plani.pdf>

the deteriorating economic situation and increasing political crises in Turkey, the extended stay of Syrians, besides the growing security concerns, the social acceptance level of host community members towards Syrian refugees has decreased (Erdoğan, 2022, p. 50). Although the Turkish government created policies with the foresight of Syrians' longer or permanent stay in the country, there have also been plans for returning Syrians who want to go to Syria.

In light of all these shifts in refugee governance and refugee politics in Turkey, it is vital to look at the political parties' policy responses towards Syrian refugees. The Syrian refugee issue has represented a critical fault line between the ruling AKP and opposition parties. Since the systematic understanding of the political parties' responses towards refugees requires an insight into the relationship between political position and ideology, the following section will examine the functions of political parties and the ideological drivers of their policy choices regarding immigrants and refugees.

3.2 Functions of Political Parties and Ideological Drivers of Party Positions on Immigrants and Refugees

In modern democracies, political parties are a significant part of the political scene. Regarding the importance of political parties for modern democracy, the Turkish Constitution states that "political parties are indispensable elements of democratic political life" (Gözler, 2018, p. 414). Political parties aim to come to power directly or share power by establishing coalitions to implement their programme. When they are in opposition, political parties seek to check the government. Like NGOs, opposition parties convey the demands of the public to the government. More to the point, they follow to what extent these demands are realised. There are many functions that political parties fulfil. As critical agents of society, political parties try to raise public awareness about social problems. According to Sayarı (2015), "articulation and aggregation" of public interests and "political participation" and "communication" (p. 128) are among the core functions of political parties.

The aim of seizing the government is among the more prominent functions of political parties, which distinguishes them from all other political formations. In modern democracies, the primary mechanism for political parties to come to power is free and

fair elections. As part of their political propaganda, which peaked during the election eve, political parties offer various promises to the electorate to win the voters' favour and attract their interest (Sayarı, 2015, pp. 129-130). They present their ideas and positions on various issues, and migration is one of them. The ruling and opposition parties' policy formulations on immigrants and refugees in relation to their foreign policy priorities and the country's internal dynamics are frequently reflected in their political materials and election promises.

Immigration is one of the issues where political parties' ideological positions differ most from each other (Aydemir, 2022, p. 659). Regarding the relationship between immigration policy and political orientation in the Western context, the relevant literature assumes that left-wing parties are more prone to hold pro-immigration attitudes. In contrast, right-wing parties are considered to advocate for anti-immigration attitudes (Lahav, 1997, p. 401). However, most subsequent empirical studies have underlined the need for paying attention to different areas of international migration while examining the relationship between left-right orientation and immigration policy choices (Massey, 1999, p. 313; Schain, 2008, p. 468; Odmalm, 2011, pp. 1076–1077). In this respect, Natter et al. (2020, pp. 1-2) refer to two theoretical grounds on why we should not directly jump to the conclusion that left-wing parties adopt a pro-immigrant stance, whereas right-wing parties favour an anti-immigrant position. First, it is necessary to point to the internal divisions on immigration policy among the left- and right-wing parties. In this respect, it is expected for political parties' policy formulations to change across different types of immigrants (pp. 1-2). As Betts (2011) suggests, the interests of political actors may change according to the different areas of international migration, such as forced migration, irregular migration, and high-skilled or low-skilled labour migration (p. 137).

Given the subject of the current thesis, one should also question how policy formulations on refugees are shaped along the left-right and/or progressive-conservative ideological orientations. Concerning the party-based approaches to Syrian refugees in the Western context, Aydemir (2022) argues that right-wing political parties/conservatives have more sensitivities about Syrian refugees surrounding national security concerns and support more restrictive policies targeting them compared to the left-wing parties/those affiliated themselves with a progressive ideology (p. 659). The second theoretical ground

identified by Natter et al. (2020) relates to the inclusion of multiple actors and multiple levels in the migration policy (p. 2), which may lead to political parties abandoning their expected stance on immigration. At this stage, the interests of domestic actors, such as the demands of businesses and capital owners for cheap and vulnerable labour, may play a profound role (Belanger & Saracoglu, 2020, pp. 417-421).

However, there is a need to delve deeply into the role of political ideologies in the case of Turkey since the categorisation of political parties in line with their ideological orientations differs from the Western context. As Aydemir (2022) suggests, “ideological cleavages are not established along the traditional left-right or progressive-conservative lines” in Turkish politics (p. 660). Therefore, in the Turkish case, one should note the importance of ethnic and religious identities for the composition of social and party-based fault lines (Aridici, 2022). From this point of view, the role of considerations relevant to ethnic and sectarian identities in determining political party positions on Syrian refugees in the Turkish context will be discussed in detail in *Chapter 4*.

Regarding the role of perceived sectarian affinity in shaping the ruling AKP’s policy formulations on Syrian refugees, it is observed that the party presents its open-door policy towards them as hosting Sunni brothers and sisters (Yanaşmayan et al., 2019, p. 43). According to Aydemir (2022), the ruling AKP’s approach separates itself from the modern Turkish state, which implemented an open-door policy to refugees from the Balkans while refusing ethnic Arabs (p. 661). Regarding the immigration and asylum policy of the Turkish state, Kirişçi (2000, p. 3) shared that Turkey, until very recently, prioritised the Turkish language and a Sunni and Hanafi religious identification as selection criteria for accepting immigrants. In parallel with this, Aydemir (2022, p. 661) and İçduygu and Aksel (2022, pp. 445-446) shed light on how the ruling AKP differs from the previous governments by its welcoming attitude towards ethnic Arabs, previously excluded by the secular elites of the Turkish Republic.

After pointing to the importance of ethnic and religious identities in Turkish politics, we also need to pay attention to how the nature of populism differs between Western and Turkish contexts and how this variation manifests in the political parties’ policy choices on Syrian refugees. As Elçi (2019) shares, populism in the case of Turkey is more recently associated with the ruling AKP and currently manifests itself as an anti-elitism against

the secular bureaucracy and the founding party of the modern Turkish Republic (p. 400). The “us versus them” distinction proposed by the President and AKP leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is based on the differentiation between the “secular elite” versus the “silent Muslim majority” (p. 400). Yanaşmayan and her colleagues (2019) revealed that although similar populist anti-refugee discourses upheld by the radical right-wing parties in Western Europe emerged in Turkish politics, they clarified that their severity could not approach those witnessed in Europe (p. 48). However, there has been an emerging need to consider the role of the 2023 election process and the tendency of politics to gain a populist style for understanding the current situation of populist anti-immigrant discourse in Turkish politics, which can be a topic of another research.

With these issues raised above in mind, the following section introduces the brief historical background of the selected political parties, their current role in the political system, their views on identity definition, and their ideologies. Then, there will be a discussion on these political parties’ proposed solutions to the Syrian refugee issue.

3.3 *Setting the Scene: Political Parties and Syrian Refugees*

3.3.1 *Justice and Development Party*

The Justice and Development Party has been in power since 2002. It was formally founded by the reformist wing of the National Outlook Movement (Milli Görüş Hareketi) (MGH)¹⁴ in August 2001. When the AKP was established in 2001, the party’s leading figures strived to distinguish the newly founded party from the MGH. There was a constant effort to convince public opinion in the domestic and international spheres that this would be a new movement. The party presented itself as conservative, centre-right, pro-Western, pro-secular, reformist, and committed to democracy.

Under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the AKP enjoyed great success by forming a single-party government in the November 2002 elections. With a landslide victory, representing another milestone in the party’s history, the AKP candidate and

¹⁴ It is a movement representing political Islam in Turkey led by Necmettin Erbakan in the late 1960s. The MGH pioneered the establishment of several Islamist political parties in the Turkish political arena in the 1970s that “rejected Kemalism and offered an Islamist path as an alternative to Kemalist notions of secular nationalism, Westernisation, and modernisation” (Yılmaz & Bashirov, 2018, p. 1815).

party leader Erdoğan received 51.80 per cent of the votes in the 2014 presidential elections and thus became the Turkish Republic's 12th President (Yeni Şafak, 2014, August 11). However, the AKP faced a real challenge in the June 2015 parliamentary elections since it failed to win a parliamentary majority for the first time since 2002. According to Grigoriadis (2016), the HDP's entry into the Turkish Parliament played a prominent role in interrupting the single-party rule of AKP (p. 39). Following the failure of the coalition talks among the political parties and the increasing security risk because of the clashes between Turkish security forces and PKK (Bardakçı, 2016, pp. 11-14), another parliamentary election took place on November 1, 2015. The AKP repeated its success in establishing a single-party government by increasing its vote share.

Having taken the MHP's support, the ruling AKP won the constitutional referendum in 2017, proposing a change from a parliamentary to a presidential system. Then, the AKP formed the People's Alliance with the MHP to campaign for elections in 2018. Although the People's Alliance achieved considerable success in the 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections, it lost big cities to the opposition in the 2019 local elections. According to Kınıklıoğlu (2020), the prevalent discontent among host community members stemming from the presence of Syrian refugees played a big part in the ruling AKP's loss of most major cities during the 2019 local elections (p. 2).

As the ruling party, the AKP has been trying to show that Turkey is in full command of the Syrian refugee issue. Besides the role of political position in shaping policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees, identity politics plays a critical role. According to Balta et al. (2022), for the AKP, the harmonisation of Syrian refugees is not a complex process to ensure, given the sectarian affinity between Syrian refugees and host community members and the belief in the "spatiality of the Turkish citizenship based on the Muslim identity" (p. 15). The AKP elite frequently emphasises the religious ties between the two communities with the aim of relieving the concerns of host community members stemming from the extended stay of Syrian refugees.

Drawing on the idea of "religious solidarity" (Yanaşmayan et al., 2019, p. 37), the AKP points to the Sunni identity of Syrians arriving in Turkey, which has also been prioritised in its own national identity understanding. Such an attitude aligns with the ruling AKP's strong emphasis on religiosity rather than ethnicity in the definition of the Turkish national identity (Aridici, 2022, p. 706). Accordingly, the ruling AKP has

redefined the identity of Syrian refugees as Muslim brothers and sisters, thereby intending to pursue a religion-inspired value system through its asylum policy (Demirtaş, 2020, pp. 156-157). In line with this aim, it has avoided referring to ethnicity-based differences between the two communities.

When it comes to the proposed migration policies for the future of Syrian refugees in Turkey, it should be noted that the ruling AKP's ultimate objective for the Syrian refugees has been to achieve their honoured and voluntary return to Syria. In this direction, the ruling AKP conducted several cross-border operations in Syria to create safe zones so that Syrian refugees in Turkey could be resettled. On the opposite end, President Erdoğan shared the plan to grant Syrian refugees Turkish citizenship in July 2016. Although President Erdoğan's July 2016 announcement appeared to be valid for the entire Syrian population, he later emphasised that Syrians' skill levels would be considered in their acquisition of Turkish citizenship (Makovsky, 2019, p. 11). In 2019, however, President Erdoğan's discourses on granting citizenship to Syrians, one more time, seemed to apply to all Syrian refugees, where he underlined the importance of Syrians' naturalisation to ensure they do not live irregularly and find a job quickly (Yeniçağ, 2019, December 13). As the statements demonstrate, the AKP's proposed policies for the future of Syrian refugees have ranged from voluntary repatriation to granting citizenship (Demirtaş, 2020, pp. 159-160).

3.3.2 *Republican People's Party*

As the main opposition party, the secular and centre-left Republican People's Party is a prominent actor in Turkish politics. According to the number of representatives in the 27th legislative term, the CHP is the second-largest political party in the Turkish Parliament. The CHP, founded under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, defines itself as a social democrat. The November 2002 elections, in which the AKP won the required number of seats to establish the single-party government, represented the beginning of the long opposition marathon for the CHP.

In Turkish politics, the CHP, from time to time, cooperated with other opposition parties. For example, the CHP cooperated with the MHP in the 2014 presidential elections by nominating a roof candidate. The AKP's loss of its parliamentary majority in the June 2015 elections for the first time since 2002 further raised the CHP's hopes of coming to

power as part of the non-AKP coalition. However, the MHP's fierce opposition to joining the coalition involving the HDP dashed the CHP's hopes (Bardakçı, 2016, pp. 11-12). Before the 2018 general elections, the centre-left CHP established an electoral alliance called Nation Alliance with the İYİ Party, SP, and DP. The Nation Alliance failed to gain parliamentary superiority in the 2018 general elections. However, in the 2019 local elections, it won most major cities.

Contrary to the ruling AKP favouring the role of religious affinity between Syrians and host community members in facilitating the integration of the former, the CHP underlines the importance of cultural and ethnic affinity in such a process. In such an environment, the CHP elite perceives the presence of Syrian refugees in Turkey as a challenge to the Turkish national identity. Furthermore, as the secular party, the CHP voices its concerns over the AKP's intentions to threaten Turkey's political secularism by featuring Syrians' Muslim identity (Balta et al., 2022, p. 15).

For the future of Syrians living in Turkey, in its 2018 election manifesto, the CHP notes that it would support the voluntary, gradual and safe return of Syrians under TP (CHP, 2018, p. 125). On September 28, 2019, CHP organised the *International Syria Conference titled "A Path to Peace"*. In the conference, CHP highlighted the need to restore diplomatic relations with the Syrian government to ensure the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland. Furthermore, the CHP called for promoting coordination with donor states and institutions to ensure the sustainability of these returns. Concerning the harmonisation, although the party has not shared any specific plan, it shortly voices this option for the remaining few Syrian refugees after the conflict in Syria is settled (Sudagezer & Okutan, 2019, September 28). In this respect, the emphasis on the need to create conditions and opportunities that would contribute to facilitating the voluntary return of Syrian refugees to their homeland stands out in the CHP's party documents.

3.3.3 *People's Democratic Party*

The People's Democratic Party is the second-largest opposition party represented in the Turkish Parliament according to its number of representatives in the 27th legislative term. With the establishment of the party, the Kurdish political movement and some political parties and organisations of the Turkish left have come under the umbrella of this left-wing party. The HDP started to increase its influence over Turkish political life

after the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi) (BDP)¹⁵ deputies switched to HDP in 2014 (Grigoriadis, 2016, pp. 39-40). The first positive sign showing the HDP's potential to become a prominent actor in the Turkish political scene came in the August 2014 presidential elections, when the HDP candidate and party co-president Selahattin Demirtaş received 9.76 per cent of the votes (p. 41). More significantly, the HDP achieved a resounding success in the June 7, 2015, parliamentary elections when it secured 80 seats in the Turkish Parliament (p. 42). The HDP's electoral success on June 7 represents a turning point in terms of the Kurdish national movement (p. 39). In the November 1, 2015, parliamentary elections, the HDP maintained its vote share above the 10 per cent threshold, although it experienced a decline in its electoral performance (p. 39).

The HDP, which is Kurdish-dominated and strongly leftist, is the one that has the most inclusive identity definition among the selected five political parties. When we examine the HDP's party program, it is observed that the party directly refers to migrants and refugees in constructing its own national identity understanding (HDP, n.d.). In this respect, the party expresses that it will also become the party of displaced people. As an extension of this stance, we see a considerable emphasis on improving the humanitarian conditions of migrants and refugees in the discourses of the party elite. In line with such a humanitarian stance, the HDP frequently criticises both the ruling coalition and the opposition for instrumentalising Syrian refugees by overlooking their rights. Having differed from other political parties, the HDP addresses the Syrian refugee issue from the normative dimension of refugee protection (İlgi & Memişoğlu, 2017, p. 88; Demirtaş, 2020, p. 162).

As to the proposed migration policies on the future of Syrian refugees, it is observed that the HDP is the only party in Parliament that frequently talks about the rights of migrants and refugees. Concerning the voluntary return of Syrian refugees, the party advocates for leaving the return issue to the jurisdiction of Syrians themselves. According to the HDP, granting citizenship to Syrians is significant for ensuring a dignified and sustainable life for these people. Having referred to the fact that opposing the status of citizenship to be granted to Syrian refugees may hinder these people's harmonisation, the

¹⁵ The BDP, representing the pro-Kurdish position in Turkey, existed from 2008 to 2014.

report prepared by HDP's Research Unit emphasises the importance of adopting a rights-based dimension to Syrians' naturalisation (HDP, 2016, p. 56). As is apparent in the approach of the HDP, the Syrian refugees' right to comment on their future has been underscored.

3.3.4 *Nationalist Movement Party*

The Nationalist Movement Party is the fourth biggest political party in the Turkish Parliament according to its number of representatives in the 27th legislative term, whose history dates back to the mid-1960s. In line with its attempt at the absorption of Islam into Turkish nationalism, the MHP adopted the Turkish-Islamic synthesis (Türk-İslam Sentezi)¹⁶ (Celep, 2010, p. 131). Since its formation in 1969, the "fortification of nationalism with Islam" (Cengiz, 2021, p. 469) has become the primary element of the MHP's ideological stance. Following Türkeş's death in 1997, the MHP selected Devlet Bahçeli for the party's leadership, leading to "a moderation of MHP's political stance" (Celep, 2010, p. 133).

Given the AKP's loss of its dominant party status following the June 2015 elections, as mentioned before, there was a political debate on the MHP's possible partnership with the CHP and HDP. However, the far-right nationalist MHP refused to become part of any coalition government involving the HDP (Cengiz, 2021, pp. 475-476). It was against such a background that the MHP obtained poorer results in the November 2015 elections by securing only 40 seats in the Turkish Parliament compared to the June 2015 elections (Yeni Şafak, n.d.). Later, the MHP partnered with the AKP during the 2017 referendum, which paved the way for the political system change. More importantly, before the 2018 parliamentary and presidential elections, the MHP participated in the ruling alliance.

After participating in the ruling coalition, the MHP has become less vocal about Syrian refugees (Aydemir, 2022, p. 672). Despite its ultranationalist stance and demographic sensitivities, the party has left its critical attitude towards the AKP's treatment of Syrian refugees. Before the partnership with the ruling AKP, similar to the stance of CHP and the İYİ Party, it directed its harsh criticisms towards the AKP

¹⁶ The Turkish Islamic Synthesis sees Islam as "one of the components of Turkish national culture" (Cengiz, 2021, p. 472).

government's Syria policy and accused it of leading to Syrian mass migration to the country (Balta et al., 2022, p. 15). In this respect, the political considerations of the MHP have gained saliency in determining the party's attitudes towards Syrian refugees.

The partnership also impacted the proposed solutions by the party for the future of Syrian refugees living in Turkey. In line with the ruling AKP, the MHP's political agenda embeds the voluntary return of Syrian refugees to their homeland. Contrary to the CHP and IYI Party, the party refrains from explicitly voicing the need to improve relations with the Assad government. Instead, the emphasis on creating safe zones and resettling Syrians from Turkey to these places is robust in the discourses of the MHP elite (Balta et al., 2022, p. 20). In other words, for MHP, the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland depends on Turkey's role in Syria.

3.3.5 *Good Party*

The Good Party, maintaining a nationalist stance, was formally established in October 2017 by former MHP members dissatisfied with their own party's course. It emerged as an alternative nationalist party to the MHP for the nationalist electorate against President Erdoğan and the AKP (Aydemir, 2022, p. 660). The party leader and presidential candidate, Meral Akşener, received 7.29 per cent of the votes in the 2018 presidential elections (Yeni Şafak, 2018a, June 27). Since the IYI Party had concerns about staying below the 10 per cent threshold, it cooperated with CHP, SP, and DP under the Nation Alliance ahead of the 2018 parliamentary elections. According to the number of seats it won in the 2018 parliamentary elections (43 seats), the IYI Party is the fifth-largest party in the Turkish Parliament (Yeni Şafak, 2018b, June 27).

As one of the largest opposition parties in the Parliament, the IYI Party has been the most vocal critic of the AKP's treatment of the Syrian refugee issue. The party frequently criticises the AKP government for undermining Turkey's national interests and losing control of the Syrian refugee issue. Besides its position in the political system as an opposition party, the conceptualisation of the national identity definition of the IYI Party, following its ideological orientation, plays a defining role in its policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees. Like CHP, the IYI Party defines Turkishness more through its references to ethnic and cultural dimensions of citizenship and, therefore, perceives Syrian refugees

as a threat and excludes them from the national identity definition (Balta et al., 2022, p. 15).

In parallel with its alliance partner CHP's emphasis on the voluntary return of Syrian refugees, the IYI Party calls on the ruling coalition to normalise relations with the Assad government (Balta et al., 2022, p. 18). In 2019, the IYI Party organised the "*Workshop on the Return of Syrians to their Homeland*," and party leader Akşener announced the "three-stage return plan" for Syrians in Turkey (Milliyet, 2019, December 17). In the first phase of the plan, the Preparation Phase, the IYI Party underlines the importance of starting official negotiations with the Syrian administration (Independent Türkçe, 2019, December 16). Having seen the return of Syrian refugees as the only solution to the Syrian refugee issue, the IYI Party rejects any plans regarding the local integration of Syrian refugees.

After pointing to the differences that stem from the position of the political parties in the political system and ideological orientations in shaping their policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees and proposed solutions for these people, the following section will contextualise the political parties' responses to Syrian refugees in line within the context of significant political events in Turkey.

3.4 Contextualising Political Party Positions on Syrian Refugees

The process, which started with the Syrian refugees' migration to Turkey as small groups, underwent massive changes between 2011 and 2021. Many internal and external factors have played a crucial role in determining the governance of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Turkey experienced the changing political dynamics during this period. For example, upon the arrival of Syrian refugees in Turkey, the country also witnessed various elections: four general elections (2011, June 2015, November 2015, 2018), two local elections plus the renewal of İstanbul's mayoral election (2014, March 2019, June 2019), two presidential elections (2014, 2018), and one referendum (April 2017). Besides elections, a series of political events emerged within and beyond Turkey's national borders that are highly significant for domestic, regional, and international politics, affecting the extent and nature of the debate on Syrian refugees across Turkish political parties. Here, it is important to note that this thesis does not seek to delve deeply into the

consequences of these events on policy responses of political parties regarding Syrian refugees, which is beyond the scope of the current thesis. However, the resulting picture would be deficient since examining these responses without considering the key developments that impact Turkey in domestic and international politics.

Van der Brug et al. (2015) note that the politicisation of an issue depends on whether an interest in or attention to that issue exists or whether different ideas on that issue appear. According to them, the absence of these two dimensions indicates that the issue has yet to become politicised (p. 7). Based on this framework, İçduygu (2017) suggests that “Turkey’s Syrian refugee issue did not show a clear politicisation trend between 2011 and 2014” (p. 36), which became evident only after 2014. As İçduygu argues, the large-scale presence of Syrian refugees, their extended stay, and the enforcement of TPR were impactful in politicising the Syrian refugee issue (p. 36). Similarly, the transition in the settlement patterns of Syrian refugees from camp-based areas to urban ones became influential in further politicising the presence of Syrians in the country, given their increasing interaction with host community members. In this respect, the contribution of the elections to the politicisation of the Syrian refugee issue, even if it is limited until the 2018 parliamentary and presidential elections, cannot be overlooked.

Starting from September 2014, the siege of Kobani by ISIS in northern Syria led to the large-scale migration of Syrian Kurds to Turkey (Balta et al., 2022, p. 9), which made the HDP highly interested in the evolution of the Syrian conflict and the situation of Syrian Kurds who arrived in the country. Later, Europe witnessed a refugee crisis in which almost 1 million refugees and migrants arrived. In such an environment, the exit of Syrians from Turkey became one of the most discussed topics among Turkish political parties. With the EU’s externalisation policies, resulting in the EU-Turkey Statement, a significant “political opportunity structure” (İçduygu, 2017, p. 37) emerged to enable the politicisation of the Syrian refugee issue. The AKP elites started to reconstruct the identities of Europe and Turkey as the “one that does not share responsibility” and the “one that assumes a serious responsibility towards refugees” (p. 37), respectively. On the other hand, opposition parties started to accuse both the ruling AKP and the EU of violating the human rights of refugees by bargaining over the lives of these people, which contributed to the further politicisation of the Syrian refugee issue.

With the extended stay of Syrian refugees in Turkey and limited resettlement opportunities, government officials started increasingly discussing the future of Syrians. For instance, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan shared his plans to grant Turkish citizenship to Syrians in June 2016. As voiced by İçduygu (2017), granting citizenship to Syrians has become a divisive issue for political parties, making Syrians a vital part of domestic contestation in socio-economic and cultural senses (p. 37). However, it should be noted that the MHP's partnership with AKP under the People's Alliance has moderated the party's fierce opposition to Syrian refugees' acquisition of Turkish citizenship. Much earlier, the failed coup on 15 July 2016 decreased the saliency of the citizenship issue among the political parties (Balta et al., 2022, p. 11) by bringing large-scale discussion in domestic politics on the internal threats to political stability.

As another significant development in Turkish political history following the coup attempt, the 2017 Referendum led to the switching from a parliamentary system to a Turkish-type presidential system. Thus, Turkey increasingly witnesses the formation of alliances between political parties. In this respect, the AKP and MHP have been cooperating under the People's Alliance, whereas the CHP and İYİ Party, together with DP and SP, formed the Nation Alliance. As a result of these new formations, one should note that how the AKP government and opposition put the Syrian refugee issue on their agenda has changed.

Based on the actual and perceived security concerns, significant developments also emerged with the militarisation of Turkey's policy towards Syria. For example, Turkey carried out various cross-border military operations in Syria to prevent the tide of new immigration from there and fight terrorism. These aims have been accompanied by the issue of establishing a safe zone to ensure the voluntary return of Syrian refugees (Şahin-Mencütek, 2019, pp. 107-108). In this regard, all these developments have affected the policy decisions of the Turkish political parties regarding Syrian refugees. Appealing to sensitivities expressed by host community members ranging from security to identity, political parties have contributed to further politicisation of the Syrian refugee issue in the meantime.

In light of all these significant political developments in Turkey, the following chapter discusses the drivers behind the party-based approaches towards Syrian refugees

and the shifts in their policy responses with the transition from the initial stage to the protracted one by using the analytical framework introduced in *Chapter 1*.



Chapter 4:

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 *International Politics of Forced Migration Dimension*

The first pillar of the current analytical framework is the international politics of forced migration, consisting of two specific factors. First, the foreign policy aims of the Turkish political parties regarding the Syrian conflict are significant in shaping their policy choices on Syrian refugees. Second, the concerns about the role of the EU in the Syrian refugee issue play a defining role in the party-based approaches in Turkey towards Syrian refugees.

4.1.1 *Foreign Policy Aims of the Political Parties in the Syrian Conflict*

The literature review sheds light on the mutual relationship between the foreign policy priorities of states and their policies targeting refugees, as addressed in *Chapter 2*. From the perspective of the international politics of forced migration pillar, the current thesis reveals that Turkish political parties' foreign policy objectives in the Syrian conflict have played a crucial role in differentiating their positions on Syrian refugees since the beginning.

The ruling AKP has had the most assertive foreign policy objectives in the Syrian conflict among the political parties in question. At the beginning of the Syrian conflict, the AKP government was determined to become a regional power in the Middle East (Şahin-Mencütek, 2019, p. 103). During that period, despite the reluctance of global political actors to step into the Syrian conflict, AKP did not abandon its assertive foreign policy strategies. In line with its expectation that the Assad regime would be short-lived, the ruling AKP supported opposition forces that fought against the Syrian regime forces. Given the failure of the opposition forces supported by the ruling AKP to overthrow the Assad regime, the AKP government felt the increasing need to reshape its foreign policy strategies regarding the Syrian conflict.

After 2016, mainly because of the YPG's rising area of influence, Turkey conducted unilateral cross-border operations against the Syrian Kurdish groups, which got severe criticism from the HDP. While carrying out such interventions in northern Syria, the AKP

government claimed that the main reason behind these interventions was to ensure the national security of Turkey. However, contrary to such a defensive argument, while making a statement on Operation Euphrates Shield in 2016, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan noted, “(...) We entered there [Syria] to terminate the reign of the cruel Assad, (...), and not for any other reason.” (BBC News Türkçe, 2016, November 29). President Erdoğan’s statement represents a kind of proof of the assertive foreign policy strategies pursued by the ruling AKP in the Syrian conflict vis-a-vis the Syrian government and its aim of undermining the image of the Assad regime.

As a justification for Turkey’s cross-border operations in northern Syria, the AKP elite frequently underlines their aim to facilitate the voluntary return of Syrian refugees to the safe zone in northern Syria, where the Turkish army has control. However, while doing that, the ruling AKP avoids explicitly underlining the need for restoring relations with the Assad regime, which could mean the legitimisation of the regime. During the interview, the AKP official addressed the voluntary return of Syrian refugees to their countries of origin in relation to the operations Turkey conducted in northern Syria and the safe zone where the Turkish army has control. Having underlined that the safe zone the AKP government aimed to create was established, the AKP official shared, “550,000 Syrians returned to this area voluntarily. We seek to ensure the return of another group of 1.5 million Syrians. In accordance with international law, we carry out the return process in a safe, voluntary, and dignified manner.” (Interview, 2022, July 1). As the AKP official’s statement exemplifies, the ruling AKP tries to show that the main reason behind the cross-border operations in Syria is facilitating the return of Syrian refugees. Furthermore, there is an emphasis on how the conditions of return the AKP upholds are in line with the norms of the international refugee regime.

Before joining the ruling coalition, the MHP held the AKP government responsible for causing mass migration from Syria because of the latter’s foreign policy errors in the Syrian conflict. In this respect, the MHP elite portrayed Turkey’s involvement in the Syrian conflict as interfering in another country’s internal affairs. Having refrained from supporting any warring parties in the Syrian conflict, the MHP drew attention to the unfavourable situation of Turkomans in northern Syria and Iraq by sharing concerns over the need to guarantee demographic balance to the advantage of ethnic fellows (Devran & Özcan, 2016, p. 41; Aydemir, 2022, p. 668). Therefore, the considerations relevant to the

demographic composition in the neighbouring regions of Syria induced by the presence of ethnic affinity with Turkomans were remarkable in the party's foreign policy vision regarding the Syrian conflict. For example, MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli emphasised the need to handle the problems of Turkomans in the neighbouring regions of Syria by ensuring their safety and welfare. In this sense, he often criticised the ruling AKP's apathetic attitude towards Turkomans in Syria and its neighbouring countries.

However, after joining the ruling coalition, MHP has softened its critical stance on the AKP government's foreign policy objectives in the Syrian conflict. In this respect, the MHP expressed its support for Turkey's unilateral military operations in northern Syria on different occasions and considered them as a combat against terrorism. Similar to the ruling AKP, the MHP sees taking such military measures as necessary foreign policy steps to inhibit the likelihood of new migratory movements to Turkey, accompanied by the need to create safe zones to facilitate the return of Syrian refugees to their countries of origin. In line with the party's strong desire to ensure the voluntary return of Syrian refugees to their homeland, it is observed that the party is one of the most important supporters of the ruling AKP's idea of creating a safe zone in northern Syria. For instance, in 2019, MHP leader Bahçeli pointed out, "Syrian refugees who are guests in our country should be gradually sent back and settled in areas that are cleared from terrorism and ensured safety. There is no any other option, no longer remains." (Sözcü, 2019, July 27). As can be seen in Bahçeli's statement, the idea of creating a safe zone stands out in the MHP's policy agenda on Syrian refugees, and this issue has been portrayed as a sole remedy to accelerate the return of Syrian refugees.

During the interviews, the party officials were asked about their opinions on the ruling AKP's foreign policy strategies regarding Syria. In this sense, an official from MHP avoided raising any criticisms against AKP's foreign policy objectives and Turkey's direct involvement in the Syrian conflict. Rather, the party elite expressed discontent with the hostile attitudes of the Middle Eastern states towards Turkey's Syria policy. In a similar but from a different perspective, the MHP official accused the EU and European countries of becoming apathetic towards the safe zone issue Turkey has been upholding from earlier times, as follows: "Turkey continues to be home to almost 4 million Syrians. However, the EU did not support Turkey's efforts to create a safe zone in Syria. This is truly an apparent expression of the double standards of the European

Union and the West towards Turkey.” (Interview, 2022, April 13). As the MHP official’s statement exemplifies, after participating in the People’s Alliance, it is politically oriented and ideologically driven that the MHP refrains from accusing the assertive foreign policy pursued by the ruling AKP in the Syrian conflict. Instead, the criticisms directed towards the Western actors for leaving Turkey alone in its policy attempts to ensure the return of Syrian refugees are prevalent in the discourses of the MHP elite.

Compared to the ruling coalition’s parties, the CHP and IYI Party have been less assertive about the developments in the Syrian civil war. Both parties have severely problematised the ruling AKP’s direct involvement in the Syrian conflict and its support for the opposition forces aiming to topple the Assad government. Contrary to the ambitious foreign policy strategies pursued by the ruling AKP in the Syrian conflict, the CHP, in its November 2015 election manifesto, makes clear, “As a political party that can negotiate with all parties to the [Syrian] civil conflict, we will not take a stand in the conflict.” (CHP, 2015, p. 182). Accusing the ruling AKP of pursuing an “adventurist, arrogant, opportunity-oriented, and sectarian” foreign policy objectives in Syria (CHP, 2018, p. 124), the CHP’s 2018 election manifesto similarly indicates that the party will leave such a foreign policy understanding when it comes to power.

According to CHP, providing military assistance to non-state actors fighting in Syria, perceived as the manifestation of Turkey’s “interventionist” approach, has deepened the Syrian conflict. Having drawn attention to the need for developing a new Syria policy, the CHP underlines the importance of normalising relations with the Syrian administration (CHP, 2019). During the interview, an official from CHP also raised severe criticisms targeting the foreign policy errors of the ruling AKP in the Syrian conflict. The emphasis on restoring relations with the Assad government was also remarkable in the words of the CHP official, which makes clear that “Since the returnees [Syrian refugees who voluntarily return to Syria from Turkey], shall not be criminalised, there is a need for dialogue with the Syrian administration.” (Interview, 2022, April 12). In addition to this, the CHP official discussed how Middle Eastern actors have perceived the ruling AKP’s Syria policy. Regarding this issue, the CHP official noted:

“Our neighbours in the Middle East paid more attention to whether Turkey had a neutral policy and saw that Turkey was pursuing a sectarian-oriented policy in the Middle East. Furthermore, the military operations conducted in Syria were

considered Turkey's interference in Syria's territorial integrity." (Interview, 2022, April 12)

The above remarks of the CHP official reveal the discontent with the ruling AKP's Syria policy and the impact of its sectarian and assertive policy on the reputation of Turkey in the neighbouring regions of Syria.

Similar to what we observed in the case of CHP, the accusations levelled against the ruling AKP of pursuing a foreign policy along religious and sectarian lines in the Middle East have been prevalent in the discourses of the IYI Party elite. Having expressed discontent with this kind of policy, the IYI Party, in its party program, mentions its objective of establishing good neighbourhood relations (IYI Party, n.d., p. 62) and calls for making a deal with the Syrian administration. During the interview, an official from the IYI Party also severely criticised the AKP's assertive foreign policy attempts in Syria by focusing on its direct involvement in the Syrian conflict and supporting armed opposition groups against Syrian government forces. In the words of the IYI Party official, "Turkey is seen as an occupying state. Turkey's open-door policy did not bring about any benefit. Have you heard anything from the Muslim world, 'Turkey did this, and we also shall do that'? On the contrary, Arabs united in their hostility towards Erdoğan. There is a need for coming to the table with the Syrian regime." (Interview, 2022, April 11). As is apparent in the attitudes of CHP and IYI Party, criticisms directed towards assertive foreign policy objectives of the ruling AKP in the Syrian conflict play a prominent role in determining both parties' foreign policy formulations on Syrian refugees. They come together in making calls for restoring relations with the Assad government to ensure the return of Syrian refugees.

HDP elite similarly holds the ruling AKP responsible for worsening the Syrian civil conflict by pursuing a sectarian foreign policy in the Syrian conflict and interfering in Syria's internal affairs. In this respect, pointing to the need to change the ruling AKP's foreign policy vision on Syria, an official from HDP stated, "Turkey has to make its relations with Syria constructive. Without doing that, it is not possible for Syria to become a stable country." (Interview, 2022, April 20). Having depicted the Syrian administration as the Assad dictatorship and the Syrian opposition as Salafi-Jihadists, the HDP sees the Kurds active in northern Syria as the only legitimate side of the war (Devran & Özcan, 2016, p. 43). In line with what is indicated in the literature on Turkish party-based

approaches towards Syrian refugees, the HDP levels severe criticisms against the ruling AKP for overlooking the situation of ethnic Kurds in northern Syria (Aydemir, 2022, p. 668). In this sense, the HDP is closely interested in the demographic balance in Syria, confirming that such considerations play a defining role in the party's foreign policy positions on Syrian refugees.

Turkey's unilateral cross-border military operations to prevent YPG from spreading its area of influence have exacerbated HDP's concerns about the geopolitical dynamics in northern Syria. In this respect, the military involvement and foreign policy attempts of the ruling AKP in Syria have been perceived by the HDP as demographic engineering by overlooking the rights of Kurds. Regarding Operation Peace Spring in 2019, HDP Diyarbakır MP Garo Paylan, for instance, noted that "(...) Playing with demographics is a crime. Israel is occupying Palestinian lands with the same kind of arguments" (Sabah, 2019, October 16). Similar arguments were also expressed during the interview with the HDP official. Having underlined the settlement policies of the ruling AKP in northern Syria has brought about another displacement, the HDP official noted, "AKP has the policy of settling Arabs in the areas where Kurds had been displaced." (Interview, 2022, April 20). As Paylan and the interviewed HDP official address, sensitivities around northern Syria's demographic composition stemmed from the party's doubts about the ruling AKP's intentions to change the political demography in the region through military operations and settlement policies.

Furthermore, the HDP official made accusations against the ruling AKP of interfering in the internal affairs of the Arab world. Having been critical of the ruling AKP's Neo-Ottomanist engagement with the Middle East, the HDP official underlined, "Throughout the Arab world, President Erdoğan is currently recognised as a dictator and therefore is no longer perceived to as a role model for the Middle East." (Interview, 2022, April 20), which negatively affects Turkey's reputation in the eyes of Syria's neighbouring countries. Furthermore, the HDP official blamed the AKP government for supporting Salafi-Jihadist groups, such as the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), commonly known as (Tahrir al-Sham), which is a Sunni opposition group. Having criticised the ruling AKP for exacerbating the Syrian conflict, the HDP official noted that the "AKP had anticipated the overthrow of the Assad government in the short run. When the Assad government maintains its rule, the ruling AKP decided to fight against Kurdish groups in

Syria.” (Interview, 2022, April 20). As exemplified in the HDP official’s critical attitude towards the ruling AKP’s foreign policy objectives in Syria, the discontent with the AKP’s Neo-Ottomanist policies intersects with the party’s sensitivities around the possible changes in the demographic composition to the disadvantage of Kurds in Syria.

4.1.2 Concerns about the Role of the EU in the Syrian Refugee Issue

During Turkey’s initial responses to Syrian mass migration, the EU as an external actor did not matter much for the Turkish political parties to shape their positions on the Syrian refugee issue. Having recognised that the Syrian refugees would not be temporary in Turkey, the Turkish government started calling on the international community to provide financial support and extend resettlement options in late 2012 (Şahin-Mencütek, 2019; Şahin-Mencütek et al., 2020). With the recognition that the presence of Syrian refugees in the country would not be temporary, the calls on the EU for increasing assistance have gained salience in the discourses of the ruling AKP. In such an environment, the EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement, signed on December 16, 2013, was one of the early signals that migration-driven diplomacy would become one of the main determinants of the future of EU-Turkey relations.

While the stay of Syrian refugees in Turkey has become a significant issue for the country’s domestic political agenda, the irregular immigration of Syrian refugees from Turkey has been a high-priority topic for the country’s foreign policy since mid-2015 (Şahin-Mencütek, 2019, p. 110; İçduygu & Aksel, 2022, pp. 450-451). In line with the increased level of importance dedicated to the exit of Syrian refugees from Turkey and the EU’s growing externalisation efforts of its migration management, particularly after the 2015 refugee crisis, the role of the EU in the Syrian refugee issue has gained saliency among Turkish political parties.

Following the European Agenda on Migration in May 2015 and JAP in October 2015, the EU-Turkey Statement of March 18, 2016, was introduced, through which Turkey sought political benefits and financial support. The large-scale discussion on the EU-Turkey Statement at the political party level proves that the Syrian refugees have been an important foreign policy topic for both the ruling AKP and other political parties in the Turkish context. Compared to opposition parties, the ruling AKP has been more

assertive about using the refugee issue as a bargaining item in Turkey's relations with the EU.

For the ruling AKP, the Syrian refugee issue is an important foreign policy tool to promote Turkey in the international arena as a responsible actor that provides every kind of help to those in dire need as opposed to the apathy of the Western actors. The AKP elite frequently announces that they expect the EU to fulfil its commitments in the EU-Turkey Statement. In particular, the party leadership retaliates by threatening the EU to suspend the implementation of the readmission agreement and migration deal. For instance, Turkish Prime Minister and AKP leader Ahmet Davutoğlu, one month after signing the EU-Turkey Statement, threatened the EU as follows: "(...) If the EU does not keep its word, including the migrants deal, we will cancel all agreements" (France24, 2016, April 19).

Upon the European Parliament's resolution to temporarily suspend accession talks with Turkey based on human rights violations in the latter on November 24, 2016, President Erdoğan adopted a much harsher stance and threatened the EU to open border gates to those who would like to go to Europe (BBC News Türkçe, 2016, November 25). According to various scholars (Şahin-Mencütek, 2019, pp. 115-117; Tsourapas, 2019, pp. 474-476), the ruling AKP acts opportunistically in its relations with the EU and tries to obtain certain economic gains and political concessions by instrumentalising the refugee issue.

In an environment where the ruling AKP is increasingly discontent with the EU's failure to fulfil its commitments as part of the migration diplomacy with Turkey, the Syrian refugee issue has provided the ruling AKP with "an opportunity to present a positive image of Turkey as opposed to a negative image of Europe" (Demirtaş, 2020, p. 158). Presenting Turkey as the "conscience of an age without conscience" (AKP Presidency of Social Policies, 2018, p. 4), the AKP, in the report titled "*Brotherhood Knows No Borders*", criticises the European countries for watching the human tragedy of Syrian refugees. The references to Turkey's "benevolence and moral superiority" in contrast to the "inhuman and immoral image of the EU" were similarly raised during the interview. While responding to the criticisms directed towards the legitimacy of the EU-Turkey Statement, an official from AKP noted that Europe is the one that violates the human rights of refugees. Reminding that "This deal was not made since the EU wanted

it, but so that people would not die”, the AKP official underlined that “Turkey approached the EU to share the burden”. Therefore, the AKP official stated that “the EU’s intention needs to be questioned” (Interview, 2022, July 1).

The refugee issue is always voiced by the AKP elite whenever EU-Turkey relations reach a deadlock. A recent example of this came in late February 2020 when the tensions between the EU and Turkey escalated with the opening of border gates to Europe. Emphasising Turkey’s critical role between Syria and European countries, the ruling AKP frequently seeks to show that Turkey bears the burden of the Syrian refugee issue unequally, whereas the EU and European countries try to run from their responsibilities. In this respect, the ruling AKP has attracted severe criticism that Turkey uses the Syrian refugee issue as leverage in its negotiations with the EU from the international community and Turkish opposition parties. In response to such criticisms, the AKP official during the interview noted:

“Migration is the issue of the world, not just of neighbouring countries. It is not fair to completely put it on Turkey’s shoulders. When it comes to burden sharing, Europe is stingy. Burden sharing exists in international law. We need to see what others [European countries] are not doing. They violate international laws.” (Interview, 2022, July 1)

The AKP official’s statement clearly underscores the perceived contrast between the asylum policies of Turkey and the EU. As can be seen from the above quotation, Turkey was presented as a generous and responsible country in its approach towards refugees by showing how it respects international norms as opposed to a negative image of European countries. The words of the AKP official give insights into how the Syrian refugee issue has strengthened the “AKP’s construction of Westernism” (Demirtaş, 2020, p. 158). At this point, we should underline that the EU dimension of the AKP’s position on Syrian refugees relates to not only political and economic concerns but also identity-related ones.

Following the ruling AKP’s increasing diplomacy with the EU on migration since mid-2015, the concerns over the role of the EU in the Syrian refugee issue have gained saliency in shaping all opposition parties’ policy responses towards Syrian refugees. In this respect, the EU-Turkey Statement has provided a great opportunity for the main opposition party, CHP, to criticise the mistakes in the ruling AKP’s foreign policy formulations on Syrian refugees. In the discourses of the CHP elite, the AKP’s bargaining

with the EU in return for political concessions and financial gains is presented as a foreign policy error resulting in the turn of Turkey into a buffer zone between refugee-producing countries and Europe. For instance, CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu stated, “Let’s give them [European countries] 6 billion Euros to host all Syrians, Afghans and Pakistanis themselves.” (Cumhuriyet, 2016, March 11). In Kılıçdaroğlu’s statement, the party’s criticisms towards the AKP’s bargains with the EU on migration in return for financial gains are clearly expressed.

When the EU-Turkey Statement came into effect, the CHP elite accused the ruling AKP of using Syrian refugees as a bargaining chip to demand political concessions from the EU rather than trying to find a real solution to the Syrian refugee issue. Such accusations were also raised during the interview in which the CHP official paid attention to the motives of the ruling AKP behind signing this deal to overcome the foreign policy deadlocks in other issue areas in the EU-Turkey relations, including visa liberalisation for Turkish citizens and updating the Customs Union. The CHP official further criticised the government for failing to respond to the problems of refugees by respecting human rights and universal values. In this respect, the CHP official underlined, “This deal came about as a result of a search for a balance that would protect the interests of both sides and, unfortunately, the Syrians became a tool here, and their rights were not respected.” (Interview, 2022, April 12). As is apparent in this statement, Syrian refugees have been presented as the victims of the bargains between Turkey and the EU.

Another crucial theme raised during the interview with the CHP official was the ruling AKP’s frequent use of the threat of opening doors to refugees who would like to go to Europe. Underlining the unethical nature of such an approach, given the humanitarian tragedy refugees face vis-a-vis the strict border measures by Greece, the CHP official noted, “It is not possible to obtain a successful result through blackmail in international relations. As observed, it did not bring the desired outcome. The EU and Turkey relations cannot be solely based on migration cooperation.” (Interview, 2022, April 12). Also, the CHP official pointed to the negative impact of such ambitious foreign policy attempts on Turkey’s international reputation by drawing attention to the fact that this attitude of the AKP government took place in the reports prepared by the European Parliament. In that respect, the main critique of the CHP elite on AKP’s negotiations with the EU on refugees focuses on AKP’s problematic foreign policy choices and its

negotiations with the EU over the lives of refugees, which lacks a humanitarian dimension.

Similar to issues voiced by the CHP, the HDP has increasingly expressed concerns about conditions that Turkey pursues in its negotiations with the EU and European countries regarding the Syrian refugee issue since mid-2015. Such concerns have become evident, particularly after the EU-Turkey Statement in 2016, which provides a suitable context for the HDP to severely reflect its critical attitude towards policy responses of the AKP and EU towards refugees. In this sense, the HDP, in the party's report on the issues relevant to refugees, has blamed the ruling AKP for becoming a part of shameful negotiations with the EU to make Turkey a prison where Syrian refugees are kept away from Europe (HDP, 2016, p. 6). Having noted that the rights of refugees to seek asylum in Europe are taken out of their hands through this deal contrary to international law, the HDP official during the interview shared, "Both refugees and Turkey's democracy, as well as Europe, have been taken hostage. Therefore, this Statement is not a simple thing." (Interview, 2022, April 20). The above remarks of the HDP official shed light on the party's criticisms against the AKP's migration diplomacy with the EU as well as the leverage this deal provides to the ruling AKP vis-a-vis the EU.

The HDP elite mainly draws attention to the EU's apathy towards the human rights violations in Turkey in return for ensuring Turkey's commitment to keeping refugees within its borders. Such concerns were also voiced during the interview, where the HDP official pointed out:

"President Erdoğan did not solely receive money from Europe. The bargaining with the EU on migration prevents the EU's sanctions from being imposed on Turkey. In this respect, the refugee issue led Europe to moderate its discourses regarding the domestic political issues of Turkey." (Interview, 2022, April 20)

Regarding the EU's apathy towards the human rights problems in Turkey and the assertive migration diplomacy that the ruling AKP conducts vis-a-vis the EU, the HDP official shed light on the concerns of European countries as follows:

"For Europe, the refugee issue is not limited to addressing the cost of hosting refugees. The political discourses produced over the refugee issue have entirely changed the nature of European politics by strengthening the radical right. In this

sense, the refugee issue has thoroughly transformed European politics and identity.” (Interview, 2022, April 20)

The above passage is critical in terms of revealing the HDP’s reasoning behind the EU’s willingness to externalise its border control to Turkey, given the concerns relevant to the domestic political climate of European countries.

Besides the European countries’ concerns about domestic politics, the HDP elite refers to their political calculations about the increasingly necessary cooperation with Turkey on migration in the future as a reason behind their mentioned apathy. Reminding the former Chancellor of Germany Merkel’s praises for the Nizip refugee camp in Gaziantep, where there were allegations of sexual assault cases towards refugees and her silence about the human rights violations in Turkey, another HDP official during the interview noted, “The EU overlooks such unlawful implementations for the sake of its own interests. Therefore, the hands of the EU are not clean, too.” (Interview, 2022, June 8). All these statements demonstrate that the main critique of the HDP elite on AKP’s bargains with the EU on refugees focuses on the AKP’s foreign policy choices, the EU’s apathy towards human rights issues for the sake of its own interests, and migration diplomacy lacking a humanitarian dimension.

Given Turkey’s growing diplomacy with the EU on migration since mid-2015, the concerns about the role of the EU as an external actor in the Syrian refugee issue have also gained saliency in the refugee-related discourses of the MHP elite. Before joining the ruling coalition, the MHP severely criticised the AKP government for bargaining with the EU to keep refugees in Turkey in return for economic and political gains. In the discourses of the MHP elite, the EU-Turkey Statement was presented as a foreign policy failure that would turn Turkey into a dumping ground for irregular migrants whom the EU did not want. For instance, several former MHP officials criticised the use of the Kayseri bargain metaphor by Davutoğlu for Turkey’s negotiations with the EU and expressed their concerns about the country’s turn into the EU’s refugee warehouse (Anadolu Ajansı, 2016, March 11; Habertürk, 2016, March 11). While the party was in opposition, the MHP elite severely criticised the AKP’s bargains with the EU on refugees by focusing on Turkey’s national interests rather than the human rights of migrants and refugees.

However, after joining the ruling coalition, the MHP abandoned this critical approach targeting the Turkish government. Instead, the discourses of the party elite have increasingly focused on the EU's reluctance to fulfil its commitments as part of its cooperation with Turkey on refugee protection. Similar to what we observed in the discourses of the AKP elite, the Syrian refugee issue has become an important foreign policy tool for the MHP elite to advance the positive image of Turkey vis-à-vis the unlawful practices of the EU against the refugees. Following President Erdoğan's announcement about the opening of border gates to migrants and refugees who would like to go to Europe, MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli drew attention to the human tragedy refugees experienced with the closure of the Pazarkule Border Gate by Greece and stated as follows:

“It is apparent that Turkey is the country that hosts the most significant number of refugees and asylum seekers in the world. (...) [However] the EU countries are completely far away from understanding and grasping Turkey. The EU's support for Greece ignoring human rights and hostilely attacking the oppressed who come to its borders is joint barbarism.” (Akan & Uslu, 2020, March 10)

As the statement above indicates, the MHP leader highlights the identity of Turkey as a defender of the human rights of refugees. In contrast, he depicts the identity of the EU as an inhuman actor that closes its doors to incoming refugees. In this respect, the discontent with the EU's unwillingness to meet its promises in the field of refugee protection has increased the differentiation of the European identity from the Turkish self-identity in the discourses of the MHP elite.

During the interview, an official from MHP also drew attention to the contrasts between the treatment of refugees by Turkey and European states. Pointing to the human rights violations Greece led and the apathy of the EU to those, the MHP official questioned, “How would you explain the acts of Greece, including beating people, taking all their belongings, and causing them to freeze to death? In our belief system, manners, customs, and history, there is nothing like closing the door to those who ask for mercy, assistance, and shelter from us. Sinking the refugees' boats and harassing and physically assaulting refugees, like Greece has been doing, is contrary to our historical heritage.” (Interview, 2022, April 13). All these statements indicate that after participating in the People's Alliance, it has been politically oriented and ideologically driven that the MHP

accuses the EU of failing its promises and acting dissemblingly. Criticising the unfavourable treatment of the EU and European countries towards refugees stands out as the strategy to advance Turkey's positive image of refugee protection in the international realm.

While questioning how the considerations relevant to the role of the EU in the Syrian refugee issue give insight into the IYI Party's policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees, we should emphasise that the party was established in an environment where Turkey's bargaining with the EU on Syrian refugees has already been high. In the discourses of the IYI Party elite, the bargaining strategy of the ruling AKP with the EU on migration is severely criticised. Regarding the coercive strategies used by the ruling AKP in its migration diplomacy vis-a-vis the EU, the IYI Party leader, Meral Akşener, for instance, shared that "President Erdoğan believed that he is utilising them [refugees] as a blackmail tool against the West. However, Westerners are not deceived." (Sözcü, 2021, August 6). Similar to what we observed in the discourses of the CHP elite, the IYI Party elite presents the AKP's negotiations with the EU on refugees in return for political concessions and financial gains as a kind of failure.

During the interview, an official from the IYI Party voiced similar concerns because of the ruling AKP's bargains with the EU in return for money. Regarding the impact of the AKP government's unfriendly attitude towards the West on Turkey's reputation in the international realm, the IYI Party official stated, "Turkey employed norms and methods that the West is not familiar with. There is no sympathy towards Turkey. The image of Turkey lost its ground because of the behaviours of President Erdoğan." (Interview, 2022, April 11). The above remarks of the IYI Party official shed light on the concerns relevant to promoting Turkey's positive image in the eyes of external actors. It is observed that the reasoning behind such considerations can be attributed to the increasing need for cooperation with the international actors articulated by the party for facilitating the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland. In this sense, pointing to cooperating with the EU to keep Syrian refugees in Turkey, the IYI Party official underlined, "The IYI Party will collaborate with the EU not for the integration of Syrians in Turkey, but re-integration of them in their country of origin." (Interview, 2022, April 11). As can be seen in the statements of the IYI Party official, the terms of cooperation with the EU on Syrian refugees differ from those of the ruling AKP.

The IYI Party elite frequently points to the costs of implementing the EU-Turkey Statement for Turkey to criticise the AKP's policy responses to Syrian mass migration. Even if party officials blame the EU for becoming a party to such a controversial deal, their criticisms generally focus on the AKP's commitment to keeping Syrian refugees in Turkey in return for material benefits. Therefore, raising grave concerns over the human rights violations Syrian refugees face because of the EU-Turkey Statement is not the main motivation behind the IYI Party's policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees. Instead, the IYI Party elite prefers to underline how the AKP's foreign policy strategies and diplomatic interests vis-a-vis the European countries harm Turkey's national interests and international reputation.

4.1.3 International Politics of Forced Migration Dimension from the Perspective of IR Theories

The explanatory power of international politics-related factors in understanding party-based approaches in Turkey towards Syrian refugees reveals itself through parties' foreign policy objectives in the Syrian conflict and their concerns about the role of the EU as an external actor in the Syrian refugee issue. The foreign policy aims of the Turkish political parties in the Syrian conflict have played a defining role in differentiating their positions on Syrian refugees. From a realist perspective, it can be understood that the ruling coalition's parties (AKP and MHP) try to embarrass and discredit the Syrian regime through the "cruel Assad" discourses. Such motives can be explained by the efforts of the ruling coalition to increase Turkey's power and influence in the Middle East.

On the other hand, the foreign policy visions of political parties, such as advocating for "zero problems with neighbours" and "non-interference in the domestic affairs of other nations", can be better understood by the (neo)liberal institutionalist IR theory (Altıok & Tosun, 2019, p. 692). These kinds of foreign policy objectives play a prominent role in shaping the positions of CHP, HDP, and IYI Party on Syrian refugees. It should be noted that the two parties of the Nation Alliance, namely CHP and IYI Party, avoided supporting any warring Syrian parties and have been less assertive about the developments in the war compared to the ruling coalition.

It is equally significant that the interest of political actors in refugee movements from a specific country can stem from identity-related reasons, such as ethnic and religious

affinity with the people in the country of origin, which constructivism can explain. Solidarities along the ethnic identity in Syria have played a prominent role in shaping the foreign policy objectives of the pro-Kurdish HDP and the Turkish-nationalist MHP in the Syrian conflict. The demographic sensitivities along ethnic identity and aims of creating favourable conditions for co-ethnics - Turkomans and Kurds by MHP and HDP, respectively - have played a prominent role in shaping their foreign policy formulations on Syrian refugees.

Evaluating the role of the EU as an external actor in shaping policy responses of political parties towards Syrian refugees within the IR theory framework demonstrates that the party-based approaches towards the bargaining strategies to be used in migration diplomacy matter. In this respect, the utility of analysing these strategies within a relative and absolute gains framework (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019, p. 121) is also valid for the current thesis. When it comes to 2015 and 2016, Turkey's relations with European countries became more confrontational since the former tried to instrumentalise Europe's interest in decreasing migration and externalising its migration management. Focusing on the relative gains vis-à-vis the EU on the Syrian refugee issue that the realist IR theory can explain, the ruling AKP acts with a zero-sum rationale. Also, MHP (after 2018), as the ruling coalition's member, has supported this approach.

On the other hand, the opposition parties, namely CHP, HDP, and İYİ Party, have been more concerned with absolute gains, drawing on the neoliberal institutionalist perspective. This kind of approach reveals itself in these parties' call for developing cooperation with the EU that will contribute to the solution of the Syrian refugee issue rather than focusing on the economic and political gains that the ruling AKP sought. From the liberal perspective, the ruling coalition criticises European countries for not respecting the human rights values they promote. Some opposition parties, mainly CHP and HDP, also raise concerns over the human rights violations of refugees. However, the relevant criticisms in this regard have not only been directed towards the EU and European countries but also the ruling coalition.

For the ruling coalition's parties, namely AKP and MHP, the Syrian refugee issue has provided an opportunity to promote the positive image of Turkey as the protector of refugees and the country's international reputation. These political parties present a negative image of the EU and European countries because of their apathy and unlawful

practices against the incoming refugees, contributing to the otherisation of the identity of Europe. Opposition parties also criticise the practices of the EU against the refugees. However, for them, “the other” is not only the EU but also the ruling coalition itself. For the opposition parties, namely CHP, HDP, and IYI Party, the AKP government’s bargaining strategy with the EU has presented an opportunity to increasingly criticise the mistakes in the ruling AKP’s foreign policy. These three opposition parties come together in building their critical attitude towards the ruling coalition’s use of the refugee issue as a bargaining item to obtain political gains and financial support. Also, the constructivist perspective sheds light on the concerns of the three opposition parties, namely CHP, HDP, and IYI Party, regarding the international reputation of Turkey because of the ruling AKP’s assertive migration diplomacy towards the EU.

4.2 National Security and Domestic Political Agenda Dimension

The role of sensitivities surrounding national security concerns and domestic political dynamics in determining the Turkish political parties’ policy responses towards Syrian refugees reveals itself in three ways. First, the concerns about border security because of refugee arrivals play a prominent role in shaping Turkish political parties’ positions on Syrian refugees. Second, perceived identity affinities or differences and concerns about the demographic balance in the host community and voting matter in differentiating political parties’ policy choices on Syrians. Finally, the criminalisation and securitisation of Syrian refugees have a defining role in bringing different policy decisions at the political party level.

4.2.1 Concerns over Border Security because of the Refugee Arrivals

Turkey encountered severe challenges to its border security due to the civil war in Syria. Various bombing incidents in border towns, such as the one in Reyhanlı in 2013, were among the most critical problems, leading to heated policy discussions on national security in Turkish domestic politics. The concerns relevant to losing control along Turkey’s borders, which also have implications for internal security, were frequently voiced by opposition parties in the initial phase of hosting Syrian refugees. Furthermore, the opposition parties shared doubts about the infiltration of jihadist fighters into the

country. In light of the security-related criticisms increasingly raised by the opposition, the Turkish government was reluctant to allow visits to some refugee camps.

With the Assad regime's alleged responsibility for the two bomb-laden vehicles being detonated in Hatay's Reyhanlı town centre in May 2013, the opposition parties began expressing their national security concerns relevant to the implications of Turkey's involvement in the Syrian conflict. In the meantime, the border incidents and terrorist attacks in urban areas led the ruling AKP to be increasingly concerned about the security threats posed by Turkey's involvement in the Syrian war. In this respect, the party elite accused the Assad regime of causing security challenges to Turkey. However, the Turkish government refrained from attributing the growing security problems to the presence of Syrian refugees since doing so would worsen the communal tension between host community members and Syrian refugees.

Furthermore, the large-scale arrival of Syrian Kurds from northern Syria to Turkey following the siege on Kobane was considered by the ruling AKP as a security threat because of the sensitivities around the Kurdish question. The ruling AKP has growingly voiced concerns about the infiltration of Kurdish fighters into the country since then. In line with such perceived challenges, the Turkish government closed many border gates (Şahin-Mencütek, 2019, p. 85). Although the government refrained from problematising the presence of Syrian refugees in terms of their impact on security at the discursive level, the increasing considerations relevant to the propensity of cross-border violence due to refugee movements led to the changes in the scope of the AKP government's open-door policy. In January 2016, the AKP government ended its visa-free policy for Syrians arriving in Turkey using air and sea pathways (Memişoğlu & Ilgıt, 2017, p. 329). In this respect, the Turkish authorities have felt the increasing need to strengthen Turkey's border control systems to prevent illegal migration to the country.

Having emphasised Turkey's increasing fight against terrorism because of the Syrian civil war, the AKP's 2018 election manifesto points to military measures taken against the ISIS and PKK/Democratic Union Party (PYD)/YPG (AKP, 2018, p. 290). Since the AKP is in power, it tries to demonstrate that Turkey has adequate capacity to ensure the control of its national borders. During the interview, how the government has been in command of Turkey's borders was underlined by an official from AKP official as follows:

“Syrian refugees arriving in Turkish borders have been subject to security checks, and their fingerprints are taken. They need to be registered to access certain rights and services in Turkey. For example, they need to be registered to go to schools or hospitals. Therefore, these people could not sustain their lives in isolation without being registered by authorities.” (Interview, 2022, July 1)

As is apparent in the statements of the interviewed party official, the AKP underlines that the Turkish government has information regarding the background of incoming Syrian refugees. In this respect, the AKP official seeks to demonstrate that Turkey has been in complete command of managing the Syrian refugee issue by referring to the measures taken regarding refugee arrivals in response to criticisms directed towards the government that it fails to implement border controls.

Given the increase in terror attacks within the country, concerns about national security due to refugee arrivals are prevalent in the discourses of the CHP elite. The CHP elite frequently holds the ruling AKP responsible for losing control over Turkey’s borders. The car bombing attacks in Reyhanlı, for example, further exacerbated CHP’s doubts in this regard. The securitised approach to borders and growing concerns about the infiltration of terrorists into Turkey stand out in the discourses of the party elite. For example, the CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu accused the ruling AKP of failing to identify those who need genuine refuge by stating, “There is a security risk. No one knows who is a terrorist and who is innocent.” (Al Jazeera Türk, 2016, July 12). As the CHP leader’s statement demonstrates, the party doubts the AKP government’s capacity to identify those who previously engaged in terrorist attacks before coming to Turkey.

During the interview, an official from CHP also drew attention to the infiltration of terrorists during refugee movements in the following words:

“Syrian refugees entered Turkey without becoming subject to comprehensive security checks and investigations regarding their past experiences. Since we do not have enough information about the background of these people, it is open to question whether terrorist organisations will use those infiltrated among refugees in the future to erode Turkey’s national security.” (Interview, 2022, April 12)

Having underlined that “some individuals who were said to be members of ISIS have been settled in Turkey and are living freely and even established businesses in Turkey”, the CHP official noted, “This is a crisis that Turkey comes across a severe threat. In this

sense, I think the open-door policy [towards Syrian refugees] makes Turkey an important target of international terrorism.” (Interview, 2022, April 12). As is apparent in statements of the CHP official, the issues of terrorist infiltration into the country and erosion of Turkey’s sovereignty have been linked with refugee arrivals.

HDP has similarly voiced concerns about the increasing terror attacks associated with ISIS within the country. However, unlike all four parties, the election manifestos of HDP do not mention anything about strengthening border security. Again, differing from the CHP and IYI Party, the HDP warns about the tendency of the host community members to see refugees, especially those from Syria, as having links to ISIS (HDP, 2016, p. 42). The HDP elite harshly criticises the Turkish military’s cross-border operations against Kurdish armed forces in northern Syria. Furthermore, the allegations that Turkey offered military assistance and operational support to the Syrian armed opposition forces are prevalent among the HDP elite.

During the interview, an official from HDP also raised concerns about border crossings by noting, “The Turkish state has been aware of the entry of ISIS and Al-Nusra members into Turkey. The intelligence service also knows this situation. [Therefore], these crossings turned Turkey into a home of international terrorism rather than a target of it.” (Interview, 2022, April 20). However, the HDP official underlined that this situation is not coincidental but an informed process. As the above statements exemplify, severe accusations have been directed towards the Turkish government since it is perceived to overlook the crossings of the members of Salafi-Jihadist terrorist organisations. On the other hand, the safety problems of Syrian refugees arising from their securitisation, such as portraying them as members of ISIS, have also been raised by HDP.

With the growing security-related problems associated with refugee arrivals, concerns about border security have become increasingly important in determining the MHP’s position on Syrian refugees. The MHP’s November 2015 election manifesto voices the need to strengthen border security systems at Turkey’s southern borders (MHP, 2015, p. 244). Before participating in the ruling coalition, a securitised approach over borders was clearly apparent in the discourses of the MHP elite. Within the scope of this approach, the MHP elite mainly attributed the growing security-related threats to the ruling AKP’s involvement in Syria’s domestic affairs and its loss of border security.

After participating in the ruling coalition, MHP's securitised approach towards borders continued. Therefore, the MHP accepted Turkey's unilateral military operations in northern Syria to combat terrorism as a legitimate act. However, the MHP elite refrains from accusing the ruling AKP of losing control over Turkey's border security, contrary to what the party did while it was in opposition. During the interview, an official from MHP expressed Turkey's capacity to ensure border controls thanks to experienced state security forces as follows:

"Our counter-terrorism units work so professionally, which is also emphasised in the International Criminal Police Organization's (INTERPOL) reports. (...) Turkey's intelligence services and counter-terrorism mechanisms are very effective. Believe me, no European country that hosts such a great number of refugees cannot get rid of instability contrary to Turkey." (Interview, 2022, April 13)

In the MHP official's statement, the party's belief in Turkey's capacity to be in full command of the management of the Syrian refugee issue is evidently supported by an appreciation of the ruling coalition's effort to strengthen border control.

Regarding the problems with border security, the IYI Party's party programme declares that Turkey's border security will be protected by "preventing the entry of military and ideological elements into the country" (IYI Party, n.d., p. 34). During the interview, an official from the IYI Party, similar to what we observed on the side of CHP, voiced the perceived threat to Turkey's national security because of the doubts about the infiltration of jihadist fighters into the country. Building on these concerns, the IYI Party official shared, "Idlib is a terrorist incubation. Terrorists are raised there under the supervision of Turkey. There is information that several of them have been granted Turkish citizenship. Are they granted citizenship since they are against the Assad government?" (Interview, 2022, April 11). As is apparent in the statements of the IYI Party official, emphasis on threats to national security has been associated with Turkey's support for jihadist groups aiming to topple the Assad government.

4.2.2 Sensitivities Relevant to Perceived Identity Difference and Demographic Balance

In today's world, we have witnessed the "growing politicisation of migration" (Castles et al., 2014, p. 17), indicating that the domestic political agenda of states is increasingly shaped by the issues relevant to international migration. One of the most significant reasons behind such politicisation is attributed to the role of international migration in bringing about cultural differences. Such impacts associated with international migration would eventually pave the way for the discussions surrounding national identity in domestic political discussions. Host community members may have negative attitudes towards the refugees' ethnic, racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds. These political attitudes can stem from previous negative experiences with a particular refugee group, as well as from the host society's national identity sensitivities or cultural differences between two communities (Şahin-Mencütek, 2019, p. 62). Besides identity-related issues, the sensitivities surrounding the demographic composition of the host community are also among the crucial areas where Syrian refugees have become part of the domestic contestation in Turkish politics. It is further widely discussed in the literature that the socio-cultural inclusion of Syrian refugees into Turkish society has brought notable changes regarding identity-driven matters.

At the beginning of the Syrian mass migration to Turkey, the AKP government's open-door policy towards Syrian refugees was loaded with ideational motives, including the culture of hospitality and religious references. In the protracted stage of Syrian refugees' stay in the country, the AKP elite did not abandon emphasising emotional and religious ties between host community members and Syrian refugees. Producing discourses on religious brotherhood/sisterhood between the two communities, which is a reflection of ensar-muhacir understanding, continued to be employed as the main strategy of the AKP elite to promote the societal acceptance of Syrian refugees. However, different from the initial phase of hosting Syrian refugees, the AKP elite has been aware that these types of discourses are no longer adequate to facilitate the social acceptance of Syrian refugees.

Given that the majority of Syrian refugees who arrived in Turkey are Sunni Muslims, the AKP elite has underscored the sectarian affinity between the two communities since

the beginning of the Syrian mass migration. According to Aydemir (2022), the ruling AKP tries to create “an Ummah-based society rather than referring to a well-defined Turkish nation” (p. 671) by prioritising the notions of religious compassion in its national identity definition. On this account, the presence of Syrian refugees in Turkey offers a golden opportunity for the AKP government to strengthen the religious component rather than the ethnic one in the Turkish state’s national identity, not a threat to Turkish national identity and demographic structure.

The AKP elite frequently expresses that the importance of religious, cultural, and emotional values is underestimated in rationalist thinking. For example, during the interview, an official from AKP mentioned the need to carry out conscience-based processes while handling the issues relevant to refugees. In this respect, the AKP official noted:

“Racist attitudes would increase unless the importance of ideational concepts were accepted. Is there a country ahead of Germany in rationalist thinking? Why they cannot manage migration? We see the voting shares of Alternative for Germany (AFD) and the National Rally in Germany and France, respectively.” (Interview, 2022, July 1)

The above passage demonstrates the significance of ideational concerns vis-a-vis rationalist thinking in shaping the AKP’s Syrian refugee response. Furthermore, as the remarks of the AKP official exemplify, the high voting rates of anti-immigrant parties in some European countries have been tied to the lack of engagement with cultural and religious values. Having underlined the problematic nature of positivist thinking to grasp these values, the AKP official added, “If we have a humanitarian policy regarding Syrians, it exists thanks to our civilisation codes. “[On the other hand], there is a black mark in Europe regarding migration management.” (Interview, 2022, July 1). These statements demonstrate that the AKP mainly relies on discourse emphasising the importance of cultural and religious values while shaping its position on Syrian refugees.

As Şahin-Mencütek (2019) puts forth, refugee integration, harmonisation, and acquisition of citizenship are the most heatedly debated issues in the domestic politics of host countries (p. 256). However, in the case of Turkey, the conservative ruling party AKP has found the integration of Syrian refugees into Turkish society much more achievable than opposition parties by emphasising a shared sectarian identity between the

two communities. Identity-driven factors, such as the religious similarity between host community members and Syrian refugees, have made the concerns about social tensions related to identity and demographic balance less remarkable in the discourses of the AKP elite. It would be in good taste to mention that these concerns started gaining saliency with the presence of Syrian Kurds and Arab Alawites in Turkey but remained limited, given their small number. On the other hand, the ruling AKP has been raising the issue of Syrians' acquisition of Turkish citizenship since 2016, exacerbating concerns of opposition parties that present a different understanding of national identity from the AKP about the destabilisation related to cultural values and Turkey's future demographic structure.

For the main opposition party, CHP, identity-driven concerns that interact with the sensitivities about demographic composition have gained saliency in determining its position on Syrian refugees, particularly after the ruling AKP's announcement on granting citizenship to Syrians. Having opposed the ruling AKP's national identity understanding loaded with religious references and highlighting the Islamic identity as a common denominator, the CHP adopts a secular understanding of Turkish national identity that emphasises the need for similarity in terms of ethnicity and culture. In this respect, perceived cultural differences between the host community members and Syrian refugees have aggravated the CHP's concerns over national identity, negatively impacting the party's viewpoint against the integration of Syrian refugees.

Having noted that Syrian refugees lack a connection to the Turkish national culture, the CHP elite constructs their presence as a threat to the host society's cultural practices through their speech acts. Although some societal issues, such as child marriages and polygamy, existed before Syrian refugees came to the country, the CHP associated the increase in these problems with the presence of Syrian refugees. During the interview, an official from CHP stated, "The presence of Syrian refugees changes lifestyles in Turkey since there is a gradual trend towards ghettoisation among them who tend to live together and be in solidarity with people from their own community." (Interview, 2022, April 12). As the statements of the CHP official exemplify, the focus has been on how cultural differences between the two communities will bring about changes in Turkey's social balance. Based on the presence of refugees who do not want to learn Turkish, the CHP official shared, "Host community members perceive such situations as an alienation

problem". (Interview, 2022, April 12). As seen in the interviewed official's responses, Syrian refugees are depicted as those who fail to fulfil the criteria of being part of the Turkish nation, requiring ethnic and cultural similarity with host community members in the eyes of CHP (Balta et al., 2022, p. 15). In that respect, the perceived threat to societal security observed in CHP discourses can be employed as a proxy to reveal the conflict between the CHP and AKP's "secular nationalism" and "humanitarian nationalism", respectively (Aridici, 2022, p. 701).

In addition to the concerns about the possible disruption of national culture because of the differences Syrians brought with themselves, the considerations relevant to Turkey's demographic structure stand out in the discourses of the CHP elite. In response to the government's construction of the container city for Syrian refugees in the Sivricehüyük village of the Kahramanmaraş's Dulkadiroğlu district, where citizens of the Alevi Bektashi faith live, the CHP took sides with residents of the neighbourhood in their resistance (Çuhadar, 2016, March 29). In such an environment, the CHP elite accused the AKP government of undermining the sectarian balance in areas mainly concentrated by the Alevi population. Furthermore, the plans for Syrian refugees' acquisition of Turkish citizenship have also brought concerns about voting by Syrian refugees during the elections. In this respect, the CHP elite severely criticises the ruling party for raising the issue of citizenship in domestic politics solely to strengthen its voter base.

Compared to CHP, the HDP embraces a different understanding of identity definition, which is more inclusive towards refugees. In this respect, the HDP elite refrains from producing othering discourse in a socio-cultural sense. By problematising the construction of the lifestyles of Syrians as a threat to Turkish lifestyles and defining this as an orientalist project, HDP officials during the interviews noted that refugees would become one of the components of the local dynamics in Turkey (Interview, 2022, April 20; Interview, 2022, June 8).

However, the HDP's support for broader cultural rights for Syrian refugees, including the education of refugee children in their mother tongues, has been interpreted by some scholars to uphold its domestic political interests (Demirtaş, 2020, p. 162). In this respect, we have witnessed some discourses among the HDP elite showing resentment toward the differential treatment received by Syrian Arabs and Kurds. For instance, the HDP co-chairperson Pervin Buldan criticises the ruling AKP for

discriminating against Kurdish people in Turkey compared to Syrian Arabs, who are perceived to be granted broader socio-cultural rights (HDP, 2018, October 30).

The HDP also criticises the ruling AKP's intentions to undermine demographic balance while distributing Syrian refugees across provinces without respecting local dynamics. The report prepared by the HDP's Research Unit draws attention to how "the concentration of refugees in a single area erodes the demographic balance of that region and induces the host community members to hold anti-refugee attitudes." (HDP, 2016, p. 55). From time to time, the HDP elite criticises the AKP government for changing the demographic structure of certain provinces, such as decreasing the proportion of the Kurdish population in specific provinces. However, while doing that, the HDP elite avoids accusing Syrian refugees of changing Turkey's demographic structure through their high birth rates, unlike other opposition parties. In addition to refraining from upholding demographic threat perceptions, the HDP also highlights the importance of leaving the approach portraying Syrians as the AKP's vote potential (p. 68).

As time passes, concerns about the emergence of possible social tensions for identity-driven reasons and considerations surrounding the need to preserve Turkey's future demographic stability have also gained saliency in the discourses of the MHP elite. Before joining the ruling coalition, the MHP elite severely voiced the negative impact of hosting Syrian refugees on Turkish society's cultural values and practices. Following the electoral partnership with the AKP, the MHP elite avoids presenting Syrian refugees as culturally different from the host community members. However, the MHP elite expresses concerns over the ghettoisation risk in areas where refugees are heavily populated. While doing that, it refrains from explicitly targeting Syrian refugees. During the interview, an official from MHP official stated, "Ghettoisation is problematic in every sense. It needs to be prevented. Prioritising the micro identity and paving the way for ghettoisation on the axis of this kind of identity entails a risk to the demographic structure." (Interview, 2022, April 13). As part of the ruling coalition, the MHP try to show that the government is able to govern the Syrian refugee issue with all its repercussions, including the ones related to the socio-cultural fabric of Turkish society.

Although we do not observe much emphasis on the religious origins of Syrian refugees in the discourses of the MHP elite both in pre- and post-alliance periods, religious solidarity with the Syrians who arrived in Turkey is not a marginal factor for

MHP. For instance, during the interview, the official from MHP noted, “Although we do not frequently use the ensar-muhacir discourse much, we know that culture, we believe that culture, and we come from that culture.” (Interview, 2022, April 13). In this context, the MHP official further shared, “It is not the political imposition that shapes the attitudes of Turkish citizens towards Syrian refugees. They already interiorised ensar-muhacir culture. If they did not believe in that culture, internal disorder would emerge.” (Interview, 2022, April 13). As is apparent in the discourses of the MHP official, there is an emphasis on how religious brotherhood with Syrian refugees plays a crucial role in facilitating social cohesion between the two communities.

While the party was in opposition, the ruling AKP’s plans for Syrian refugees’ acquisition of Turkish citizenship became a significant political concern for the MHP elite because of sensitivities around Turkey’s demographic composition. In this respect, the party frequently objected to this issue raised by the ruling AKP, depicting it as a threat to national unity and Turkey’s demographic balance. Before joining the ruling coalition, MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli, for instance, voiced harsh criticisms against the issue of granting citizenship to Syrians as follows:

“Turkish citizenship is not a status left to the discretion of the President. Turkish citizenship has dignity and prestige. No statesman has the right to overshadow this. Offering citizenship to millions of Syrians means impeding our national unity. (...) Anyone who tries to undermine the future of Turkishness should be careful.” (Habertürk, 2016, July 12)

As the above passage reveals, the issue of Syrians’ acquisition of Turkish citizenship has been understood by the MHP leader as a demographic threat to the Turkish nation, leading to possible demographic change favouring Syrians vis-a-vis host community members. Besides the sensitivities over Turkey’s demographic future, the issue of granting citizenship also brought concerns about Syrian refugees’ ability to vote. In this respect, the MHP elite depicted raising this issue just for voting calculations as an irresponsible act in light of the perceived threat to Turkey’s national unity. Despite the ongoing electoral partnership with the AKP, the MHP elite continues to raise concerns about demographic challenges. In light of the perceived demographic threat associated with Syrian refugees, the return of Syrian refugees to their countries of origin has been

offered as an optimal solution. However, after joining the ruling coalition, the MHP elite has refrained from constructing Syrian refugees as a voting threat.

Similar to CHP, the IYI Party accuses the AKP of using religious references to justify Turkey's open-door policy towards Syrians. The religious ties between host community members and Syrian refugees have not been found functional in the discourses of the IYI Party elite in increasing the societal acceptance of Syrian refugees. During the interview, having underlined that the religious ties between the two communities no longer positively shape public attitudes, an official from the IYI Party also drew attention to the prevalent discourses among host community members that "I became a second-class citizen in my own country." (Interview, 2022, April 11).

The IYI Party's party programme highlights the importance of "taking measures to prevent the change(s) in the socio-cultural composition of Turkish society" (IYI Party, n.d., p. 34) that would stem from international migration. In this respect, the IYI Party elite presents the extended stay of Syrian refugees as a threat to the Turkish national identity because of the perceived ethnocultural differences between the two communities and severely opposes the integration and social cohesion of Syrian refugees. Similar to what we observed in the case of CHP, for the IYI Party, Syrians fail to meet the criteria of being part of the Turkish nation since the party prioritise ethnic and cultural similarity within the scope of its national identity understanding (Balta et al., 2022, p. 15).

As part of the identity-relevant concerns, the legacy of hostile Turkish-Arab relations also stood out to play a significant role in the fierce opposition of the IYI Party to the integration and permanent settlement of Syrian refugees in Turkey. During the interview, the IYI Party official drew attention to the historical events in which Arabs reportedly betrayed Turks and stated, "There are discourses suggesting that Arabs are unreliable." (Interview, 2022, April 11). As the statement shows, past experiences with Arabs have played a defining role in bringing about the IYI Party's restrictive policy formulations on Syrian refugees.

Besides concerns about the communal tensions that may arise from identity-driven factors, the sensitivities around Turkey's demographic stability stand out in the discourses of the IYI Party elite. Given that in some provinces, the number of Syrian refugees is more than host community members, the IYI Party elite frequently presents Syrian refugees as a demographic threat that may lead to demographic change favouring Syrians

vis-a-vis host community members. The perceived demographic threat also worsens doubts about Syrian refugees' access to the right to vote. During the interview, the official from the IYI Party also raised the turn of Syrian refugees into vote potential for the ruling AKP as follows:

“Syrian refugees are not being tried to be made citizens, but voters. They are seen as having voting potential. The AKP has been politically losing blood. Syrian refugees will be obliged to vote for AKP on the condition that they will be granted Turkish citizenship. [In this sense], Syrian refugees have been settled in areas where the AKP needs votes.” (Interview, 2022, April 11)

The IYI Party official's statement sheds light on doubts about the ruling AKP's instrumentalisation of Syrian refugees to ensure the survival of its power.

4.2.3 *Criminalisation and Securitisation of Refugees*

The ongoing debate in the literature reveals that refugees are frequently addressed concerning their negative effects on crime rates, public order, and safety in host societies. Given the perceived increase in crime rates because of the presence of refugees in host societies, it is necessary to question how these threat perceptions play a role in bringing about unfavourable attitudes followed by restrictive policies towards refugees. In this direction, Piopiunik and Ruhose (2017) argue that sensitivities surrounding the crime proneness of refugees have a more substantial effect in shaping the policy decisions regarding them than concerns regarding the labour market (p. 258). As time passes, concerns about Syrian refugees' impact on public security have led to their criminalisation among host community members (Şahin-Mencütek, 2019, p. 61). Such a process has also played a crucial role in determining the policy decisions of political parties on Syrian refugees.

During the initial phase, Syrian refugees were not criminalised in Turkish politics to a great extent, similar to what we observe currently in European politics. However, criminalising and securitising the presence of Syrian refugees as a domestic policy strategy started gaining significance among politicians as time passed. With mostly stemming from economic concerns, a substantial number of Syrian refugees started to settle across urban areas by leaving camps. This change in the settlement pattern of Syrian refugees has exacerbated the negative public attitudes towards them. In this context, the

sensitivities surrounding internal security that Syrians were increasing crime rates in urban areas worsened the tension between the two communities (Makovsky, 2019, p. 13).

After the country reached a turning point regarding the Syrian refugee-hosting experience, some Turkish opposition parties started to produce generalisations about Syrians' crime potential. The concerns of host community members relevant to internal security have been attributed to the presence of Syrian refugees, which gave these opposition parties a tool to hold the ruling AKP responsible for undermining public order. In light of the securitisation and criminalisation of refugees at the discursive level by the opposition parties, the ruling AKP took restrictive measures against refugees. In this direction, the LFIP was amended to ensure the deportation of foreigners living in Turkey with different statuses who have been perceived to have a link with terrorist organisations and undermine public safety (Makovsky, 2019, p. 4).

Despite these legal changes, the ruling AKP needed to find ways to get less reaction from host community members with severe internal security concerns while simultaneously justifying the extended stay of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Therefore, the crime proneness of Syrian refugees is not voiced much in the AKP elite's discourses on Syrian refugees. Whereas there are some exceptions, these are limited in scope and have not reached the point of criminalising and securitising the entire population of Syrian refugees in Turkey. It is widely discussed both in academic and policy circles that the failure it experienced during the 2019 local elections made AKP increasingly recognise the impact of the Syrian refugee issue on domestic politics and necessitated carefully listening to the host community's safety concerns. Following the local election results, the Turkish President and AKP leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated, "Those [Syrians] who committed a crime will be deported" (Kayaoğlu, 2019, July 13). In such an environment, AKP leader Erdoğan has sought ways to send Syrian refugees back to Syria by making them a prominent agenda item in the AKP government's foreign policy to relieve host community members' safety concerns.

The ruling AKP aims to demonstrate that it has full control over migration affairs, including the issues of criminality. The AKP government accepted that appealing to the sensitivities surrounding Syrian refugees' crime potential voiced by host community members, as opposition parties did, would undermine the social cohesion between the two communities. Therefore, the AKP elite refrains as far as possible from criminalising

and securitising the presence of Syrian refugees at the discursive level. On the other hand, the ruling AKP adopted several restrictive policies to respond to the growing discontent of host community members on Syrian refugees' negative impact on public order and internal safety. In this direction, there are real-life examples of the relocation of Syrians who are identified as taking part in criminal and social tension incidents involving host community members to a different province by law enforcement officials (Şahin-Mencütek, 2019, p. 256). Furthermore, regarding such kinds of incidents, we increasingly witness public releases by the governorates noting the deportation of refugees who are involved in the incident.

When the AKP elite faces criminalising statements on Syrian refugees, they frequently refer to official figures. Against the allegations of Syrian refugees' high crime potential, an official from AKP, during the interview, underscored, "There exists no much conflict [between the two communities] stemming from the hate speech. The crime rates of Syrian refugees are low when we look the data provided by the MoI." (Interview, 2022, July 1). The interview with the AKP official shows that the Turkish government seeks to reveal how it effectively controls the Syrian refugee issue by referring to official statistics as a kind of strategy. Furthermore, this statement exemplifies how the AKP presents the lack of significant tensions between Syrian refugees and host community members as proof of its success in migration management.

Compared to the ruling AKP, the main opposition party, CHP, has been more assertive about criminalising Syrian refugees without differentiation. In this sense, the CHP frequently refers to the increasing crime in areas where Syrians are heavily populated. In the discourses of the CHP elite, Syrian refugees are accused of undermining public order and internal safety by committing incidents of ordinary crime and gender-based violence, even if many of these crimes already existed before they came. A closer look at the CHP's political materials indicates that the party has not avoided criminalising the entire Syrian population in Turkey. For instance, CHP's *Report on the Social Acceptance and Harmonisation of Syrian Refugees in Turkey* underlines, "Syrians who are uneducated and without professions will increase crime rates in the country." (CHP, 2016a, p. 4).

The securitisation and criminalisation discourse targeting Syrian refugees stands out in the case of CHP by gaining particular significance in the later stages of Turkey's Syrian

refugee-hosting experience. For instance, in 2016, the CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu used very criminalising language towards Syrian refugees and reminded the public of their crime proneness as follows: “We are not still aware of the cost of [hosting] Syrians. You will see tomorrow, important actors of the underworld will be from these people [Syrians]. Our whole order will be undermined.” (Habertürk, 2016, March 12). As Kılıçdaroğlu’s statement exemplifies, CHP frequently depicts Syrian refugees as a threat to public order by using expressions such as “actors of the underworld”, “internal security” problem, and “survival problem”.

However, during the interview, an official from CHP refrained from criminalising the entire population of Syrian refugees in the country. In this context, the CHP official drew attention to the problematic nature of drawing on isolated events while making inferences about the negative impact of Syrian refugees on crime rates in Turkey. The CHP official referred to publicly available figures at this point and suggested, “Syrians do not have very high crime rates, and therefore, we cannot deduce from these figures.” (Interview, 2022, April 12). However, the CHP official voiced the risk of ghettoisation among Syrian refugees by adding, “In the cities, we increasingly witness that if any Syrians get into a dispute with host community members, other people from the Syrian community take a side with their friend.” (Interview, 2022, April 12). In light of the harmonisation-related problems of Syrian refugees, the CHP official pointed out, “If the groupings among Syrian refugees emerging as a result of ghettoisation gradually turn into a criminal organisation, these groupings may pose an internal security threat. This needs to be controlled well” (Interview, 2022, April 12). As the CHP official’s statements exemplify, the perceived groupings and ghettoisation among Syrian refugees have been depicted as a threat to public safety. All this discussion indicates that the criminalisation of Syrian refugees by the CHP elite through a speech act is not a marginal factor in their policy decisions.

When we delve into the stance of HDP on the securitisation and criminalisation of refugees, it is understood that the party reflects a very different understanding of security. In domestic political debates surrounding Syrian refugees, the HDP advocates for ensuring human security for Syrian refugees rather than criminalising or securitising them. By drawing attention to the safety concerns of Syrian refugees in its domestic political agenda, the HDP elite usually seeks to demonstrate how constructing Syrians as

a security threat in return creates greater insecurity for them. An official from HDP also articulated such considerations relevant to Syrian refugees' safety during the interview as follows:

“Since the leaders of Turkish political parties, such as CHP and IYI Party, often deliver hate speech targeting Syrian refugees, the society which has serious resentment because of the current economic crisis will reflect its anger somewhere, making the refugees the easiest target group in this regard.”
(Interview, 2022, April 20)

As is evident in this passage, the HDP official holds politicians who criminalise and securitise the presence of refugees responsible for worsening the relations between the two communities. Rather than depicting refugees as a threat to public order, the HDP official has shed light on how refugees face safety challenges due to their criminalisation and securitisation. On the side of HDP, securitisation and criminalisation discourse targeting Syrian refugees does not stand out.

Contrary to HDP, given that the stay of Syrians in Turkey is prolonged, the concerns over their crime proneness have also gained saliency in the discourses of the MHP elite. While in opposition, the MHP elite frequently criticised the ruling AKP for undermining public order because of the perceived rise in crime associated with Syrian refugees. In this direction, the party leadership, particularly MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli, referred to the negative impact of Syrian refugees on public peace. In 2016, MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli, for instance, noted, “The incidents caused by Syrians increased. Dilemmas in social cohesion and moral problems brought about by Syrians jeopardise social peace.” (Habertürk, 2016, July 12). Before joining the ruling coalition, the MHP leader, as exemplified in the above statement, frequently associated the presence of refugees with societal problems.

After the party's electoral alliance with AKP, the MHP leader Bahçeli maintains his security-oriented stance on Syrian refugees but not in the way intending to present them as the source of increased crime rates. As a member of the ruling coalition, the MHP has also been trying to show that the government has the strength to handle the Syrian refugee issue with all its implications, including the ones related to public order. In this respect, it is worth underlining that the scope of the statements of the MHP elite changed, focusing

more on the capacity of the government to deal with the crime-related problems of refugees.

Similar to what we observed in the discourses of the AKP elite, the MHP elite also frequently cites official figures while responding to criticisms of the negative impact of Syrians on the safety of host community members. During the interview, emphasising the importance of “correctly establishing a cause-and-effect relationship”, an official from MHP mentioned the need to consider official figures concerning Syrians’ crime rates before commenting on their crime potential by adding, “Syrians have lower crime rates than host community members.” (Interview, 2022, April 13). In the words of the MHP official, “Refugees should not be demonised. Crime is individual, and the punishment should therefore be individual. The offender is guilty regardless of his or her nationality, age, and gender.” (Interview, 2022, April 13). The above passage shows that the MHP focuses on the individual nature of crime rather than depicting all refugees as potential criminals. This is one of the most prevalent strategies MHP employs to respond to the criticisms directed towards the ruling coalition regarding the negative impact of Syrian refugees on public order.

Regarding the policy formulations of the IYI Party on Syrian refugees, it is worth emphasising that the party was established in an environment where the severity of securitisation and criminalisation of refugees was already high. In this respect, the criminalisation of refugees reveals itself in the IYI Party’s 2018 election manifesto, which depicts “Syrian refugees living in Turkey under temporary protection as a group to be controlled.” (IYI Party, 2018, p. 49). Similar to what we observed in the discourses of the CHP and MHP (until 2018) elite, the IYI Party elite often builds on perceptions that Syrian refugees have a high tendency to commit crimes in the country. For instance, IYI Party Kocaeli MP Lütfü Türkkan stated, “The safety of Turkish citizens is threatened because of Syrians, who lead to security incidents almost every day.” (Yeniçağ, 2021, August 19).

During the interview, an official from the IYI Party similarly pointed to high crime proneness among Syrian refugees and underlined their involvement in “drug trafficking, woman trafficking, and begging.” (Interview, 2022, April 11). Having drawn attention to the presence of “Syrian youth outside education as well as the unregistered individuals among the Syrian population”, the IYI Party official added, “Syrians will definitely create

an internal security risk.” (Interview, 2022, April 11). As is evident in these statements, while appealing to the sensitivities of host community members surrounding public safety, the IYI Party elite accuse Syrian refugees of increasing criminal incidents without noting the individual nature of the crime.

4.2.4 National Security and Domestic Political Agenda Dimension from the Perspective of IR Theories

The evaluation of the factors behind the policy decisions of Turkish political parties regarding Syrian refugees within the realist IR framework shows that increasing terrorist attacks associated with irregular border crossings to Turkey have become a significant matter of concern about border protection and national security for political parties. Following the mass flow of Syrian Kurds from northern Syria to Turkey in 2014 and the rising area of influence of the YPG, the AKP government closed many border gates, which can be regarded from the realist IR perspective as an attempt to preserve Turkey’s national security.

The opposition parties’ doubts about the infiltration of terrorists into Turkey and the ruling AKP’s support for Salafi-Jihadist groups in the Syrian conflict can also be better understood in terms of the considerations relevant to border safety and national security from a realist perspective. For the CHP, the concerns over border clashes and the increase in urban terrorist attacks in Turkey have played an essential role in determining the party’s position on Syrian refugees since the onset of the Syrian mass migration. Similarly, fears of threats to Turkey’s external borders and national security, as well as concerns over the arrival of Syrians who may have connections with terrorist groups, stand out in the discourses of the IYI Party elite. On the other hand, the HDP elite draws attention to how the AKP’s support for jihadist groups poses a challenge to state security and regional security.

The increasing criminalisation and securitisation of Syrian refugees in the later stages of their stay in Turkey by certain opposition parties at the discursive level, namely CHP and IYI Party, can be better captured from the perspective of constructivist IR theory. On the other hand, the current thesis observed that the HDP is the one that has adopted the most humanitarian approach to Syrian refugees. In this sense, the HDP often pays attention to the safety risks Syrian refugees may face in their daily lives because of

increasing hate speech and discrimination against them. This stems from the party's sensitivities about protecting human security, which can be better understood from the perspective of liberal IR theory. In response to the public resentment, the ruling coalition's political parties (AKP and MHP) refrain from criminalising Syrian refugees at the discursive level. However, these parties engaged in the securitisation process through their restrictive policies to mitigate public concerns over the impacts of Syrian refugees on public safety.

The ruling AKP did not initially perceive a threat to societal security since the majority of incoming Syrian refugees were Sunni Muslims, suiting the national identity definition it embraces. The Sunni Muslim identity of Syrian refugees has been frequently emphasised in the discourses of the AKP elite. Such an emphasis on the religious affinity between Syrians and host community members in terms of national identity considerations can be understood from the constructivist perspective. However, the mass migration of Kurds to the country with the siege on Kobane was viewed by the AKP as a threat to Turkish national identity because of the sensitivities around the Kurdish question.

With their sensitivities around identity and concerns about criminality and securitisation, the constructivist IR theory is instrumental in explaining the policy decisions of the CHP and IYI Party regarding Syrian refugees. Retrieving from the Turkish national identity definition that mainly emphasises the need for cultural and ethnic affinity, both parties exclude Syrian refugees from the national identity construction process. The frequent references in the discourses of the CHP and IYI Party elite to the cultural differences between the two communities that can be understood in constructivist terms have led these parties to adopt restrictive policies towards Syrian refugees. By problematising the presence of Syrian refugees from the identity-centred perspective, both opposition parties voice concerns over the possibility of inter-communal tension stemming from ethnocultural differences. After joining the ruling coalition, the MHP has refrained from the securitisation of the presence of Syrian refugees in the socio-cultural sense. However, the references to the need for preserving Turkey's demographic balance to the advantage of Turkish people, which the constructivist IR theory can capture, continued to be observed in the discourses of the MHP elite.

On the other hand, the HDP distinguishes itself from the ruling and other opposition parties through its more inclusive identity definition, embracing the forcibly displaced people as well. However, from time to time, the HDP elite voices concerns that can be better understood from the perspective of the constructivist IR theory about the AKP's differential treatment of Syrian Kurds arriving in Turkey compared to Syrian Arabs. With the transition of Syrian refugees from camp-based settlements to urban areas, the HDP has also increasingly suspected the ruling AKP's settlement policies regarding Syrian refugees. While doing that, it has accused the government of disrupting the ethnic balance of certain provinces to the disadvantage of the Kurdish people, which the constructivist theory of IR can best explain.

4.3 *National Economy and Social Development Dimension*

The considerations relevant to the national economy and social development behind the refugee policy are the third pillar of the analytical framework used to examine the party-based approaches in Turkey towards Syrian refugees in the current thesis. In this respect, the focus here will be on understanding how economic and development-related concerns have determined the policy decisions of political parties regarding Syrian refugees.

4.3.1 *Economic and Development-Related Concerns*

The ever-increasing number of Syrian refugees and their extended stay in Turkey have increased the host community members' and politicians' economic and development-related concerns. The worsening economic conditions and concerns about the country's development course have made the host community members increasingly attribute the reasons behind such processes to the presence of Syrian refugees starting from the transition phase. The ruling AKP put forth more structured policies on Syrian refugees' access to the formal labour market. To ease Syrians' access to the formal labour market under certain circumstances, the government enacted the Regulation on Work Permits of Refugees under Temporary Protection in 2016. This step to strengthen the economic inclusion of Syrian refugees led the opposition parties (except for the HDP) to increasingly articulate concerns about the unfair competition between host community

members and refugees. While grounding their economic concerns, these political parties often move from the perceptions of host community members that Syrians are stealing the jobs of the former.

The ruling AKP's political materials usually emphasise steps taken by the government to reinforce the absorption capacity of the host community. Having been aware that public resentment against Syrian refugees has worsened as the latter's stay is extended, the AKP elite has avoided presenting Syrian refugees "as a rival group" (İlgiç & Memişoğlu, 2017, p. 86) for host community members in the labour market. The AKP is seen accountable for the economic problems of the host community members, including the competition in the job market due to Syrians' tendency to pursue informal employment. In this direction, the President and AKP leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2019 emphasised the significance of Syrians' acquisition of Turkish citizenship to make sure that they do not participate in the informal labour market (Yeniçağ, 2019, December 13).

While trying to justify the extended stay of Syrian refugees in Turkey, the AKP elite consciously sheds light on the possible contribution of Syrian refugees to Turkey's economic development. In this respect, AKP Chairperson Advisor Yasin Aktay, in 2021, pointed to how Syrian refugees boost the economy by filling the labour gaps in the sectors that host community members do not prefer (Cumhuriyet, 2021, July 26). Aktay's point of view clearly demonstrates Syrian refugees as a potential source of development and economic contribution instead of negatively affecting Turkey's economic capacity. Another statement highlighting the economic contribution of Syrian refugees to the labour market came in 2021 from the AKP's Vice President Mehmet Özhaseki, who drew attention to the role of refugees in keeping the industry alive in some provinces, such as in Gaziantep (Cumhuriyet, 2021, July 27). As time passed, the AKP's domestic policy agenda on Syrian refugees centred on Syrians' contribution to the Turkish labour market by trying to show how they do this without harming the host community members. Having underlined the importance of migration management, the AKP official stated, "If we manage the migration well, Syrians can contribute to the country in an economic sense. However, there needs to be a more detailed investigation on whether they provide added value." (Interview, 2022, July 1). It is observed that the interviewed AKP official was more wary about conceptualising the presence or lack of such contribution.

With the new regulations and policies enacted by the ruling AKP to enhance Syrian refugees' access to decent and sustainable job opportunities in light of their protracted stay, some opposition parties have increasingly voiced socio-economic concerns. In this respect, the perceptions regarding the exemption of Syrian refugees from legal and tax-related obligations while operating their businesses and the role of this in creating competition between two communities are one of the primary sources of the socio-economic concerns of the CHP. In response to the challenges to the absorption capacity of the host community, the CHP frequently highlights the need to take necessary measures to avoid making host community members economically vulnerable due to the economic inclusion of Syrian refugees (CHP, 2016b, p. 94). Furthermore, the CHP has increasingly built its socio-economic concerns on the perceived prioritisation of Syrian refugees in public services vis-a-vis the host community members. This was not a significant issue initially for the CHP because of the low number of Syrians and their limited access to public services.

In the discourses of the CHP elite, the presence of Syrian refugees has been associated with increasing unemployment, informality in the labour market, and decreasing access to sustainable livelihoods, even if such economic problems were already in the country before Syrians arrived. For example, in a television programme, CHP's presidential candidate for the 2018 presidential elections, Muharrem İnce, criticised the return of Syrian refugees who went to Syria for Eid to Turkey by underlining their negative effect on the economic capacity of Turkey, "Is this [country] a soup kitchen? My citizens are unemployed, and the retirees cannot earn their living." (Haber7, 2018, May 25). As this statement shows, the vulnerable situation of host community members vis-a-vis Syrian refugees has been prioritised in the policy decisions of CHP regarding Syrian refugees. However, it is equally important to note that Syrian refugees encounter more severe challenges in accessing the labour market because of their displacement. Contrary to this issue, Syrian refugees in the country have been made scapegoats for host community members' economic problems in the CHP elite's discourses.

CHP officials often construct Syrian refugees as those creating unfair competition for host community members because of the former's perceived tendency to accept low wages and long working hours. It is worth noting that such concerns emerge as common

knowledge among the public and have been instrumentalised by the Turkish opposition parties without showing conclusive proof most of the time. Given that Syrian refugees are usually employed in jobs that host community members do not prefer, it would not be realistic to anticipate them to be competitors for job opportunities all the time. Furthermore, such statements raised by political actors cannot be seen as solely evaluating the current situation in the labour market since these perceptions perpetuate the risk of discrimination and exploitation against Syrian refugees. The economic inclusion of Syrian refugees expected to be realised in line with the right to work stipulated in the international refugee law, which has no great relevance to security matters, has been securitised by CHP (Karadağ & Rumelili, 2017, p. 73).

During the interview, the CHP official similarly raised concerns about the impact of the economic inclusion of Syrian refugees on the local absorption capacity. The CHP official expressed the effect of Syrian refugees' access to livelihoods on host community members as follows:

“Syrian refugees work for low wages without demanding social security. Hence, business people prefer Syrians, which creates a competitive environment in the labour market where they have been employed rather than Turkish people of working age. Since they are less costly to employers, Syrians are selected for the available job opportunities. This creates a tension, which needs to be solved.”

(Interview, 2022, April 12)

The above passage highlights concerns about the likelihood of conflict over scarce resources between host community members and Syrian refugees. As is apparent in this statement, the problems surrounding the increased competition in the job market with Syrian refugees' access to livelihood opportunities are underlined. Having mentioned the need to prevent the likelihood of such tensions between host community members and Syrian refugees, the CHP official recommended that tax obligations be put on the employed Syrians. On the other hand, when the official was asked about how the economic inclusion of Syrian refugees can contribute to the host country, the CHP official stated:

“Syrian refugees create various problems even if they are presented as contributing to the solution of economic problems in the medium term from the perspective of demography. Therefore, the solution to Turkey's economic

problems should not depend on the presence of Syrian refugees.” (Interview, 2022, April 12)

As the above statements of the CHP official exemplify, the main focus of the CHP’s perspective on Syrian refugees’ access to livelihoods has been on the economic problems they pose rather than expecting any contribution from them to Turkey’s economic and social development. Indeed, seeing refugees as a remedy to the problems Turkey experienced with a focus on the structural conditions of the job market has been problematised.

The HDP, on the other hand, avoids depicting Syrian refugees as responsible for creating competition in the job market since it is aware that such threat perceptions may lead to domestic conflict between the two communities. Rather than problematising the presence of Syrian refugees in economic terms, the report prepared by the HDP’s Research Unit pays attention to how Syrian refugees face exploitation and discrimination when they adopt negative coping strategies, such as taking part in the informal economy. Furthermore, the same report calls on the state authorities to enhance Syrians’ working conditions dignifiedly and to put changes in place to the national legal framework in line with the international human rights instruments (HDP, 2016, p. 13). Furthermore, refraining from appealing to the host community members’ concerns about Syrian refugees’ prioritisation in public services, the HDP draws attention to the shortcomings in their access to relevant services, such as education required to create sustainable job opportunities.

In response to the discussions surrounding Syrians’ possible contribution to Turkey’s economic development, the HDP official stated:

“First of all, Syrians were forced to leave their homes. These people work for low wages and informally, which leads to their exploitation under harsh conditions. For example, if they fail to receive their wages for three months, these people do not seek their rights since they are unaware of the relevant rules and regulations. Therefore, I would not describe this situation as contributing to Turkey’s economic development.” (Interview, 2022, April 20)

The remarks of the HDP official draw attention to the vulnerability of Syrian refugees in the labour market by emphasising the challenges that the displacement situation of Syrian refugees creates. Similarly, another interviewed HDP official underlined,

“Workers from the host community who are subject to poor working conditions pit against Syrian refugees because of scarce resources, which may, in turn, lead to xenophobic attitudes.” (Interview, 2022, July 1). As the above statement exemplifies, the likelihood of discrimination against Syrian refugees in the labour market by host community members who also encounter similar challenges has been voiced.

Regarding the statements at the governmental level regarding Syrian refugees’ contribution to Turkey’s economic development, the HDP official clarified the party’s stance as follows, “When we look at it from the perspective of employers, this represents an opportunity since Syrian refugees are a source of cheap labour. However, our party refuses to approach this issue from the same perspective.” (Interview, 2022, July 1). As the above remarks of the HDP official demonstrate, by refraining from contributing to the economic securitisation of Syrian refugees, the HDP criticises the ruling AKP for leading to the economic precarity of Syrian refugees in line with the business interests. Furthermore, the importance of ensuring just and dignified working conditions for Syrian refugees has been emphasised during the interviews with HDP officials.

Before joining the ruling coalition, the MHP was the party that raised the most severe concerns about the economic inclusion of Syrian refugees and its consequences for competition between the two communities. The MHP elite expressed discontent with the government’s policies providing Syrian refugees access to the labour market since their participation may, in turn, lead to job losses for host community members. In this direction, the likelihood of socio-economic tensions between the two communities because of the increasing competition for scarce job opportunities was raised in the political materials of the MHP. In line with the initial expectations, this thesis observed that, prior to becoming part of the ruling coalition, the MHP prioritised meeting the economic needs of host community members vis-à-vis Syrian refugees.

However, the participation of MHP in the governing coalition in 2018 has moderated the tone of its criticisms towards Syrian refugees’ access to livelihoods. As a ruling coalition member, the MHP, similar to AKP, tries to find a middle way in which the economic well-being of Syrian refugees during their stay in Turkey will be ensured without disadvantaging host community members in their access to livelihoods. In this direction, the MHP official, during the interview, stated:

“The economic inclusion of Syrian refugees has pros and cons. As the National Movement Party, we cannot think just based on benefits. The most important thing is not to undermine the peace of host community members while simultaneously ensuring the peace of Syrians as well.” (Interview, 2022, April 13)

Having been aware of the concerns of the host community members regarding Syrian refugees’ access to the labour market, the MHP avoids directly presenting the latter as competitors for job opportunities, as CHP did. This stance is closely related to the party’s belief that such threat perceptions will undermine the government’s credibility, which is expected to be accountable for ensuring the economic capacity of the country.

Regarding the role of considerations relevant to the economy and development in shaping the IYI Party’s policy responses towards Syrian refugees, the current thesis observed that the IYI Party accused them of rising unemployment. In line with the public criticisms against the economic inclusion of Syrian refugees, the IYI Party elite have focused on the negative impact of Syrians’ access to livelihoods, especially the perceived competition in the labour market. During the interview, similar concerns were raised by the IYI Party official as follows, “The majority of Syrians work informally. Since Syrians work for low wages, they lead to competition and steal the jobs of host community members.” (Interview, 2022, April 11). As the above statement demonstrates, the economic securitisation of Syrian refugees by presenting them as competitors in the job market for host community members has been prevalent.

In addition, the interviewed IYI Party official drew attention to how the policies regulating the Syrian refugees’ access to livelihoods in Turkey represent an area where business interests are served. Within the scope of the heated debate on the Syrian refugees’ possible contribution to Turkey’s economic development, the same IYI Party official differed Turkey from European countries, such as the Netherlands, which suffer from labour shortages because of their shrinking population. According to the IYI Party official, these countries selected Syrian refugees who are likely to solve these problems, unlike Turkey (Interview, 2022, April 11).

Besides the perceived competition in the labour market, for the IYI Party, public services have been under pressure because of the extended stay of Syrian refugees. In this direction, the IYI Party elite often complains about the economic costs of hosting Syrian refugees with the claims about the prioritisation of Syrian refugees vis-a-vis host

community members. For example, the IYI Party İzmir MP Aytun Çıray argued that the opportunities provided to Syrian refugees make relevant public services, including national education and social security, be interrupted (Yeniçağ, 2018, October 6). Rather than pointing to Syrians' contribution to Turkey's economic development, the IYI Party official's discourse has prioritised their role in overstressing public services.

4.3.2 National Economy and Social Development Dimension from the Perspective of IR Theories

When we examine the role of socio-economic considerations in shaping political parties' decisions regarding Syrian refugees within the realist IR theory framework, it is observed that the ruling AKP has reconstructed the identity of Syrian refugees as contributors to Turkish society in economic terms. Such reasoning behind the refugee protection approach of the AKP elite has become particularly important with the party's recognition that the sectarian affinity between host community members and Syrian refugees no longer facilitates societal acceptance. With the aim of legitimising the extended stay of Syrian refugees in Turkey and the need for their economic inclusion, the ruling AKP has been trying to show that Syrians' access to livelihoods is in the country's national interest in economic terms. However, during the interview, this issue was associated with the importance of successful migration governance.

Compared to the ruling AKP, the CHP and IYI frequently highlight the negative impact of Syrians' access to the labour market on host community members. These parties have increasingly raised concerns about the problems of unemployment and informality in the labour market, worsening economic competition, and disruption of public services. Considering that the above-mentioned economic problems existed before the Syrian mass migration, portraying Syrian refugees as a scapegoat for all these would not be realistic. Presenting Syrians as a threat to the conditions of the labour market, the functioning of public services, and the provision of social welfare, which can be understood better from the perspective of the constructivist IR theory, has contributed to their further securitisation and, therefore, brought about more politicisation of the presence of Syrian refugees. Such labels prevented them from accessing sustainable livelihood opportunities and enjoying public services in the desired way. The AKP and MHP avoid using such labels since they want to show their capacity to govern the issues relevant to the Syrian

refugee issue, including their impact on the host community's economic capacity and Turkey's development trajectory.

In liberal terms, on the other hand, the HDP problematises the poor working conditions of Syrian refugees, including low wages, long working hours, and the lack of access to social security, besides exploitation and discrimination they face in the labour market. The party sees the ruling coalition's policies as responsible for the unfavourable working conditions of Syrian refugees. In this respect, the HDP is the party that most advocates for improving the resilience and self-reliance of Syrian refugees. More to the point, rather than accusing Syrian refugees of worsening the country's economic problems, the HDP sees the ruling coalition as responsible for the country's bad economic performance.

In addition to the research findings mentioned above, one crucial point that was largely missing regarding the elite interviews is the economic inclusion of high-skilled Syrian refugees. The political party officials did not show any interest in pointing out how the economic inclusion of high-skilled and educated Syrian refugees and their competencies can contribute to the sustainable economic and social development of Turkey. Another issue which was mainly lacking from the findings from the elite interviews was the role of Syrian entrepreneurs who have previously had business relations with Arab countries in contributing to Turkey's foreign trade, which could be better understood from the liberal IR perspective.

4.4 International Refugee Regime Dimension

The international refugee regime is the last pillar of the current thesis's analytical framework. In this respect, the role of the normative dimension of refugee protection in shaping political parties' responses towards refugees has been questioned below. The findings of the thesis demonstrate that the "*international rights-based protection approach to refugees*" matters in differentiating the policy decisions of Turkish political parties regarding Syrian refugees.

4.4.1 *International Rights-Based Protection Approach to Refugees*

The expectations among Turkish political parties that the Syrian conflict would not last long strengthened their belief in the return of Syrian refugees to their countries of origin within a short time. In this respect, temporariness and humanitarian responsibility associated with the presence of Syrian refugees are relevant to understanding the reasoning behind the political parties' early policy responses towards Syrian refugees. However, the Syrian conflict that dragged on without obvious hope of achieving a peaceful resolution made the issues of improving the legal and institutional framework and introducing harmonisation policies increasingly debated across political parties.

In the initial phase, the ruling AKP implemented an open-door policy by adopting a humanitarian stance. Since then, the concept of responsibility for hosting Syrian refugees in Turkey has been frequently voiced by the AKP elite. For instance, Prime Minister and AKP leader Ahmet Davutoğlu in September 2014 portrayed embracing Syrian brothers "as a historical and humanitarian duty" (Hürriyet, 2014, September 19). Davutoğlu's depiction demonstrates the duty-based refugee protection mentality, which is an inherent part of the ruling AKP's policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees. Such an approach has been accompanied by the discursive strategies used by the AKP elite to emphasise the religious brotherhood with Syrian refugees.

Intending to justify Turkey's open-door policy in domestic political discussions and increase societal acceptance of Syrian refugees, the AKP elite frequently underlines the sectarian affinity between host community members and Syrian refugees. Despite the implementation of a TP regime for Syrian refugees, the AKP elite, particularly President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, often portrays Syrians as *muhacir* and host community members as *ensar*. Rather than pointing to these people's right to access asylum in line with the norms and principles of international refugee law, the AKP elite emphasises the religious ties between the two communities. Such attributions used by the party elite exemplify a "selective humanitarianism" (İçduygu et al., 2017, p. 459) through which Syrian refugees' sectarian origins are underlined more than the rights and services their legal status entails.

The extended stay of Syrian refugees in Turkey has made developing policies that aim to facilitate their socio-economic inclusion increasingly necessary for the ruling AKP

since 2014. Furthermore, the issue of Syrian refugees' acquisition of Turkish citizenship has been on the political agenda of President Erdoğan since 2016. The debates on facilitating the voluntary return of Syrian refugees to northern Syria decreased the saliency of the citizenship issue for the ruling AKP. Nevertheless, we should mention that this process has not entirely stopped since it is ongoing for Syrian refugees with specific economic and educational qualifications (Şahin-Mencütek, 2019, p. 93). Paying attention to skill levels in such a process demonstrates that the ruling AKP has been selectively giving Turkish citizenship to Syrian refugees. While trying to justify the extended stay of Syrian refugees in Turkey, the AKP elite have increasingly underlined the "need to integrate skilled, educated Syrian refugees" (İçduygu et al., 2017, p. 464). In this sense, AKP officials point to Syrians' potential to bring added value to the country.

The ruling AKP does not define Syrians as legal refugees as stipulated in the international refugee regime. However, on the side of AKP, the normative dimension of refugee protection plays a prominent role in entitling refugees to certain rights in Turkey, such as access to the labour market and education. While responding to the criticisms directed towards the impact of Syrians' legal status-related problems on their access to rights and services, an official from AKP, during the interview, underlined that the geographical limitation Turkey maintains is irrelevant to the emergence of such problems (Interview, 2022, July 1). All these discourses and practices reveal that the ruling AKP's treatment of Syrian refugees living in the country is far from fully meeting the international rights-based protection approach.

As the stay of Syrian refugees prolonged, the CHP started to increasingly criticise the ruling AKP for solely pursuing an assistance-based approach towards them rather than adopting a comprehensive refugee protection response supported by international law. In parallel to this critique, CHP upholds that Syrian refugees should reach their fundamental human rights. The party's November 2015 election manifesto declares that Syrian refugees should enjoy humanitarian treatment in Turkey (CHP, 2015, p. 206). While expressing criticisms against the non-asylum-based protection mentality of the ruling AKP, the report prepared by the CHP Commission to Monitor Migration and Migrants' Problems problematises the lack of time limit determining how long TP lasts. By adding that living in such a limbo increases Syrians' vulnerability, the Commission emphasises that the AKP government's policies towards Syrian refugees lack a long-term protection

and harmonisation perspective (CHP, 2016b, p. 52). Moreover, the Commission underlines that Turkey should lift its geographical limitation to the 1951 Geneva Convention (pp. 143-144).

During the interviews, participants were asked about the challenges posed by Turkey's ongoing geographical limitation in terms of facilitating the local integration of Syrian refugees. The CHP official expressed that removing this geographical limitation will not resolve the social cohesion-related problems of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Having suggested that the ruling AKP is reluctant to integrate Syrian refugees into society, the CHP official raised that other policies, such as the well-thought education policy, should accompany the integration policy. By complaining about the lack of adequate knowledge-sharing by the government, the CHP official, during the interview, raised doubts about whether the ruling AKP formulated policies for integrating the "650,000 Syrian children born in Turkey" into the official education system (Interview, 2022, April 12).

On the other hand, the CHP frequently sheds light on the problems that host community members experience, although it recognises the legal rights of refugees. In such an environment, the party often voices the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland as the only feasible solution. For example, the concluding declaration of CHP's International Syria Conference calls for encouraging the voluntary return of Syrian refugees to their countries of origin while simultaneously highlighting the need for preparing harmonisation strategies for Syrians who may stay in Turkey (Sözcü, 2019, September 28). However, the CHP's policies relevant to the future of Syrian refugees contain a more robust focus on voluntary return vis-à-vis the integration-based approach. More to the point, the party is one of the leading opponents of the naturalisation plans put forth by the ruling AKP towards Syrian refugees because of prevalent concerns over their turn into a vote potential for the government in line with demographic sensitivities.

Contrary to the initial expectations, the extended stay of Syrian refugees in Turkey made the HDP highly critical of the assistance-centered approach pursued by the ruling AKP. In this respect, the HDP underlines the urgent need to adopt an agenda on refugee protection which upholds the importance of a right-based protection approach to refugees. Having been closely interested in ensuring Syrian refugees' resilience, the HDP supports adopting more comprehensive rights and clear legal status. For instance, the HDP's

November 2015 election manifesto problematises Turkey's ongoing geographical limitation to the 1951 Refugee Convention (HDP, 2015, p. 15). In this sense, it should be underlined that the HDP's policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees seek to guarantee their rights-based protection.

In a similar direction, the report prepared by the HDP's Research Unit sheds light on the problems Syrian refugees experience while accessing rights and services due to the uncertainties surrounding TP. By referring to the lack of humane working conditions Syrian refugees are exposed to, such as low wages and long working hours, the report also calls for changes in the national legislation to enhance these people's right to dignified job opportunities (HDP, 2016, pp. 11-15). Despite the frequent emphasis on improving the access of Syrian refugees to rights and services in the policy recommendations of the HDP, concerning the HDP's refugee protection approach, some studies refer to a kind of "selective solidarity" (İlgit & Memişoğlu, 2017, p. 88; Aydemir, 2022, p. 667) because of the party's frequent references to the situation of Syrian Kurds.

Nevertheless, the current thesis observed that the HDP has provided the most support for implementing an international rights-based protection approach. The party calls for clarifying the legal status of Syrians and improving their access to rights and services in accordance with international refugee law. By drawing attention to the problematic nature of the ruling AKP's approach that selects Syrian refugees based on their qualifications while granting citizenship, the HDP elite supports that refugee status and citizenship should be accessible to all of them, differing from all other opposition parties. During the interview, an official from HDP accused the AKP government of engaging in an "arbitrary process" of granting citizenship to Syrian refugees by sharing, "Almost 200,000 Syrian refugees were granted Turkish citizenship, who have financial resources or certain professions." (Interview, 2022, April 20). Pointing out that they do not know the criteria for which the ruling AKP grants citizenship to Syrians, the HDP official noted that the AKP's approach in this subject area is a "closed book". Apart from the support for strengthening the socio-economic participation of refugees in daily life, the HDP official problematised the concept of integration because of its negative cultural connotations. The HDP official described it as a purely state-centric approach that puts the whole responsibility on the shoulders of newcomers rather than underlining a mutual

process, where host community members also need to assume responsibility (Interview, 2022, April 20).

Another HDP official added, “The decision regarding how refugees maintain their lives should be left their own jurisdiction.” (Interview, 2022, June 8). Having been opposed to the integration concept since the mentality behind it has the “intention of standardising”, the HDP official underlined the importance of aiming to achieve “harmonisation and coexistence” (Interview, 2022, June 8). Regarding the harmonisation, the HDP official underlined the need for measures to respect the individuality of refugees, including their cultural differences. These statements are important in terms of showing that the policy decisions of the HDP regarding refugee protection embeds a solid rights-based approach, including socio-economic and cultural rights.

On the other hand, the belief that the Syrian refugees’ stay in the country would be temporary played a determining role in creating MHP’s assistance-based policy formulations. The party has supported the provision of cash and in-kind assistance to Syrian refugees since the beginning of Syrian mass migration. Despite the extended stay of Syrian refugees, the MHP’s emergency-based humanitarian response has not been replaced by a rights-based protection approach informed by the international refugee regime. For example, the MHP’s November 2015 election manifesto still underlines that Syrians have been hosted in the country as guests of the Turkish nation (MHP, 2015, p. 253). The manifesto draws attention to the issue of providing help to every individual without looking at their identities. However, some scholars did not find such a stance convincing because of the party’s frequent attributions to the humanitarian situation of Turkomans in Syria, which can be interpreted as “selective solidarity” with a specific ethnic group (İlgıt & Memişoğlu, 2017, p. 88; Aydemir, 2022, p. 667).

When we look at the policy recommendations of the MHP regarding the future of Syrians in Turkey before it participated in the ruling coalition, it is observed that the party presented Syrians’ voluntary return to their homeland as the only viable solution. MHP initially took a harsh stance on integrating Syrian refugees with the belief that integration policies targeting them would bring their permanent settlement in the country. In this sense, it would be appropriate to note that the MHP addressed the Syrian refugee issue from an assistance-oriented approach to refugee protection rather than a rights-based one derived from international law before joining the ruling coalition.

As a ruling coalition member, the MHP continued to show a solid commitment to ensuring the return of Syrian refugees to their countries of origin vis-a-vis alternative policy formulations. In this respect, the party's 2018 election manifesto does not refer to any policy suggestions to promote Syrian refugees' integration. During the interviews, participants were asked about the challenges posed by the logic of temporariness targeting refugees in accessing rights and services. As to lifting the geographical limitation that Turkey put on the 1951 Refugee Convention, the MHP official expressed concerns about the turn of Turkey into a "migrant heaven" since it is an attractive country. The MHP official added, "The party's primary goal is to ensure the voluntary return of Syrians to their home." (Interview, 2022, April 13). Concerning the nature of this return, the MHP official clarified that "this return would be in line with the domestic and international law" (Interview, 2022, April 13). As seen in the statements of the MHP official, the issue of voluntary return of Syrian refugees continued to emerge as one of the most critical issues on the political agenda of the MHP elite on refugees. Such a stance decreases the likelihood of adopting policies aiming to facilitate the local integration of Syrian refugees in the eyes of the MHP elite. However, it is necessary to highlight the role of the ongoing partnership with the ruling AKP in moderating the party's harsh stance on integration policies.

The international rights-based protection approach to refugees provides a limited understanding of the IYI Party's policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees. Whereas it was realised that the presence of Syrian refugees in Turkey would not be temporary, the IYI Party's 2018 election manifesto does not focus on the status-related problems of Syrians (IYI Party, 2018). The IYI Party İzmir MP Aytun Çıray, in the "Workshop on the Return of Syrians to their Homeland" organised by the party in 2019, severely opposed granting refugee status to Syrians (Evrensel, 2019, December 16). In this respect, it is understood that the IYI Party elite aims to prevent any policy attempts to make the stay of Syrians in Turkey permanent since the party seeks to ensure the return of Syrian refugees to their own countries of origin. In line with this aim, the party's 2018 election manifesto already declared that "new temporary protection and asylum applications would not be accepted" (IYI Party, 2018, p. 49).

Whereas the extended stay of refugees in the host countries necessitates the creation of policies enabling them to become self-reliant, the IYI Party refrains from raising

Syrians' status-related problems, which make their access to rights and services difficult. Since the party sees the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland as the only possible solution, it is against any form of local integration policies since they have the potential to create resentment among host community members. During the interview, an official from the IYI Party also took up a similar position in line with the party's lack of an agenda on an international rights-based protection approach to refugees. Reminding that "no country could carry out a refugee status determination process on an individual basis during a mass refugee movement of such a magnitude to its own borders" (Interview, 2022, April 11), the IYI Party official did not raise any concerns over the difficulties Syrian refugees experienced in accessing their rights and services. As discussed above, the policy formulations of the IYI Party solely focus on the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland by refusing asylum-based protection and local integration.

4.4.2 International Refugee Regime Dimension from the Perspective of IR Theories

In the initial stage of Syrian refugees' stay in Turkey, a humanitarianism-centred approach to refugee protection, which can be understood from the perspective of liberal IR theory, emerged as impactful in shaping political parties' policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees. In this respect, references to the humanitarian norms and principles exemplified through the statements among political parties on meeting the basic needs of refugees were extensive. However, the assistance-based approach of the initial stage upheld by certain political parties, rather than focusing on more sustainable policies, failed to come up with policy suggestions that can respond to the needs of Syrian refugees and improve their access to rights and services.

As time passed, the Syrian refugee issue created intense debate among political parties over Syrians' access to rights and services, the creation of integration policies and future scenarios for them. Thus, we see a growing emphasis on the need to ensure the transition from the assistance-based approach to the rights-based approach to refugee protection. Despite the lack of policy attempts to grant Syrians refugee status, which entails broader rights, the resilience-based approach, including the attempts to facilitate their access to education and livelihoods, started to materialise in the ruling AKP's treatment of Syrian refugees. Acquisition of Turkish citizenship by Syrians has also been on the political agenda of the ruling AKP since 2016. However, this process has been

carried out exceptionally and was interrupted from time to time. Despite the improvements in terms of Syrian refugees' access to socio-economic rights, it would be good taste to highlight that these are not at the desired level in practice.

When we look at the opposition parties' views on rights-based refugee protection, the current thesis observed that the HDP differs from other political parties with its substantial level of support for improving Syrian refugees' rights in line with international refugee law. The HDP's frequent references to the need to lift the geographical limitation and grant refugee status to Syrians shed light on the asylum-based protection approach of the party. Furthermore, the provision of the path to the acquisition of citizenship for every refugee, regardless of financial resources and professional skills, stands out in the policy recommendations of the HDP.

Compared to HDP, CHP has been more prudent regarding the policies that would encourage the permanence of Syrian refugees in Turkey. On the one hand, the CHP advocates for improving refugees' access to rights and services as long as this does not create resentment among host community members. On the other hand, the party points to the problems that host community members experience because of the presence of Syrian refugees. Contrary to HDP, the CHP fiercely opposes the Syrian refugees' acquisition of Turkish citizenship due to voting concerns. When it comes to the MHP and IYI Party, it is observed that the humanitarianism of the initial stage is still more relevant compared to the international rights-based protection approach to refugees in determining their policy responses towards Syrian refugees. This thesis reveals that plans for Syrians' acquisition of Turkish citizenship were met most negatively by the IYI Party, given the MHP's electoral partnership with the ruling AKP.

This thesis indicated that the issues of local integration, permanent settlement of Syrian refugees, and their acquisition of Turkish citizenship continued to be seen as problematic areas by certain political parties. However, the existence of discourses on improving the refugees' access to rights and services demonstrates the internalisation of the norms of the international refugee regime. Such a learning process has become instrumental in determining the policy formulations of political parties on refugees that can be better understood from the perspective of the constructivist theory of IR, as discussed in *Chapter 2*.

Chapter 5:

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The current thesis presents a comparative study of Turkish political parties' policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees in Turkey between 2011 and 2021 and tries to reveal similarities and differences in their policy choices on Syrian refugees. While doing so, this thesis sought to provide an analytical framework that would shed light on how the proposed factors exert a varying influence on Turkish political parties' policy responses towards Syrian refugees. In this direction, this thesis focuses on the role of a particular group of elements: international politics of forced migration, national security concerns and domestic political dynamics, considerations relevant to the economy and social development, and the international refugee regime. The evolving nature of Turkey's refugee politics shows that the Syrian refugee issue first became a foreign policy tool of the ruling AKP and later turned into a matter of domestic politics. Besides the extended stay of Syrian refugees, the increasing concerns about national and societal security and the perceived disruption of the socio-economic order became instrumental in reaching a turning point in terms of party-based approaches.

As time passed, the worsening bilateral relations with Syria and subsequent open-door policy towards Syrians emerged as a heatedly debated issue in Turkish domestic politics, making it appropriate to conduct a comparative study. Therefore, this thesis examines how the policy responses of the five major political parties in the Turkish Parliament, namely AKP, CHP, HDP, MHP, and IYI Party, towards Syrian refugees connect to their domestic and foreign policy agenda. The comparison of their policy choices on Syrian refugees, considering the continuity and changes of various factors in the domestic and international realms, has provided valuable insight into how their positions share similarities or differ. The findings of the current thesis are mainly based on the semi-structured elite interviews conducted with political party officials accountable for their parties' foreign and migration policies ($N=6$). The second component is the content analysis of the party programs, general election manifestos (2015 and 2018), and reports and policy notes of the selected five parties on Syrian refugees. Besides the desktop research and the analysis of the national laws and regulations on asylum since 2011, the third component consists of the analysis of the

public discourses of the party administrators and deputies of the selected five political parties in the media ($N=231$) to support the findings from the other two components. Such a multi-level data collection provided the comprehensive content to be examined through the newly designed multifaceted analytical framework built on existing literature and research.

The current analytical framework used in this thesis to account for the factors behind the Turkish political parties' policy responses towards Syrian refugees has been built mainly on the existing literature on drivers of forced migration governance. These drivers include foreign policy and diplomatic interests, national security concerns, domestic political realities, issues relevant to the economy and development, humanitarianism and the international refugee regime. The main argument made at the beginning of the thesis was that party-based approaches in Turkey towards Syrian refugees could not be adequately examined without studying domestic and international factors behind their policy-making, and this study's findings support this argument. Furthermore, this thesis sought to demonstrate what the IR theory could offer to understand the motivations behind Turkish political parties' positions on Syrian refugees without ignoring the salience of other factors. Therefore, there will be concluding remarks on the contributions of mainstream IR theories within the scope of the current thesis.

An in-depth analysis of the policy responses of political parties regarding Syrian refugees in Turkey reveals that all four pillars of the newly proposed analytical framework are relevant to understanding these responses, with some pillars having relatively more explanatory power than others. The factors relevant to international politics of forced migration are the foreign policy objectives of the political parties regarding the Syrian conflict and their concerns about the role of the EU as an external actor in the Syrian refugee issue. Regarding national security concerns and domestic political dynamics, political parties seek to protect the country from perceived and actual security threats associated with refugee arrivals. The sensitivities around identity, including concerns about the cultural, ethnic, and sectarian differences and demographic balance besides the criminalisation and securitisation of refugees, matter in differentiating the policy choices of political parties on Syrian refugees. Regarding the framework's economy and social development pillar, concerns about the financial cost of hosting refugees, their economic inclusion and access to public services stand out. When it comes to the international

refugee regime, as a last pillar, upholding the norms around right-based refugee protection represents a divisive issue across political parties. To turn back, *Chapter 4* presented evidence obtained through semi-structured interviews and content analysis. In this respect, the relevance of these four main pillars while explaining the policy responses of the five largest political parties on Syrian refugees in the Turkish context could not be underestimated. However, it would be in good taste to point to the changes in the level of influence of these factors proposed under each of the four pillars between 2011 and 2021.

One of the main findings of this study is that foreign policy objectives and diplomatic interests of political parties affect their positions on Syrian refugees. Host countries' relations with the refugee-sending countries play a prominent role in determining the former's responses towards refugees. Political parties may be reluctant to accept refugees from particular countries since such an act could be seen as a way of undermining the regional principles of "non-interference" or "national sovereignty" (Cheung, 2012, p. 64). In this respect, they may be unwilling to accept refugees from friendly regimes. On the other hand, they may be more willing to accept refugees fleeing from hostile states since doing so will undermine the latter's legitimacy in the eyes of the international community. In this respect, it is observed that bilateral relations with Syria have been a divisive issue for Turkish political parties from the beginning, significantly affecting parties' positions on Syrian refugees.

The ruling AKP pursued the most assertive foreign policy goals among Turkish political parties regarding the Syrian civil war. In this sense, it supported the Syrian opposition forces that failed to eliminate the Assad regime. On the other hand, the main opposition party, the CHP, is a vocal critic of the AKP's direct involvement in the Syrian conflict and its support for the armed Syrian opposition. Later, with the Kurdish groups' growing influence in northern Syria, the Turkish military started to carry out military operations, making HDP claim that the AKP aims to change the demographic structure of Kurdish-populated areas. After participating in the ruling coalition, the MHP left its critical attitude towards the AKP's foreign policy aims in Syria. Thus, the AKP and MHP started to act together in their discontent with the Syrian regime and sought to increase Turkey's power and influence in the Middle East. While doing that, they have tried to discredit the legitimacy of the Syrian regime.

Referring to the principle of non-interference in other countries' domestic affairs as stipulated in international law, the CHP, HDP, and IYI Party, on the other hand, criticised the government for becoming a party to the regional conflict. In this direction, the CHP and IYI Party have problematised the deviation of the ruling AKP from the Turkish foreign policy's long-lasting principles. Building on the sensitivities surrounding demographic compositions in neighbouring Syria, the HDP, on the other hand, accused the ruling AKP of conducting interventions to change the demographic balance of Kurdish-populated areas in northern Syria. Before joining the ruling coalition, the MHP, on the other hand, raised concerns over the perceived harm to the presence of Turkomans because of the foreign policy attempts of the ruling AKP.

When we look at the contribution of IR theories, it is observed that mainly realist and (neo)liberal institutionalist ones are relevant in explaining the mutual relationship between the political parties' foreign policy objectives in Syria and their positions on Syrian refugees. Furthermore, constructivism's central assumptions about identity-driven concerns provide a promising framework for understanding the relationship between political parties' policy decisions regarding refugees and foreign policy strategies, given the sensitivities of MHP and HDP surrounding the demographic compositions in Syria. This finding is in line with the ongoing debate in the literature (Demirtaş, 2020; Aydemir, 2022) by bringing an additional explanation from the perspective of constructivist IR theory. The abovementioned findings reveal the need to link IR with the refugee/forced migration studies literature.

Similarly, the use of Syrian refugees as a matter of diplomacy in Turkey's relations with the EU has become a politically and economically divisive issue for Turkish political parties, especially since mid-2015. Although national states assume the primary responsibility for accepting refugees, several external actors have played a critical role in shaping these states' policies targeting refugees. In this direction, we should highlight the importance of the EU in the politicisation of issues relevant to Syrian refugees in Turkish domestic politics. The EU has demonstrated a strong commitment to curb the tide of irregular immigration to Europe from Turkey, which in turn made Turkey a vital partner in the eyes of the EU. When we question what insights the IR theory can offer into the factors behind the political parties' policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees, the

neoliberal institutionalist theory of IR stands out through its emphasis on international organisations and their role in serving mutual interests on refugee protection.

Given the implications of refugee protection on state sovereignty, the EU's externalisation attempts of its migration control to Turkey have been a matter of intense debate in Turkish domestic politics. The four opposition parties, CHP, HDP, MHP (until 2018), and IYI Party, have expressed discontent with the AKP's negotiations on migration and refugees with the EU. In this direction, the CHP and IYI Party blame the AKP government for eroding state sovereignty by accepting the conditions the EU put forth through externalisation policies. Such a critical stance can be better understood from the perspective of the realist IR theory. Before joining the ruling coalition, the MHP's stance on the issue resembled those of the CHP and the IYI Party.

However, this thesis observed that the MHP's opposition to the AKP's use of the Syrian refugee issue as a negotiation tool vis-a-vis the EU in return for financial support faded after this party cooperated with the ruling AKP. Thus, MHP agrees with the AKP on accusing the EU of failing to fulfil its responsibilities on refugee protection and shifting the burden to Turkey rather than sharing it. It would be appropriate to underline that the Syrian refugee issue has provided the ruling coalition's parties with a golden opportunity to promote a positive image of Turkey as opposed to a negative image of Europe. In this direction, while simultaneously seeking to advance Turkey's international reputation, these two political parties have contributed to the otherisation of the EU and Europe, which can be better comprehended through the main assumptions of the constructivist IR theory.

Regarding the negotiations with the EU on refugee protection, the CHP and HDP accuse the AKP government of violating the human rights of Syrian refugees and the norms of the international refugee regime. However, the criticisms articulated by the two parties are not solely directed towards the AKP government but are also relevant to EU and European countries. From a constructivist perspective, this can be interpreted as the internalisation of the ideas and norms on refugee protection, which stand out in the political agenda of CHP and HDP. Contrary to the ruling coalition's sense of pride in underlining Turkey's generosity for refugees, the three opposition parties, CHP, HDP, and IYI Party, express their concerns over how the AKP's assertive foreign policies against the EU erode Turkey's reputation in the eyes of the international community. In

this respect, the constructivist IR theory provides a promising framework for understanding political sensitivities around international reputation as a driver behind the policy decisions of political parties regarding Syrian refugees.

Having underlined the critical role of international institutions in refugee protection, all the examined political parties pay attention to the need for cooperating with the EU on issues relevant to Syrian refugees. The liberal theory of IR stands out in understanding the party-based approaches through its main assumptions on responsibility sharing. However, the policy formulations of the opposition parties regarding the conditions and nature of the cooperation with the EU on refugee protection differ from those of the ruling coalition's parties. Problematising the AKP's negotiations on migration and asylum in return for financial gains, CHP, HDP, and IYI Party seek to improve cooperation with the EU to find a real solution to the Syrian refugee issue.

The second finding, which is more related to national security concerns and domestic political realities within the scope of the current thesis, is comprehended better using the main assumptions of the constructivist IR theory on identity. The valuable insights of the theory stem from its potential to account for identity-driven concerns behind Turkish political parties' policy decisions, including the perceived affinity or differences between host community members and Syrian refugees in terms of ethnic, sectarian, and cultural senses. Political party officials, except for the HDP elite, have redefined the identity of Syrians instead of portraying them as refugees fleeing political violence and persecution in their countries of origin. The considerations relevant to national security and demography have become impactful in the reconstruction process of identities by determining the strategies of Turkish political parties to incorporate Syrian refugees into each party's proposed national identity definition or omit them from it.

It is prevalent that the policies targeting migrants and refugees who have different ethnic and religious identities bring discriminatory measures (Meyers, 2000, p. 1250). Political actors in host countries are committed to strengthening national identity, often leading to differentiating policy responses towards refugees who have affinity in terms of ethnic and religious belonging with host community members from those who have differences in these senses. For example, the emphasis on a specific ethnic group among Syrian refugees in the discourses of the MHP and HDP elite while addressing their problems - Turkomans and Kurds, respectively has been regarded by some scholars as a

“selective solidarity” (İlgi & Memişoğlu, 2017, p. 88, Aydemir, 2022, p. 667). In this respect, the constructivist IR theory can explain the role of ethnic solidarity since perceived affinity with refugees matters in encouraging more supportive policies towards them. However, we should underline that HDP advocates for the rights of all refugee groups regardless of their ethnic identity in accordance with international refugee law. On the other hand, for the CHP and İYİ Party, Syrian refugees are not linked to these political parties’ national identity definitions since they prioritise ethnic and cultural affinity much more. Therefore, Syrian refugees are presented as a threat to the Turkish national identity in ethnic and cultural terms in the discourses of the officials from these two parties.

The policy formulations of political parties in Turkey towards Syrian refugees have not been solely shaped by the perceived affinity or distance in terms of the ethnic identity of refugees. The perceived cultural similarities and differences between host community members and Syrian refugees regarding religious background have also become impactful in determining party-based approaches in Turkey towards them. In this respect, the ruling AKP has emphasised the Sunni-Muslim identity of Syrian refugees, which complies with its religion-centered national identity definition. On the other hand, CHP and İYİ Party view the ruling AKP’s emphasis on the Muslim identity of Syrian refugees as a deliberate strategy to erode republican values, which is in line with the findings of the previous study conducted by Balta and her colleagues (2022).

Appealing to demographic sensitivities, the CHP and HDP frequently blame the ruling AKP for disrupting ethnic and sectarian balance through its settlement policies targeting Syrian refugees. Having built on concerns about Turkey’s sovereignty and future demographic composition, the İYİ Party focuses on the demographic threat perceived by the extended stay of Syrian refugees. Before joining the ruling coalition, the MHP was similarly a severe critic of the presence of Syrian refugees in the country and problematised the possible demographic changes to the disadvantage of Turkish people in certain Turkish provinces, where Syrian refugees are heavily populated. Within this tense context, the announcement of the plans by the government regarding the Syrians’ acquisition of Turkish citizenship has become a divisive issue for Turkish political parties due to their sensitivities surrounding demographic projections and voting concerns. After joining the ruling coalition, the MHP’s opposition to the ruling AKP on the considerations

relevant to national identity and demography moderated. Constructivism's emphasis on identity and societal security (Buzan et al., 1998) is highly relevant to explaining how the Turkish political parties are likely to securitise or desecuritisise the presence of Syrian refugees in identity-related terms depending on the severity of their concerns.

The third finding of the current study is that the Syrian refugee issue has become a divisive domestic policy issue for the Turkish political parties after the Syrian refugee-hosting experience reached a turning point at the political party level. In the initial phase of the Syrian mass movement to Turkey, the ruling AKP's assistance-focused policies did not aggravate public attitudes much towards Syrian refugees. During that period, the expectations regarding the temporality of the Syrian conflict, accompanied by humanitarian considerations, played a defining role in party-based approaches towards Syrian refugees. However, the decreased hope for the return of Syrian refugees in the short run and the growing national and societal security concerns paved the way for the party-based approaches to the turning point. The extended stay of Syrian refugees in the country required the ruling AKP to introduce policies granting Syrian refugees access to rights and services. In this respect, the increasing competition for scarce resources, especially in the labour market, has exacerbated discriminatory public attitudes towards Syrian refugees.

Besides economic reasons, the Turkish political parties have become increasingly concerned about the emergence of possible inter-communal tensions that may be driven by the sensitivities surrounding identity as time passes. From the perspective of opposition parties, except for the HDP, these concerns have been accompanied by the criminalisation and securitisation of Syrian refugees. In light of all these dimensions, the Syrian refugee issue has turned into a highly politicised issue area among Turkish political parties. Drawing on the Copenhagen School, the constructivist IR theory can significantly explain the securitisation and politicisation process of the presence of Syrian refugees by Turkish political parties.

The current thesis also supports the existing debate in the literature (Demirtaş, 2020, p. 163; Balta et al., 2022, p. 15) by revealing that the position of the political parties in domestic politics has become impactful in determining their approaches towards Syrian refugees. This finding is instrumental in demonstrating that the changes in the relations with the ruling party in domestic politics shape the policy decisions of the political parties

on Syrian refugees. In this respect, it is observed that the MHP's position on Syrian refugees has significantly altered after this party joined the ruling coalition, and its fierce opposition to them has notably decreased. Cooperating with the ruling AKP under the People Alliance has moderated the level of influence of ideology in shaping MHP's position on Syrian refugees. On the other hand, the opposition parties utilise Syrian refugees as a tool while articulating their criticisms towards the ruling coalition. This is less applicable to HDP since it usually addresses the issues relevant to refugees within the framework of the norms stipulated in the international refugee regime, which the liberal IR theory can better explain. In response to the criticisms towards the Turkish government's treatment of Syrian refugees, the governing coalition's parties try to demonstrate that they have the adequate capacity to handle the implications of the Syrian refugee issue without undermining the interests of the host community members.

This finding supports the ongoing debate in the literature on the moderating role of domestic political interests, international political dynamics, and external actors such as the EU in determining the salience of ideological orientations on policy decisions of political parties (Aydemir, 2022, pp. 662-663). This is not to say that ideological orientations do not play a role in shaping migration and refugee policies of political parties. Instead, ideological orientations are not the only motivation behind party-based approaches towards refugees, given that various other factors can restrict the explanatory power of ideological preferences of political parties. For example, in line with the findings of the existing study conducted by Balta and her colleagues (2022, p. 15), the current thesis observed that ethnic political parties which take a robust ideological stance, such as the MHP (before joining the ruling coalition) and HDP, have adopted a more explicit stance on Syrian refugees. Whereas MHP produced mainly negative discourses on Syrian refugees and supported restrictive policies regarding them before cooperating with the ruling AKP, the HDP substantially continued to articulate favourable opinions on these refugees and advocate for liberal policies towards them. However, what is critical to mention again is that the MHP abandoned its initially witnessed stiff opposition towards Syrian refugees. In this respect, becoming a part of the ruling coalition in 2018 has moderated the influence of MHP's demographic sensitivities and identity-driven concerns along with the nationalist ideas the party upholds on its policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees.

The last finding of the current thesis is that the domestic politics and economic side of the newly designed framework offer a reasonable explanation for the Turkish political parties' proposed policies for the future of Syrian refugees in Turkey. It is apparent that the identity-driven concerns and the problems relevant to the economy and social development play a crucial role in bringing about prospects for the local integration of Syrian refugees. If the above concerns and problems are highly significant in determining party-based approaches towards Syrian refugees, the prospects for integrating Syrian refugees fade in the eyes of political parties. We observed such an outcome regarding the CHP and IYI Party. However, the prospects for local integration continue if these concerns and problems do not play an equally significant role in determining the Turkish political parties' positions on Syrian refugees. We witnessed such an outcome concerning HDP and the ruling AKP. This is less applicable to MHP because of the party's strong emphasis on the voluntary return of refugees despite its awareness of the emerging need to integrate the remaining refugees. Using the refugee issue as a foreign policy tool, political parties may bring the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland to the centre of the domestic political debate to respond to the public outcry about the former's impact on safety and socio-economic order. Such an approach indicates an issue area where domestic and foreign policy preferences converge in driving refugee policies.

The findings of this thesis indicate that party-based approaches in Turkey towards Syrian refugees could not be adequately analysed without addressing them in relation to domestic and international political realities. These findings support the ongoing debate in the literature that the turn of the Syrian refugee issue into a highly-debated matter in the realm of domestic politics among Turkish political parties became much later than its emergence as a foreign policy topic (İçduygu, 2017; Ilgıt & Memişoğlu, 2017; Balta et al., 2022). Furthermore, existing studies suggest that opposition parties seek to challenge the ruling coalition's policies rather than being essentially opposed to the presence of Syrian refugees (Aydemir, 2022; Balta et al., 2022). However, the content analysis and interviews as part of the current thesis present a different picture of the position of opposition parties, namely CHP and IYI Party, towards Syrian refugees, which securitise the presence of Syrian refugees in cultural and economic senses. Additionally, contrary to what is indicated in Aydemir's content analysis (2022), CHP and IYI Party, frequently raise concerns about threats to public security perceived to be posed by Syrian refugees.

These differences may stem from various factors, including the increased real or perceived threats to societal security, economic downturn, national security concerns, and the establishment of the ZP, as indicated in the earlier literature (Balta et al., 2022, pp. 11-12).

To conclude, even though it is not possible to address all factors behind the party-based approaches in Turkey towards Syrian refugees, international politics of forced migration, national security concerns and domestic political dynamics, considerations relevant to economy and development, and the international refugee regime offer a relatively comprehensive and multifaceted sense of understanding. The explanatory power of all four pillars of the analytical framework cannot be underestimated for the political parties studied within the scope of the current thesis. However, when we delve into the motivations behind the political parties' policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees in detail, for the ruling coalition's parties, namely AKP and MHP (after 2018), factors relevant to the international politics of forced migration play a more critical role than the other three pillars. Before joining the ruling coalition, national security concerns and domestic political realities had more considerable impact on the MHP's approaches towards Syrian refugees than international politics because of its sensitivities around the future demographic composition of the country. As can be seen, participating in the ruling coalition has played a crucial role in moderating the severity of such concerns in MHP's approaches towards Syrian refugees.

For the policy formulations of CHP and IYI Party, the factors relevant to international politics of forced migration also matter since the foreign policy objectives of the ruling AKP and the conditions of bargains with the EU it accepted have been met with stiff opposition from these two parties. However, the perceived negative impacts on the country in socio-economic senses with Syrian refugees' access to livelihoods and public services besides identity- and demography-driven concerns make the factors relating to national security concerns and domestic political dynamics together with economic considerations stand out. On the side of HDP, the implications of factors relevant to the international politics of forced migration, besides national security concerns and domestic political dynamics, cannot be undervalued. Regarding the former pillar, the concerns over the bilateral relations with Syria and conditions of bargaining with the EU, whereas concerning the latter, doubts about the support for the jihadist groups and the perceived

threat to the sectarian balance because of the ruling AKP's settlement policies matter. However, the norms around rights-based refugee protection in line with the international refugee regime have a more considerable impact on HDP's approaches towards refugee governance compared to other political parties, as well as the remaining three pillars of the analytical framework.

While examining the Turkish political parties' policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees, the MIRTs enable us to capture the role of foreign policy priorities and diplomatic interests of political parties in addition to other issue areas. These areas are relevant to the securitisation and politicisation process, sensitivities around sovereignty and national security, socio-economic considerations, identity politics, and norms of the international refugee regime. Within the current thesis's scope, IR theory, the national security concerns and domestic political interests, economic factors, and characteristics of the international refugee regime offer a comprehensive and multifaceted viewpoint where systemic- and domestic-level factors behind party-based approaches are considered. The current study reveals that MIRTs represent a valuable perspective for shedding light on the role of foreign policy objectives/diplomatic interests in differentiating the positions of Turkish political parties on Syrian refugees.

More specifically, through its emphasis on inter-state relations and power politics, it is identified that the realist IR theory can bring a reasonable explanation to changing policy decisions of ruling and opposition parties regarding Syrian refugees in the Turkish context along foreign policy lines. On the other hand, drawing on constructivism's central concepts, namely identity construction, societal security, and securitisation, the strong explanatory power of the theory to capture the differing positions between the ruling coalition's parties and opposition parties is observed. The perceived identity affinity or difference with Syrian refugees along ethnic, religious, and cultural dimensions plays a crucial role in bringing about the absence or exacerbation of threat perceptions about them at the political party level, which the constructivist IR theory can explain to a great extent. Furthermore, the commitment to the norms and rules of the international refugee regime accounts for the role of a rights-based approach to refugee protection in differentiating policy positions on Syrian refugees across Turkish political parties.

The current thesis revealed that the issues relevant to the population have been quite contested and multifaceted area, in which the Turkish political parties have approached

the issue of Syrian refugees from the most different perspectives. When we look at opposition parties, except for HDP, it is observed that they frequently raise concerns over the access of Syrian refugees to livelihoods by allegedly stealing the jobs of host community members and the tension that this issue will create. Such concerns can be captured better from the realist IR perspective.

On the other hand, these political parties have shown sensitivities relevant to political demography, such as the perceived threat to the future demographic structure of Turkish society, to which the constructivist IR theory can bring reasonable explanations. The demographic concerns also stand out in relation to international politics in the policy decisions of political parties regarding Syrian refugees. These concerns manifest themselves in the policy choices of ethnic parties, namely MHP and HDP, which the constructivist IR theory can better understand. As part of the ruling AKP's policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees, the considerations relevant to the demographic profiles of Syrian refugees and their role in filling the shortages in the labour market can be greatly comprehended from the perspective of the realist IR theory. In addition to these findings, we should mention that political parties do not pay attention to demography as a component of state power in terms of military strength in relation to hosting Syrian refugees, which the realist IR theory can better understand.

As Table 5. 1 demonstrates, the role of none of the proposed factors under the four main pillars of the analytical framework in shaping party-based approaches in Turkey towards Syrian refugees cannot be underestimated. In line with the analysis conducted, it can be seen that a political party can shape its position on Syrian refugees by simultaneously drawing on foreign policy priorities, diplomatic interests, considerations relevant to the economy, national security concerns and domestic political realities, as well as the normative dimension of refugee protection. For example, HDP advocates for the most comprehensive rights for Syrian refugees stipulated in the international refugee law. However, when it comes to identity- and demography-driven sensitivities, it is remarkable that the feeling of relative deprivation stands out in the discourses of the HDP elite.

Table 5. 1: Factors influencing the policy choices of political parties in Turkey on Syrian refugees

<i>Pillars of party-based approaches</i>	<i>Specific factors</i>	<i>Continuum of factors in each political party</i>				
		<i>AKP</i>	<i>CHP</i>	<i>HDP</i>	<i>MHP* (The final pattern of the continuum was determined by considering its current partnership with the ruling AKP.)</i>	<i>İYİ Party</i>
International politics of forced migration	Foreign policy aims of the political parties in the Syrian conflict	High	Low	Moderate	Moderate to High	Low
	Concerns about the role of the EU in the Syrian refugee issue	Low to High	Low to Moderate	Low to Moderate	Low to High	Moderate
National security and domestic political agenda	Concerns over border security because of refugee arrivals	Moderate to High	High	Moderate	Moderate to High	High
	Sensitivities relevant to perceived identity difference and demographic balance	Low to Moderate	Low to High	Low to Moderate	Moderate	High
	Criminalisation and securitisation of Syrian refugees	Low to Moderate	Low to High	Low	Low to Moderate	High
National economy and social development	Economic and development-related concerns	Low	Low to High	Low	Low to Moderate	High
International refugee regime	International rights-based protection approaches to refugees	Low to Moderate	Moderate	Moderate to High	Low	Low
	IR Theory	Realism Constructivism	Realism Constructivism	Liberalism Constructivism	Realism Constructivism	Realism Constructivism

One can suggest that there could be other factors relevant to the Turkish political parties' policy formulations on Syrian refugees. In light of the normative dimension of refugee protection informed by the international refugee law, national political actors may be concerned at the prospect of not reaching resettlement pathways for refugees living temporarily in the host country (Jacobsen, 1989, p. 662). Furthermore, they may be concerned about being exposed to criticisms from the international community that affect the host country's reputation unless refugees are treated justly (p. 663). Regarding resettlement, it is worth underlining that fears of not reaching the resettlement option did not emerge as the motivation behind Turkish political parties' policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees due to the low figures for resettlement in a third country. Turkish political parties frequently blame Western countries, especially European countries, for not sharing the responsibility of refugee protection with Turkey. In this respect, the resettlement of Syrian refugees in European countries has become an important foreign policy tool of the ruling AKP in its negotiations with the EU. Similarly, the risk of jeopardising Turkey's international reputation in the eyes of global political actors and facing sanctions does not matter for AKP since Turkey has been proud of its refugee response. Indeed, the ruling party have utilised it as a foreign policy strategy to reveal the EU's and European countries' apathy towards refugees.

All in all, the current thesis is one of the successful attempts to bring a comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of the Turkish political parties' policy decisions regarding Syrian refugees by taking into account the dynamic nature of their policy responses. While examining party-based approaches towards Syrian refugees in the Turkish context, this study mainly retrieves from the literature on IR theory and refugee studies. However, it also partly benefits from the interactions of comparative politics and political economy literature with refugee studies. Combining different discussions in the literature on the drivers of refugee policies while developing an analytical framework within the scope of the current thesis has enabled us to bring a crucial theoretical contribution to the existing body of literature.

As mentioned, the analytical framework utilised in the current thesis provides a multifaceted perspective to shed light on the drivers behind party-based approaches in Turkey towards Syrian refugees. However, its applicability to factors behind political parties' policy responses towards alternative mass refugee groups is open to discussion.

In other words, there are doubts about whether the Turkish political parties' policy formulations would be the same if they encountered another mass refugee migration. However, the generalisation of findings through questioning whether they work in other contexts, which can be defined as external validity (Findley et al., 2021), is not the primary concern within the scope of the current thesis.

Another limitation of the current thesis stems from the sole focus on mainstream IR theories while questioning the contribution of IR theory. The utilisation of IR theory in this thesis does not mean referring to each different IR theory label, which is beyond the capacity of one single study. In this respect, future research could delve into what the critical theories of IR or different strands of mainstream IR theories that were not addressed in the present thesis can contribute to studying the factors behind the political parties' policy responses towards refugees.

The final limitation of the current study stems from the data collection method. The findings of this thesis are mainly obtained from the semi-structured elite interviews conducted with political party officials accountable for their parties' foreign and migration policies, even if other data collection techniques support this component. Despite the concerns over the impossibility of capturing the political party officials' genuine motives behind their approaches towards Syrian refugees, the discourses of party officials are significant manifestations of their attitudes. It is equally important to mention the considerations relevant to the reliability issue given the doubts about the researcher's possible role in guiding the respondents and leading to biased findings (Berry, 2002), emerging another limitation relating to the data collection method. However, it should be noted that the researcher tried to protect its neutrality during the interviews as much as possible.

By offering an analytical framework developed based on the existing literature, the current study encourages future research on the party-based approaches in Turkey towards mass refugee movements. In this respect, it could be fruitful to test the current analytical framework while studying the policy decisions of recently established political parties in Turkey, such as DEVA, ZP, and GP, regarding Syrian refugees. It should be noted that the current thesis did not consider the 2023 election process and the impact of the ZP, which has an anti-refugee orientation, on the policy positions of examined political parties. Therefore, future research may bring about additional findings and

potential fluctuations in the approaches of these five political parties towards Syrian refugees.

Future research could also expand this study's geographical context and temporal scope. In this respect, conducting comparative studies on the policy decisions of political parties on Syrian refugees in different countries that host a large number of Syrian refugees in the Middle East, such as Lebanon, would be worthwhile to strengthen the findings of the current thesis. For example, the most similar research design could be employed to identify the factors behind policy decisions of political parties on refugees across countries. It is also possible to test the current analytical framework while examining the party-based approaches in Europe, such as Germany, where a substantial number of Syrians stay in the country. Overall, the current study represents an initial step in providing a theoretical framework that considers the multifaceted and dynamic nature of political parties' policy responses towards Syrian refugees within the Turkish context by serving to strengthen the association between IR theory and refugee studies.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. As you know, the population is one of the most significant sources of power for countries. In this sense, migrants are believed to offer demographic opportunities for host country economies. In your opinion, should Turkey continue to provide protection to Syrians since they have the potential to extend the period in which the share of its working-age population is more than its dependent population?
2. As you know, due to the tensions that escalated after two foreign nationals killed Emirhan Yalçın and injured Ali Yasin Güler in Ankara's Altındağ district, there were attacks on Syrians' properties. In this context, do you think that hosting Syrians poses a threat to Turkey's domestic security by increasing inter-communal violence and crime rates?
3. In recent years, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has threatened Europe with opening the border gates for refugees unless international support for establishing a safe zone for Syrian refugees in northern Syria materializes. In that regard, do you think that the Syrian refugee issue has strengthened Turkey's hand in its relations with the European Union?
4. Do you think that Turkey's open-door policy toward Syrians has made the country a target of international terrorism?
5. As you know, the business world complains of labour shortages in some labour-intensive sectors such as agriculture. Recently, an Advisor to the AKP leader, Prof. Dr. Yasin Aktay, made similar statements. He noted, "If you withdraw Syrians from critical sectors, the country's economy will collapse." In this context, do you think Syrians contribute to Turkey's economic development in labour-intensive sectors?
6. Do you see a positive change in Turkey's migration policy after the Syrian migration to the country? In this context, how do you evaluate the role of the European Union in raising Turkey's migration policy to international standards?

7. As you know, Turkey has not granted refugee status to Syrians as it ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees by placing a geographical limitation. Do you think that maintaining the geographical limitation hinders the local integration of Syrians into the host society?
8. Considering the businesses established in Turkey by Syrian refugees, who know the business environment in Arab countries, do you think that they can develop international trade between Turkey and the Arab world?
9. The EU-Turkey Statement came in March 2016 as a product of Turkey's longstanding cooperation with the EU on migration. However, some human rights organizations have expressed concerns about the legitimacy of the EU-Turkey Statement. Do you think that the EU-Turkey Statement violates the human rights of Syrian refugees in Turkey?
10. Do you think that portraying Syrian refugees in Turkey within the scope of Ensar-Muhacir discourse makes host community members more tolerant towards this displaced community?
11. Do you think that Syrians pose a threat to the lifestyles in Turkey?
12. Do you think that Turkey's open-door policy towards Syrians has increased Turkey's international reputation as a country that contributes to solving humanitarian problems?
13. How do you think Turkey can contribute to building the future of Syrians in the country? In this context, which scenario(s) would you prefer: voluntary repatriation, and/or resettlement, and/or local integration or none of them?
14. Do you think that Turkey's open-door policy toward Syrians has made Turkey a more effective actor in the eyes of the people of Middle East?
15. Do you think that Turkey's alleged use of Syrian refugees as a bargaining chip in its relations with the EU negatively impacts the perception of Turkey by the EU and its member states?
16. Is there anything else you want to add?

Appendix B: Ethics Committee Approval



Toplantı Tarihi:	24.03.2022
Karar No:	2022.109.IRB3.053
Sorumlu Araştırmacı:	Ebru Aras
Araştırma Başlığı:	Political Party Positions towards Syrian Refugees in Turkey: An Overview between 2011 and 2021
Başlangıç tarihi:	25.03.2022
Etik Kurul izninin süresi:	1 yıl (Uzatma hakkı mevcut olarak)

Koç Üniversitesi Etik Kurulu'na değerlendirilmek üzere başvuruda bulunduğunuz yukarıda künyesi yazılı projenizin başvuru dosyası ve ilgili belgeleri, Üniversitemiz "**Sosyal Bilimler Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu**" tarafından araştırmacının gerekçe, amaç, yaklaşım ve yöntemleri dikkate alınarak incelenmiştir.

Yapılan inceleme sonucunda çalışmanın gerçekleştirilmesinde etik ve bilimsel sakınca bulunmadığına karar verilmiştir.

Notlar:

- Araştırma başlangıç tarihinin 6 aydan daha fazla gecikmesi durumunda Etik Kurul'a başvurularak tarihlerin değiştirilmesi gereklidir.
- Etik Kurul incelemesi ve onayı olmadan bu araştırmada kullanılan prosedürler, formlar ya da protokollerde herhangi bir değişiklik yapılamaz.
- Etik bakımdan sorun çıkması ya da şüpheli bir olay/beklenmeyen etki görülmesi durumunda derhal etik kurul bilgilendirilmelidir.
- Araştırmacının gerçekleştireceği birimlerin yöneticilerinden de ayrıca izin alınması gerekli olabilir.

Saygılarımla,

Prof. Dr. Hakan S. Orer
Başkan

Appendix C: Informed Volunteer Consent Form

BİLGİLENDİRİLMİŞ GÖNÜLLÜ OLUR FORMU

Koç Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi/Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü ve İnsani Bilimler ve Edebiyat Fakültesi/Sosyoloji Bölümü öğretim üyesi Prof. Dr. Ahmet İçduygu tarafından yürütülen, Koç Üniversitesi Etik Kurulları'nın 2022.109.IRB3.053sayılı onayı ile izin verilen, *Political Party Positions towards Syrian Refugees in Turkey: An Overview between 2011 and 2021/ Siyasi Partilerin Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Mültecilere Yönelik Pozisyonları: 2011-2021 Arasına Genel Bir Bakış* başlıklı araştırmaya katılımınız rica olunmaktadır.

Bu araştırmaya tamamen kendi iradenizle, herhangi bir zorlama veya mecburiyet olmadan gönüllü olarak katılımınız esastır. Lütfen aşağıdaki bilgileri okuyunuz ve katılmaya karar vermeden önce anlamadığınız herhangi bir husus varsa çekinmeden sorunuz.

ÇALIŞMANIN AMACI (Neden böyle bir araştırma yapmaya gerek duyuldu?)

Bu araştırma, Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler Yüksek Lisans Programı öğrencisi Ebru Aras'ın Koç Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi ve İnsani Bilimler ve Edebiyat Fakültesi öğretim üyesi Prof. Dr. Ahmet İçduygu'nun gözetimi altında yürüttüğü tezi kapsamında veri toplamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Bu tez, Türk siyasi partilerinin Suriyeli mültecilere yönelik politika formülasyonlarını nasıl belirledikleri sorusuna bir açıklama sunmaktadır. Mülteci yönetişiminin açıklayıcı bir tipolojisini sunan mevcut bir çalışma üzerine inşa edilen bu tez, Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi'nde grubu bulunan en büyük beş siyasi partinin Suriyeli mültecilere ilişkin tutumlarının arkasındaki faktörlere ışık tutan bir analitik çerçeve tasarlamaktadır.

PROSEDÜRLER

Bu çalışmaya gönüllü katılmak istemeniz halinde yürütülecek çalışmalar şöyledir:

Mevcut çalışma kapsamında sizinle yüz yüze veya çevrimiçi bir mülakat yapılacaktır. Bu mülakat hem sizin hem de araştırmacının kendini rahat hissedeceği bir ortamda gerçekleştirilecektir.

Mülakat esnasında, güvenlik, ekonomi, kültür/kimlik ve haklar açısından iç ve dış politika düzeylerinde Suriyeli mülteciler konusunda partinizin tutumu hakkında açık uçlu soruları yanıtlamanız istenecektir.

Mülakat Türkçe yapılacak olup, mülakat süresinin 60 ile 90 dakika arasında olması planlanmaktadır.

OLASI RİSKLER VE RAHATSIZLIKLAR

Bu çalışmaya katılımınız gönüllülük esasına dayalı olup, herhangi bir hakkınızı kaybetmeden veya herhangi bir yaptırıma maruz kalmadan istediğiniz zaman çalışmadan çekilebilirsiniz. Bu çalışmaya katılmanız size herhangi bir maliyet veya ödeme yükümlülüğü getirmeyecektir.

Araştırmacı tüm görüşmeyi sizin onayınızı aldıktan sonra kaydedecek ve yazıya dökcektir. Bu nedenle, araştırmacı mülakata başlamadan önce sesinizi kendi bilgisayarında bulunan ses kaydedici ile kaydetmek için sizden izin isteyecektir. Sesinizin kaydedilmesini onaylamazsanız, araştırmacı görüşme sırasında bilgisayarına notlar alacaktır.

Mülakat esnasında cevaplamak istemediğiniz soruları cevapsız bırakma hakkına sahip olacaksınız. Adınız ve diğer kişisel tanımlayıcılarınız, gizliliğinizi korumak için ses kayıtlarında, alan notlarında ve deşifre metinlerde yer almayacaktır. Araştırma verileri, sorumlu araştırmacının korumalı ve şifreli dizüstü bilgisayarında saklanacaktır. Adınız ve diğer kişisel tanımlayıcılarınız yayınlarda kullanılmayacaktır.

Araştırmacı, çalışmanın tamamlanmasından sonra araştırma verilerini imha edecektir.

Mevcut çalışma günlük hayatta karşılaşılan risklerden daha fazla bir risk taşımamaktadır.

TOPLUMA VE/VEYA GÖNÜLLÜLERE OLASI FAYDALARI

Siyasi partilerin göçmenlere ve mültecilere yönelik tutumlarına ilişkin mevcut çalışmalar ağırlıklı olarak Batı ülkeleri üzerinde yoğunlaşmaktadır. Ancak, Türkiye'nin dünyadaki en önemli sayıda Suriyeli mülteciye ev sahipliği yaptığı düşünüldüğünde, siyasi partilerin Suriyelilere yönelik tutumlarını araştırmak önemli bir görev olmaya devam etmektedir.

Bu çalışma, göç politikasının iç ve dış politika yönlerini birbirinden ayırarak ilgili literatüre katkı sağlayacaktır. Mevcut çalışmanın sonuçları, araştırmacının, seçilen siyasi partilerin Geçici Koruma altındaki Suriyelilere yönelik politikalarına ilişkin gerekçelerindeki benzerlikleri ve farklılıkları tespit etmesini sağlayacaktır.

Mevcut çalışma aynı zamanda politikayla ilgili bir öneme de sahiptir. Suriyelilere yönelik hoşgörü Türk kamuoyundan gelen tepkilerle birlikte kaybolmaya başlamıştır. Bu nedenle, seçilen siyasi partilerin Suriyelileri gündemlerine nasıl aldıklarını ve potansiyel olarak kamuoyunu nasıl etkilediklerini anlamak gerekir.

GİZLİLİK

Bu çalışmayla bağlantılı olarak elde edilen ve sizinle özdeşleşmiş her bilgi gizli kalacak, 3. kişilerle paylaşılmayacak ve yalnızca sizin izniniz ile ifşa edilecektir.

Kişisel tanımlayıcılarınıza yalnızca sorumlu araştırmacı ve projeyi denetleyen öğretim üyesi erişecektir. Adınız ve diğer kişisel tanımlayıcılarınız, gizliliğinizi korumak için ses kayıtlarında, alan notlarında ve deşifre metinlerde yer almayacaktır. Adınız ve diğer kişisel tanımlayıcılarınız, katılımcıların gizliliğini sağlamak için yayınlarda kullanılmayacaktır.

Araştırma verileri, sorumlu araştırmacının korumalı ve şifreli dizüstü bilgisayarında saklanacaktır. Sorumlu araştırmacı ve projeyi yürüten öğretim üyesi araştırma verilerini hiç kimse ve hiçbir kurumla paylaşmayacaktır.

KATILIM VE AYRILMA

Bu çalışmanın içinde olmak isteyip istemediğinize tamamen kendi iradenizle ve etki altında kalmadan karar vermeniz önemlidir.

Katılmaya karar verdikten sonra, herhangi bir anda sahip olduğunuz herhangi bir hakkı kaybetmeden veya herhangi bir yaptırıma maruz kalmadan istediğiniz zaman ayrılabilirsiniz.

ARAŞTIRMACILARIN KİMLİĞİ

Bu araştırma ile ilgili herhangi bir sorunuz veya endişeniz varsa, lütfen iletişime geçiniz:

Araştırma sorumlusu:	Başvurudan sorumlu araştırmacı:
Adı Soyadı: Ebru Aras Unvanı: Master Student	Adı Soyadı: Ahmet İçduygu Unvanı: Professor
Fakülte/Bölüm: Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Koç Üniversitesi	Fakülte/Bölüm: İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi /İnsani Bilimler ve Edebiyat Fakültesi, Koç Üniversitesi
Departman/Ünite: Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler	Departman/Ünite: Uluslararası İlişkiler / Sosyoloji

Yukarıda yapılan açıklamaları anladım. Sorularım tatmin olacağım şekilde yanıtlandı. Dilediğim zaman ayrılma hakkım saklı kalmak koşulu ile bu çalışmaya katılmayı onaylıyorum. Bu formun bir kopyası da bana verildi.

Katılımcı Adı-Soyadı

Katılımcı İmzası

Tarih

Araştırmacının İmzası

14.03.2022

Tarih