
The Routledge Handbook of Differentiation in the European Union

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First published 2022

ISBN: 978-0-367-14965-9 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-18382-4 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-0-429-05413-6 (ebk)

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The case of border management

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DOI: 10.4324/9780429054136-34

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Introduction

Throughout the early 2010s, the labyrinthine relationship between the European Union (EU) and Turkey mimicked a roller-coaster ride, unveiling alternating ascents and descents. During the latter part of the decade, the bilateral relationship has started to involve more ebbs than flows – an unequivocal trend observed in Turkey's dialogue with some key member states as well (Turhan 2019). Turkey's accession process remains in a state of coma. Its progressive "de-Europeanization" throughout the last decade played an important role in the gradual slow-down of Turkish accession negotiations (Yılmaz 2016). At the same time, the EU's inability to open key negotiation chapters as a result of the Cyprus conflict and the routine use of member states' unilateral vetoes (Turhan 2016), coupled with "reverse transformation" in the EU as reflected in the steady evolvment of a counter-hegemonic illiberal bloc in Europe (Öniş and Kutlay 2019), also contributed to the evaporation of Turkey's EU prospects.

The unlikeliness of a fully-fledged revival of Turkey's EU accession negotiations necessitates "thinking out of the accession box" (Turhan 2017; for an up-to-date study of EU-Turkey relations see also Reiners and Turhan 2021). In recent years, a limited number of studies came up with alternative partnership concepts, inter alia "dynamic association" (Saatçioğlu et al. 2019) and "gradual integration" (Karakas 2013). These conceptualizations basically rest on "external differentiated integration", which is broadly defined as third countries' selective adoption of EU policies (Schimmelfennig and Winzen 2019). The EU-Turkey relationship represents a unique case of external differentiation. On the one hand, as a long-term accession candidate, Turkey has already aligned itself with a large part of the EU *acquis*. At the same time, Turkey's weakening membership prospects does not undermine its status as a "key partner" of the EU (European Commission 2021: 2) in areas of common interest that necessitate further policy convergence. Accordingly, Turkey's double-headed role both as an accession candidate with a fading membership perspective and as a strategic partner of the EU makes it an alluring case through which to study external differentiation as an ever-evolving phenomenon. Yet, studies of this matter remain

low in number, and limited either to conceptual discussions on possible modes of external differentiation (e.g., Müftüler-Baç 2017; Turhan 2017; Cianciara and Szymański 2020) or sector-specific analyses concerning development and trade policies (Cihangir-Tetik and Müftüler-Baç 2018; Özer 2019).

The policy area of migration offers an intriguing opportunity to examine this evolving debate on the EU–Turkey relationship from both policy-centred and theory-directed angles. Migration has long been one of the most prominent policy areas to occupy the EU–Turkish agenda both within and outside the accession scheme. While, from the early 1960s to the late 1990s, the bilateral debates mostly addressed Turkey’s status as an emigration country, Turkey’s steady development into a key country of transit and destination from the mid-1990s onwards heightened the EU’s interest in policy convergence with Turkey. Despite Turkey generally “moving further away from the European Union” (European Commission 2019: 105), migration remains one of the few policy areas where Turkey has continued to achieve progress in alignment with EU norms (European Commission 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021).

With an eye towards combating irregular migration, the EU has placed the transfer of its border management norms and rules at the core of its dialogue and cooperation with Turkey. The spillover effects of the Syrian conflict onto the EU in the form of a so-called “European refugee crisis” in late 2015 reinforced the Union’s efforts at strengthening the protection of its external borders (European Council 2015) and its actions geared to bringing Turkey’s border regime into alignment with the relevant *acquis*. The release of the March 2016 EU–Turkey Statement (European Council 2016) moved Turkey’s cooperation with the EU on border controls closer to the centre of bilateral affairs. At the same time, Turkey’s alignment with the EU *acquis* displays variance across specific policy issues relating to border regime.

Against this background, this chapter aims to uncover the extent and drivers of Turkey’s external differentiated integration with the EU in the field of border management. Of specific relevance to the study is the heterogeneity of integration both within and across the three issue areas of priority from the EU and Turkey’s perspective: the implementation of the Integrated Border Management (IBM), operational and technical cooperation with FRONTEX and reinforced cooperation on border controls and on combating irregular migration within the context of the March 2016 EU–Turkey Statement. Drawing on a distinction between different types of policy transfer, the chapter first conceptualizes external differentiated integration and provides a mapping of the explanatory factors that have been frequently used by the literature to explain the variance in (external) differentiation. Following a brief justification of case selection, the aim of the ensuing sections is twofold. First, they examine the degree of external differentiated integration between the EU and Turkey in the above-mentioned issue areas relating to border management, based on the annual country reports of the Commission. Second, they critically assess the effect of the explanatory variables distilled from the existing literature on these issue areas in order to identify the prevailing drivers of variance in Turkey’s external differentiated integration with the EU pertaining to border management.

External differentiated integration: variety of concepts and drivers

Conceptualizing external differentiation

The extension of the EU’s *acquis* to third countries through “alternative forms of integration below the threshold of membership” (Lavenex 2011: 373) fosters “the extraterritorial application of Union policy” (Leruth and Lord 2015: 756) in non-member states with an ambiguous or absent prospect of full membership. Non-member states’ partial adoption of EU rules without formal

involvement in decision-making structures of the EU and, consequently, the selective “externalization of the *acquis communautaire*” (Leuffen et al. 2013: 17) result in external differentiation.

While studies on external differentiation remain limited, existing literature does not “conceptually agree over what differentiation ultimately means” (Gänzle et al. 2020: 2). This has generated a large number of concepts, including “variable geometry” (Wallace and Ridley 1985), “concentric circles” (Schäuble and Lamers 1994) and “external governance” (Lavenex 2004, 2011; Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2009). Despite the appearance of cooperation between the EU and third countries on the management of irregular migration flows as a prevailing issue on the agenda of key EU institutions since 2015, analyses of external differentiated integration between the EU and non-member states in the field of migration policy remain extremely rare. A limited number of works examine third countries’ selective adoption of EU *acquis* in migration matters from the point of view of “extra-territorialization” (Rijpma and Cremona 2007), “external governance” (Lavenex and Wichmann 2009; Lavenex 2011; Wunderlich 2012a) or Europeanization (Wunderlich 2012b). Considering the prominence of multilevel and transgovernmental dynamics in the formulation of states’ migration and asylum policies (Caponio and Jones-Correa 2018), we rely in our analysis on the concept of “external governance”. This approach pays particular attention to “multi-level actor constellation” in the extra-territorial projection of EU norms and interprets external differentiation as “the extension of the legal boundary of authority beyond institutional integration” through sector-specific transfer of parts of the *acquis* to non-member states (Lavenex 2004: 683). According to this logic, policy transfer is ideally pursued either through hierarchical means of interaction or horizontal modes of network governance (Lavenex 2008; Lavenex and Wichmann 2009).

External differentiated integration based on hierarchical governance entails third countries’ commitment to a partial adoption of a binding, predetermined, structurally locked-in and non-negotiable *acquis* (Lavenex and Wichmann 2009; Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2009). Hierarchical policy transfer downgrades “local implementers to mere decision-takers”, (Wunderlich 2012a: 1416) who are usually key government representatives of third countries. It typically relies on the use of “conditionality”, which makes the exogenous incentive and progress towards its attainment conditional on non-member states’ alignment with EU norms and rules. Policy transfer through network governance, on the other hand, rests on the conception that “political actors consider problem-solving the essence of politics and that the setting of policymaking is defined by the existence of highly organized social sub-systems” (Kohler-Koch and Eising 1999: 5). This mode of external differentiated integration is characterized by voluntary, sector-specific and weakly legalized functional features jointly determined by the EU and the third countries in a relationship of equals (Lavenex and Wichmann 2009). In contrast to hierarchical governance, a network type of external governance promotes transgovernmental operational and technical coordination, as well as exchange of data and best practices with the involvement of multilevel actors, inter alia regulatory agencies, non-state actors and technocrats (Lavenex 2008, 2015).

Key drivers of variance in external differentiated integration

Causes and drivers of variance as regards the mode and extent of external differentiation remain a particularly understudied subfield. In our mapping of factors that have been primarily underlined by existing literature, we have identified the following five explanatory variables that will be utilized to determine the causes and drivers of variations in Turkey’s external differentiated integration with the EU in the field of border management: “politicization”, “extent of mutual interdependence”, “asymmetry of interdependence”, “incentives” and “domestic conditions”.

Politicization is regarded as an obstacle to external differentiation (Schimmelfennig et al. 2015). It refers to “an increase in polarization of opinions, interests or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards the process of policy formulation within the EU” (de Wilde 2011: 560). Main indicators of issue politicization are the salience of the matter, expansion of actors involved in public debates and polarization among societal actors resulting from differing opinions on the matter (de Wilde et al. 2016). While policy areas of “high politics” that concern national sovereignty (e.g., security and foreign policy, home affairs and monetary policy) are particularly prone to processes of politicization, in “low politics” domains, politicization is less likely to occur (Leuffen et al. 2013; Schimmelfennig and Winzen 2019). In politicized policy areas, the EU tends to make use of hierarchical policy transfer. It could, however, switch to network governance in the event of enforcement problems arising from asymmetrical interdependence in favour of related third-country or weak incentives (Lavenex 2008).

The extent of mutual interdependence between the EU and non-member states also affects the formulation of external differentiation. Various studies suggest that external differentiated integration primarily comes into existence in highly interdependent policy areas (Schimmelfennig et al. 2015; Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2009; Lavenex 2004, 2011). Reciprocal policy sensitivity between states generates externalities for societal actors, making the formulation of joint policies inevitable (Schimmelfennig et al. 2015). Taking into consideration the effects of externalities on a wide spectrum of governmental and societal actors in multilevel settings, we assume that both hierarchical and network types of external differentiated integration rely on a decent degree of interdependence between the EU and third countries in policy areas under scrutiny.

The pattern of *asymmetrical interdependence* particularly affects the distribution of bargaining power in hierarchical modes of policy transfer as it produces different constellations of a “vertical relationship between the ‘rulers’ and the ‘ruled’” (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2009: 797). Differential patterns of asymmetrical interdependence emanate from “differences in how much member state governments need each other to attain their goals – and in the credible outside options (alternatives to European integration) that they possess” (Schimmelfennig and Winzen 2019: 1177). In policy areas with “reverse interdependence” (Yıldız 2016: 21) in favour of the third country coupled with weak incentives, hierarchical modes of governance are likely to lose their effectiveness, and the EU might incline to shifting to network types of governance (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2009). However, in some cases, the EU might still make an attempt at hierarchical rule extension by engaging the third country in an “interest-based bargaining in the definition of conditionality in terms of positive rewards” (Lavenex and Wichmann 2009: 90).

Incentives are perceived as a driver of the extension of the EU *acquis* to non-member states, especially in hierarchical modes of governance driven by the principle of conditionality (Leuffen et al. 2013; Lavenex 2011; Lavenex and Wichmann 2009; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2004). The attractiveness of the incentives granted within the framework of EU conditionality influences the success of hierarchical policy transfer as it shapes “the cost–benefit calculations of target actors” (Börzel and Risse 2012: 7) when considering partial compliance with EU *acquis*. This argument is applied, in particular, to issue areas characterized by strong asymmetry of interdependence in favour of third countries, inter alia, to irregular migration and readmission (Lavenex and Wichmann 2009; Yıldız 2016). Alongside the attractiveness of the promised incentives, the credibility of EU conditionality promotes the maintenance of hierarchical policy transfer. In the event of reverse interdependence coupled with unappealing or unreliable incentives, the EU might consider turning to network governance for extraterritorial rule promotion. External differentiation by network governance does not encompass any leverage mechanism of “legal” or “soft” conditionality. At the same time, strong alterations in “cost–benefit equilibrium” facing multilevel actors are likely to weaken norm approximation.

Domestic conditions influence the extent and mode of external differentiation outcomes as well (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2009). Domestic structures matter, as “the roots of DI [differentiated integration] are often in the domestic politics of [member] states, rather than in the integration process itself” (Leruth and Lord 2015: 759). High domestic costs of rule adoption may hinder integration in sensitive policy areas concerning state sovereignty (Barbé et al. 2009). Likewise, the EU’s introduction of external positive incentives in exchange for domestic costs of compliance could calibrate the “domestic equilibrium”, which is conceived as “the current distribution of preferences and bargaining power in domestic society” (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005: 11). Domestic equilibrium may shift either as a result of discriminatory empowerment of societal actors by conditionality-driven incentives (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005) or due to specific costs imposed on influential domestic groups from policy harmonization with the EU (Moravcsik 1993).

Turkey’s differentiated integration in border management

The EU’s border management cooperation with third countries functions as part of the externalization of EU migration policy (Boswell 2003). This externalization strategy primarily rests on containing irregular migration to the EU’s periphery (Dimitriadi et al. 2018) by shifting certain border control responsibilities to neighbouring countries (Lavenex 2006), stirring neighbours to cooperate with the EU in combating irregular migratory flows (Üstübcici and İçduygu 2019) and fortifying their alignment with the EU *acquis* on border management. As a key transit country on the Eastern Mediterranean route, Turkey constitutes a vital strategic partner at the EU’s external borders in terms of controlling various “unwanted” migration flows by the EU. This makes the field of border management a prevailing case for the study of Turkey’s policy-specific external differentiated integration with the EU.

Within the broader scope of border management, this contribution assesses the extent of differentiated integration in specific issue areas by conducting a systematic review of the Commission’s regular reports on Turkey from 1998 to 2020. In gauging Turkey’s alignment with the EU, we select three central issues pertaining to border management that recurrently appear in the Commission reports under Chapter 24 “Justice, Freedom and Security”: (1) the implementation of the IBM, (2) operational and technical cooperation with FRONTEX and (3) reinforced cooperation on border controls and combating of irregular migration within the context of the March 2016 EU–Turkey Statement. For the purpose of unfolding the key drivers of the distinct patterns of Turkey’s differentiated integration in the selected issue areas, we disclose the most prominent and plausible factor(s) that promote or impede integration in each context, based on the characterizations of the five explanatory variables we identified in the previous section (see for a similar approach, Schimmelfennig et al. 2015: 775) and by utilizing secondary data.

Integrated border management (IBM)

IBM endeavours to achieve a multilevel merger of the border management mechanisms of the individual EU member states (Sert 2013) to ensure “a more homogenous level of security at all the external frontiers” (Commission of the European Communities 2002: 4). IBM offers a multilevel governance structure which primarily joins up all activities of the border and law enforcement authorities (Council of the European Union 2006). Agencies in charge of border surveillance, such as border guards and coast guards, the immigration service, the armed forces and customs vary from one country to another. While their core tasks remain essentially the same, IBM calls

for national, EU level and international cooperation and coordination among these different border authorities. Additionally, as regards EU candidate countries, the 2010 “Guidelines for Integrated Border Management in European Commission External Cooperation” specifically insist on a gradual transfer of border surveillance to a civilian authority from military or similarly armed forces (European Commission 2010a: 29).

Turkey’s twofold function as both an accession candidate and a strategic partner of the EU in migration matters finds its expression in the official EU documents on IBM. The 2006 Council conclusions entail a “four-tier access control model” with the purpose of the extraterritorial expansion of its IBM to key third countries like Turkey. This formula comprises measures in third countries of origin and transit, including the training of consular officials, cooperation with neighbouring countries, systematic border controls at the external borders of third countries and control measures within the Schengen Area (Council of the European Union 2006). Likewise, the Commission’s 2011 Communication titled “Global Approach to Migration and Mobility” and its 2020 Pact on Migration and Asylum consider IBM as a priority for cooperation with third countries (European Commission 2011a: 17; 2020b: 11). As part of Turkish accession process and the *acquis* conditionality, the EU expects Turkey to adopt and effectively implement IBM while also establishing a single civilian border agency.

Systematic review of the Commission’s regular reports demonstrates that Turkey has steadily integrated with the EU in IBM in respect of strengthening its law-enforcement staff capacity and reinforcing border surveillance. It established more checkpoints at its borders, with more staff to support the reinforcement of border controls (Commission of the European Communities 2001). In-service training for law enforcement officials has been successfully conducted to improve institutional capacity for implementing IBM (European Commission 2010b, 2011b, 2014a, 2016). Border surveillance capacity, infrastructure and modernization of most border crossing points have been progressively strengthened (European Commission 2007, 2013, 2018).

The main driver of Turkey’s gradual compliance with IBM has been the attractiveness of EU incentives. In respect to external incentive mechanisms introduced by the EU, “accession conditionality” and the “financial and technical assistance programs” have come into prominence for the sectional extension of the EU *acquis* on border management to Turkey. A conditional, non-negotiable membership perspective induces a hierarchical policy transfer to candidate countries. In this context, the strengthening of Turkey’s EU membership prospects in early 2000s promoted norm compliance in Turkey. Following the announcement of Turkey’s candidacy in 1999, Ankara kicked off the reinforcement of external border controls. The launch of accession talks in 2005 brought about the adoption of a national action plan on IBM in March 2006 and various reforms in the “polity” domain. These concerned the institutional aspect of alignment with EU standards, inter alia the formation of a high-level working group in 2008, putting together the agencies responsible for border tasks (Commission of the European Communities 2008). However, as a result of the Council’s decision to freeze accession negotiations in eight chapters of the *acquis* in 2006, and unilateral vetoes of individual member states on key negotiation chapters, the credibility and normative consistency of the membership incentive weakened. Turkey lost part of its motivation to further integrate with the EU’s *acquis* on IBM, particularly in issue areas with higher costs for compliance, including the adoption of an IBM strategy and the creation of a civilian border agency.

Another incentive mechanism for policy convergence amid the weakening credibility of the EU’s accession conditionality has been the EU’s financial and technical assistance programs. While producing policy transfer, they also helped Turkey pursue self-interests in strengthening its costly border surveillance. Despite the diminishing attractiveness of the membership incentive, the EU’s Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) has provided Turkey with financial and technical

support for alignment in Justice and Home Affairs (JHA), with improvement of border security and surveillance having been a top priority for the period 2014–2020 (European Commission 2014a). Turkey's 2016 "Regulation on Inter-Institutional Cooperation and Cooperation in the field of Border Management" was the outcome of an EU twinning project. Between 2002 and 2017, 43 per cent of the twinning projects were related to JHA (TAEK 2020; Bürgin 2014). Through these financial and technical incentives, Turkey has elevated its mobile and fixed surveillance capacity at its land and maritime borders in line with the IBM strategy (Delegation of the EU to Turkey 2020). Moreover, these programs have supported Turkey's capacity building through training activities and joint projects that targeted multilevel actors such as governors, local administrators, migration experts, national police, port authorities, land forces and customs authorities. Thus, although IBM issues are usually strongly linked with the domain of "high politics", financial and technical assistance programs have facilitated cooperation between the EU and Turkey in a network type of external governance, rather than through a hierarchical mode of interaction.

Despite Turkey's successful alignment and cooperation with the EU, particularly in reinforcing border infrastructure and building the capacity of border staff, two highly challenging issues remain, which prevent Turkey's further integration with the EU in IBM. First, Turkey has not yet entirely brought its legislative framework in line with the EU by adopting a national strategy on IBM, although this issue has been consistently raised in regular reports (e.g., European Commission 2020a; 2021). Second, Turkey has not yet established a professional, single, civilian border agency. Instead, the overarching supervision of border management is entrusted to the Turkish Ministry of the Interior, together with several individual authorities and institutions responsible for issue-specific border management (e.g., the coast guard; land forces command, police and gendarmerie and customs forces). Without a central system of border coordination, "control is disambiguated across multiple, functionally integrated actors and norms" (Baird 2015: 854), and "the fragmented nature of the system" (Bürgin 2014: 466) obstructs Turkey's alignment with the EU's IBM policy.

Limitations to Turkey's integration with the IBM standards are attributable in particular to domestic conditions relating to the potential costs of compliance and to the highly politicized nature of border politics. Implementing the IBM and establishing a civilian border agency would come with high political adaptation costs as a result of Turkey's distinct security interests along its borders. Turkey's long, mountainous and rugged east and southeast borders with its unstable, non-European neighbours are more difficult to control than the borders of most EU member states (Sert 2013). Its southeastern borders are subject to infiltration by terrorist organizations that constitute serious security threats. Post-2011 dynamics in Syria and the intense armed conflict beyond Turkey's borders pose a national security threat to Turkey's territorial integrity (Okuy 2017). Turkey's primarily security-driven approach to border management has also been reflected in its latest actions at its eastern and southeastern borders. It has not only increased its border protection measures by adding surveillance systems but in 2019 it also completed the construction of an 837-km concrete wall along its Syrian border and an 81-km security wall at its Iranian border. Thus, the potential costs of the transfer of border surveillance to a civilian authority may be much higher for Turkey than for other countries, since border issues are strongly linked with national security and foreign policy interests.

The intensely politicized nature of Turkey's border has been another key factor that has obstructed Turkey's complete alignment with the IBM strategy and its establishment of a single, civilian border agency. Its southeastern border regions are composed of multi-ethnic and multireligious populations with transnational affiliations, which generates a complex relationship between physical state borders and ethnic-sectarian identity boundaries (Okuy 2017). Such

distinct features of Turkish borders not only concern the broader question of the maintenance of national sovereignty but also heighten public awareness of Turkey's border politics. This has produced high levels of salience and political contestation about Turkey's border management strategies. In recent years, Turkey's further development into a key transit and destination country for several irregular and asylum flows, and the destabilizing demographic and social balance in border provinces (Okuy 2017), has raised the salience of issues such as terrorism, border politics and EU–Turkish negotiations on the control of irregular migration in the Turkish public opinion and media. They have also led to party-political contestation over the definition of “responsibility sharing” by the EU and Turkey (Aksel and İçduygu 2018). Accordingly, heightened politicization of border politics culminated in Turkey's cherry picking of IBM rules that would boost its border security while hampering its alignment with those norms that were perceived within Turkey as a potential threat to national sovereignty.

Technical and operational cooperation with FRONTEX

European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX) plays a significant role in promoting external border security of the EU and the extra-territorialization of border control through coordinated actions with member states and third countries by primarily utilizing coercive practices and surveillance technology (Carrera 2007). FRONTEX is one of the key EU transgovernmental agencies with a medium level of autonomy in implementing the IBM (Lavenex 2015). While member states continue to exclusively function as the “masters” of regular border controls, over time, FRONTEX has extended its powers and competences specifically in regard to the management of joint operations and the monitoring of member states' capacities. As far as the external governance of border management is concerned, FRONTEX has been conferred with two pivotal external competences: First, it cooperates directly with the authorities of third countries by means of working arrangements; second, it facilitates operational and technical cooperation between member states and third countries (Wessel et al. 2011: 294). The New Pact on Migration and Asylum also proposes a new leading and operational role for FRONTEX to support EU's return policy (European Commission 2020b).

Cooperation between Turkey's border enforcement agencies and FRONTEX is a solid showcase of how sector-specific, functional coordination resting on a network type of interaction allows for horizontal policy transfer. While the Commission had provided FRONTEX with a mandate in 2009 to sign an operational agreement with Turkey, the Turkish authorities were reluctant to cooperate with FRONTEX until 2012, due to the asymmetrical relationship between both parties in terms of operational capacity and Turkey's exclusion from decision-making as a non-EU member (Dimitriadi et al. 2018). Relations swiftly improved following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between FRONTEX and Turkey in May 2012. The MoU largely envisages enhanced information exchange, including those related to best practices in the field of border control, joint risk assessment of mixed migration flows, training and research activities, the deployment of Turkish officers at key points on the EU external borders, as well as the development of joint projects in cooperation with EU member states (FRONTEX 2012a). The document does not entail a hierarchical, vertical mode of interaction through conditionality; on the contrary, it primarily rests on functional structures and jointly agreed action plans involving a variety of EU and Turkish actors in a multilevel setting (e.g., Turkey's border enforcement agencies, border management authorities of neighbouring EU member states, national officers at focal points and risk analysis experts). The signing of the working arrangement was followed by the establishment of a Turkey–Frontex Risk Analysis Network (TU-RAN) that aims to share intelligence in order to identify cooperation priorities.

Based on the MoU, a cooperation plan between Turkey and FRONTEX for 2020–2022 was also signed in January 2020 (European Commission 2020a).

According to the regular reports of the Commission since 2012, an operational partnership between FRONTEX and Turkey has been one of the few areas in which consistent progress could be achieved. Data exchange between FRONTEX and Turkey started in 2013 and intensified with the signing of a cooperation plan for 2014–2016 on further technical coordination to share statistical data for joint risk analysis, training activities and operational cooperation (European Commission 2014a, 2016). FRONTEX deployed a liaison officer in Turkey in April 2016, which was the first deployment in a non-EU country.¹ In general, the working arrangement with FRONTEX has also reinforced Greek–Turkish dialogue on the management of irregular migration flows from Turkey to the EU. Since the signing of the MoU, FRONTEX has facilitated the realization of numerous high-level meetings between Greek and Turkish authorities in the Evros region, one of the key crossing routes from Turkey to Greece (FIDH – Migreurop – EMHRN 2014). Thus, EU transgovernmental structures with technocratic features have contributed to a partial de-politicization of border politics (see also Lavenex 2008), promoting technical cooperation and horizontal policy transfer detached from the ever-evolving political contestation between the EU/Greece and Turkey. However, the technical cooperation with Greek authorities has been largely disrupted since February 2020, given Turkey’s decision to open its Western borders to refugees, and severe Greek–Turkish disputes over gas exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean and territorial claims in the Aegean. The operational cooperation between FRONTEX and Turkey was further weakened in late 2020 as FRONTEX attracted attention as a result of its alleged involvement in Greece’s pushback operations and inhumane practices in the Aegean Sea.

The extent and asymmetry of sector-specific interdependence between the EU and Turkey, accompanied by attractive incentive mechanisms, have driven Turkey’s rule compliance through horizontal cooperation with FRONTEX until early 2020. For the EU, Turkey functions as a strategic partner in controlling the so-called Eastern Mediterranean route whereby irregular crossings are made to Greece and thereafter to other member states. FRONTEX refers to the Greek–Turkish border as “the centre of gravity for land border joint operations” (FRONTEX 2012b: 17). The MoU and closer functional cooperation with Turkey conspicuously have ensured FRONTEX’s collaboration with Turkish authorities. For Turkey, on the other hand, the effective implementation of the working arrangement has facilitated its cooperation with FRONTEX on the exchange of data and capacity building.

Positive incentives provided by the EU – in the form of EU-funded technical assistance projects and the prospect of visa liberalization for Turkish citizens – have also encouraged policy transfer through transgovernmental networking. For example, FRONTEX has been offering training for Turkish border agency personnel, to introduce EU norms and best practices on migration management (FRONTEX 2019). The visa liberalization dialogue, which was launched in conjunction with the signing of the EU–Turkey readmission agreement in December 2013, bolstered the ongoing operational cooperation between FRONTEX and Turkey. As a conditionality-based incentive offered within a hierarchical mode of governance, the dialogue envisages the lifting of visa requirements for Turkish citizens travelling to EU member states, conceding that Turkey fulfils the 72 benchmarks introduced in a guiding document called the “Roadmap towards the visa-free regime with Turkey”. Benchmark 13, which called for an effective implementation of the MoU signed with FRONTEX, was fulfilled in 2014 (European Commission 2014b) and fostered sector-specific network interaction.

As a technical, non-politicized issue area, Turkey’s cooperation with FRONTEX has not been largely obstructed by domestic contestation until 2020. The functional coordination has

mostly taken place “outside the public eye and with little involvement of civil society”, both in the EU and Turkey (Baird 2015:857) until the European Parliament, the European Ombudsman, and the media increased their criticism in 2020 and 2021 of FRONTEX’s alleged involvement in pushbacks. At the same time, despite the existing asymmetrical hierarchy of the overarching relations between Turkey and the EU in favour of the latter, cooperation between Turkey’s border agencies and FRONTEX has demonstrated a pattern of reverse interdependence between the EU and Turkey as a result of the EU’s persisting exposure to high flows of irregular migrants and Turkey’s central function as a gateway to Europe. Accordingly, Turkey, in line with its own interests and preferences, has maintained its relative bargaining power vis-à-vis the EU, thereby selectively adopting specific EU norms while pursuing functional integration with FRONTEX (Baird 2015). Over a long period, technical and operational cooperation with FRONTEX has come into prominence as a “positive” and “resilient” driver of Turkey’s external differentiated integration with the EU in the field of migration governance and has successfully evolved irrespective of increasing political tensions in the overarching dialogue between the EU and Turkey (Dimitriadi et al. 2018). Thus, the functional cooperation between FRONTEX and Turkey leading to policy alignment in border management can be addressed as a prominent case that supports the argument of Lavenex (2015) regarding the effectiveness of technocratic networking tackling sectoral interdependence by promoting external differentiation independent of the political constraints of the EU’s enlargement project.

Reinforced cooperation on border controls and combating of irregular migration: the EU–Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016

Combatting irregular migration has continually been one of the critical issues in EU–Turkey relations and Turkey’s accession negotiations. Located on the Eastern Mediterranean migration route, Turkey became an even more important strategic partner for the EU after more than 1 million people reached Europe irregularly during 2015 and 2016. FRONTEX (2016) reported that 885,386 of those irregular migrants used the Eastern Mediterranean route in 2015, mostly crossing between Turkey and the Eastern Aegean Greek islands. The so-called refugee crisis accompanied by many EU member states’ reluctance to implement an EU-wide solution for the relocation and resettlement of the Syrian refugees (Carrera et al. 2019) created an urgent need for the EU to strengthen its operational cooperation with Turkey on border controls and the management of irregular migration flows. Several rounds of bilateral and “mini-lateral” preparatory meetings between Turkey and some EU member states, as well as two joint summits between the European Council and Turkey (Turhan 2016), brought about the contested EU–Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016. The joint statement primarily aimed at outlining the contours of a strategic partnership between the EU and Turkey to curtail irregular migration and ensure that both actors effectively address the Eastern Mediterranean migration challenge. It envisaged the return to Turkey of all irregular migrants and asylum seekers whose applications are declared inadmissible or unfounded after crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands after 20 March 2016 (European Council 2016). The Statement has thus been one of the concrete outcomes of the EU’s externalization of its migration and border policies through deterrence and containment (Yıldız 2016; Üstübcü 2019).

EU–Turkey cooperation based on this Statement has been a significant example of how attractive EU incentives coupled with dominant patterns of strong, asymmetrical interdependence in favour of the third-country drive external differentiated integration. In return for Turkey’s commitment to control its borders and prevent irregular crossings to the EU territory, the Statement offered Turkey a large set of *a priori* jointly negotiated incentives. The reward package

included appealing material incentives, including re-energizing Turkey's accession negotiations, providing EUR 6 billion of financial assistance to improve the standard of living for Syrians in Turkey, offering a visa-free travel regime for Turkish citizens – provided that Turkey fulfils all 72 benchmarks, and kicking off the negotiations on the modernization of the EU–Turkey Customs Union (European Council 2016). These strong incentives have played a fundamental role in Turkey's cost–benefit calculations and resulted in importing EU norms in combating irregular migration. For instance, while the Commission's regular reports (e.g., 2003, 2004, 2008, 2011b and 2014a) repeatedly implied that Turkey should try harder to prevent irregular migration and readmit irregular migrants, concrete steps to strengthen border controls were primarily taken after the 2016 EU–Turkey Statement. Whereas around 950,000 irregular migrants were apprehended in Turkey in the decade from 2005 to 2015, there were more than 1.3 million apprehensions between 2016 and 2021 (Presidency of Migration Management 2021). The 2020 regular report noted that “[t]hroughout 2019, Turkey was committed to the implementation of the EU–Turkey Statement of March 2016” (European Commission 2020a: 7). FRONTEX also referred to the Statement as an essential driver of easing migratory pressures at the EU's external borders, as it boosted Turkey's control of its maritime and land borders (FRONTEX 2017). Existing operational border cooperation between the EU and Turkey also intensified after the implementation of the Statement. The border agencies of Turkey, Bulgaria and Greece expanded joint actions in tackling irregular migration and the regulatory compatibility between border authorities have been strengthened. Overall, the Statement has been successful in consolidating the sectoral, policy-specific cooperation concerning joint efforts of the EU and Turkey in combating irregular migration, which could otherwise have been trapped within the overarching macro-institutional framework of Turkey's stalled accession process.

According to Yıldız (2016), the Statement reflects the patterns of a top–down hierarchical relationship between the EU and Turkey based on “reverse interdependence” in favour of the latter. Contrary to what might be expected from an asymmetrical power relationship in the accession context, the EU and its member states have been exceedingly dependent on Turkey's efforts to control its borders since the exacerbation of the Syrian civil war. For Turkey, on the other hand, compliance with EU norms and demands was going to generate only few benefits, with the central ones being securing the EU's commitment to resettle a small part of Syrian refugees residing in Turkey to its member states and facilitating EU–Turkey coordination on the post-conflict reconstruction of Syria. This reverse interdependence has strengthened Turkey's bargaining power vis-à-vis the EU and provided it with a greater leeway to ask for attractive incentives from the EU before taking further steps in controlling irregular migration. Consequently, the EU–Turkey Statement emerged as an important mechanism of hierarchical policy transfer following interest-driven, intergovernmental negotiations between the highest political representatives from the EU and Turkey, which aimed to secure the rewards to be provided to Turkey within the framework of “transactional” conditionality.

In view of issue-specific interdependence in favour of Turkey on the one hand, and shortcomings in the expeditious delivery of promised incentives by the EU (e.g., the launch of talks on the reform of the Customs Union, the acceleration of Turkey's accession process, activation of a voluntary humanitarian admission scheme, and timely disbursement of the EU's financial aid) on the other, the EU's rule transfer through the March 2016 joint statement has faced important limitations. On 28 February 2020, the Turkish government announced that it would no longer stop refugees from reaching Europe. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated, “until all Turkey's expectations, including free movement, updating of the customs union and financial assistance, are tangibly met, we will continue the practice on our borders” (TRT World 2020). Accordingly, Turkey opened its borders, which immediately led to thousands of migrants

and refugees rushing towards Turkey's borders with Greece and Bulgaria as well as some towards Turkey's western coast. Alongside the diminishing attractiveness of the EU's reward mechanism, Ankara's decision was influenced by the anticipation that if the northern Syrian province of Idlib fell to Assad's forces, 1.3 million people would be displaced northwards towards Turkey, which was going to be difficult to manage without strong EU cooperation. Accordingly, Turkey pressured the EU to act on the causes of displacement in Syria or deal with the consequences of externalization by providing credible and greater incentives to Turkey.

Incentive-based cooperation has also been highly prone to politicization in both Turkey and the EU. Many politicians, policymakers and the media in EU member states have consistently resorted to a panic discourse, highlighting that millions of people have been trying to reach the EU through Turkey. In Europe, the issue has become highly politicized because rising far-right parties have increasingly attracted voters with their anti-migrant discourses. Meanwhile, the EU's containment of irregular migration to Turkish territory has also become politicized in Turkey, as growing numbers of Syrians and other irregular migrants "stranded" in Turkey (Yıldız 2021: 142) have exacerbated adaptation costs for the domestic constituency. As of 2021, the hospitality and tolerance of Turkish society towards Syrians residing in the country since 2012 has considerably diminished. Various studies underline growing tensions and societal cleavages among Turkish society in terms of perceiving Syrians as a cultural threat and economic burden (Erdogan 2020; Altıok and Tosun 2018; Yanaşmayan et al. 2019). According to one survey, 86.2 per cent of participants across Turkey's strongly polarized political spectrum agreed that "Syrians should be sent back to their country once the war in Syria has ended" (Erdogan 2018). During the general and presidential elections in 2014 and 2018, Syrians became a salient issue utilized by both the incumbent and opposition parties (Yanaşmayan et al. 2019). The politicized context slightly altered as President Erdoğan started to emphasize the prospect of a "safe zone" south of Turkey's border with northern Syria that Syrian refugees could be repatriated to. In short, the EU-Turkey Statement on managing irregular migration rests on thin ice, with Turkey's cost-benefit equilibrium being primarily prone to domestic politicization and the credibility of external incentives.

Conclusion

EU-Turkey relations and policy convergence are increasingly viewed through the analytical lens of external differentiation. The purpose of this contribution has been to offer theoretical and empirical insights into the extent, limits and key drivers of Turkey's external differentiated integration with the EU in the field of border management – a policy area that has remained at the epicentre of EU-Turkey dialogue on the control of irregular migration. The contribution specifically focused on variance in external differentiation both within and across three central issue areas concerning border regime: the implementation of the IBM, operational cooperation with FRONTEX and the March 2016 EU-Turkey Statement.

EU-Turkey cooperation on border management has been largely associated with the realm of "high politics" and displayed strong, asymmetrically reverse interdependence in favour of Turkey, equipping it with a greater bargaining power vis-à-vis the traditionally governance-providing EU. Notwithstanding the reverse asymmetry of interests, until the impairment of the credibility and attractiveness of Turkey's membership perspective, Turkey's alignment with the EU *acquis* on border management was primarily placed along a hierarchical axis displaying the unilateral expansion of non-negotiable, predetermined EU rules to Turkey in a conditionality-driven process. From 1999 to 2006, a normatively consistent and credible EU conditionality induced hierarchical policy transfer mainly in the domain of IBM. Turkey's alignment with EU rules was particularly reflected in its strengthened border infrastructure and law-enforcement

staff capacity as well as in the institutional reforms that envisaged improved coordination among Turkey's border agencies.

Turkey's superior bargaining position vis-à-vis the EU came into particular prominence from 2006 onwards as a result of a steady evaporation of the accession narrative from European and Turkish discourses. The discernible deadlock in achieving conceivable progress in accession negotiations had two profound repercussions for the EU's rule export.

First, Turkey's external differentiated integration with the EU started to evolve in some issue areas outside the typical hierarchical setting and follow a more horizontal, sector-specific logic, based on a network type of interaction. The evanescence of the accession milieu, coupled with high and asymmetrical interdependence in favour of Turkey, granted to Turkey an equal, if not superior, position alongside the EU in bargaining processes, generating mutually agreed features and rules of cooperation. External differentiation by network governance has been particularly evident in Turkey's technical and operational cooperation with FRONTEX. The MoU signed between FRONTEX and Turkey has primarily rested on functional structures and jointly agreed action plans, and facilitated interdependence-driven sectoral cooperation such as the exchange of strategic information and development of joint activities. The MoU has operated in a transgovernmental and functional setting with the involvement of multilevel actors such as border enforcement agencies and risk analysis experts. FRONTEX's strengthening of a decentralized, sectoral cooperation with technocratic features between Turkey and neighbouring member states has bolstered a partial de-politicization of border politics, which promoted external differentiation. Similarly, amidst the waning credibility and appeal of the membership perspective, the financial and technical assistance programs of the EU in the form of twinning projects or IPA funds promoted a network type of rule import by Turkey concerning the implementation of the IBM. Thus, horizontal, sector-driven transgovernmental networking has proven to be a useful and, under the right circumstances, an efficient mechanism of policy convergence between the EU and Turkey.

Second, reminiscent of the argument of Lavenex and Wichmann (2009), given the severe weakening of the attractiveness and credibility of the EU's accession conditionality, the EU's attempts at hierarchical policy transfer in issue areas featuring seemingly strong reverse interdependence in favour of Turkey encompassed intergovernmental negotiations. The outcome of these negotiations, which designed the prevailing features of the EU conditionality was, *inter alia*, the incentives to be granted to Turkey mostly in the form of issue linkages. The March 2016 EU–Turkey Statement on the control of irregular migration flows rests on such a type of hierarchical rule extension characterized by a jointly negotiated conditionality. However, the fragility of the Statement demonstrates that in policy areas dominated by a strong asymmetry of interests to Turkey's advantage, two conditions appear to be imperative for hierarchical external governance to subsist outside the accession framework. First, the EU should have the capacity and readiness to offer credible and strong incentives to counteract domestic compliance costs. Second, the overarching relations between Turkey and the EU/its member states should enable a favourable working environment at the operational level that would prevent a re-politicization of the norm alignment process in the public sphere.

Overall, rather than passively accepting EU externalization (Üstübcü 2019), Turkey has developed its border regime with a certain autonomy. The findings reveal the empirical plausibility of the explanatory factors distilled from the existing literature. While attractive and credible material rewards functioned as a key driver of policy transfer in consideration of strong interest asymmetries, issue-specific politicization and unfavourable domestic adaptation costs disrupted Turkey's external differentiation with the EU in the field of border management.

Note

- 1 To date, the EU has deployed FRONTEX liaison officers to three additional non-member states: Niger, Serbia and Senegal.

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