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Discourses of Turkish Opposition Political Parties towards Syrian Refugees: Securitization and Repatriation

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Türkiye'deki Muhalefet Partilerinin Suriyeli Mültecilere yönelik Söylemleri: Güvenlikleştirme ve Geri Gönderme

Discourses of Turkish Opposition Political Parties towards Syrian Refugees: Securitization and Repatriation

Öz

2011 yılından itibaren Suriye'deki iç savaş nedeniyle Türkiye'de yaşamak zorunda kalan 3,6 milyondan fazla Suriyeli mültecinin Türk siyasetine önemli bir etkisi olmuştur. Bu konuda iktidardaki Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, dini temelli insancıllık ile güvenlikleştirme söylemleri arasında gidip gelirken, muhalefet partileri ise artan kamuoyu hoşnutsuzluğunu temel alarak Suriyeli mülteciler konusunu siyasi gündemlerinin en üst sırasına yerleştirmişlerdir. Son dönemdeki geri gönderme tartışmalarına odaklanan bu çalışma, özellikle muhalefet partilerinin Suriyeli mültecilere yönelik tutumlarını ve söylemlerini incelemektedir. Çalışma Kopenhag Okulu'nun güvenlikleştirme teorisinden yararlanarak dört muhalefet partisinin söylemlerini ekonomik, kültürel ve güvenlik açılarından analiz etmektedir. Makale Halkların Demokratik Partisi dışındaki diğer üç partinin, Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, İyi Parti ve Zafer Partisi'nin çeşitli seviyelerde mülteciler konusunu güvenlikleştirdiği sonucuna varmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk siyaseti, Suriyeli mülteciler, göç, muhalefet partileri, güvenlikleştirme

Abstract

Since 2011, more than 3.6 million Syrian refugees who were forced to live in Turkey due to the civil war in Syria have had a significant impact on Turkish politics. While the governing Justice and Development Party has fluctuated between religiously-based humanitarianism and securitization discourses, opposition parties have prioritized the issue in response to growing public discontent. Focusing on the recent repatriation debate, this article analyzes the attitudes and discourses of opposition parties towards the Syrian refugees. By drawing on the Copenhagen School securitization theory, the study examines the discourses of four opposition parties under the dimensions of economy, culture and security. The article concludes that while Republican People's Party, Good Party and Victory Party securitize the issue to varying degrees, Peoples' Democratic Party does not.

Keywords: Turkish politics, Syrian refugees, immigration, opposition parties, securitization

Makale Türü: Araştırma Makalesi

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1. Introduction

Syrian refugees have been one of the most heated topics in Turkish politics for a decade. Since the beginning of the civil war in Syria in 2011, more than 3.6 million Syrian refugees have started to live in Turkey (UNHCR Türkiye).[3] They constitute the vast majority of over 4 million refugees and asylum seekers living in Turkey, which now hosts the most refugees worldwide. Turkey was unprepared for this massive Syrian refugee inflow. Although the Turkish authorities consider Syrians as "foreigners under temporary protection" rather than "refugees" due to the geographical limitation Turkey maintains to the Geneva Convention, this study selects the term "refugees," which is usually preferred in scholarly works.[4] Under the "temporary protection" clause, the majority of Syrian refugees currently live outside refugee camps in major cities, thereby facing employment, housing, and education problems. As of April 2023, İstanbul hosts the most number of refugees (531.098), followed by Gaziantep (450.115), Şanlıurfa (349.919), and Hatay (330.239). Kilis has the highest concentration at 33.6 percent of the local population (Mülteciler Derneği, 2023).

The challenge of accepting more than 3.6 million Syrian refugees is creating tensions for the Turkish government that is currently struggling with its own socio-economic and political pressures. In particular, due to the deepening economic difficulties of 2022, there is growing discontent among the Turkish community towards them. Although the government has always described them as "guests" rather than "refugees" or "asylum seekers," Turkish society has not embraced this welcoming attitude as their numbers have increased (Yanaşmayan et al., 2019: 38).[5] Similar to the Western European electorate groups who accuse immigrants for damaging their economic welfare and culture, increasing number of Turkish citizens have tended to blame Syrian refugees for Turkey's economic hardships and demographic changes, ultimately considering them a threat to their economic well-being, cultural life, peace, and security.[6]

Consequently, in the face of growing public criticisms toward the government's migration policy, on one hand, the governing Justice and Development Party – JDP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) has fluctuated between religiously-based humanitarianism and securitization discourses. On the other hand, opposition parties prioritized the issue by concentrating on growing public discontent, and increasingly used it to appeal to Turkey's disappointed and angry public.

There is a rich literature on public opinion, media representation of refugees, and the government's migration policy,[7] alongside the analyses of opposition party discourses. However, the issue still needs

[3] However, the exact number of Syrian refugees in Turkey is still unknown as many are not registered with the authorities. In fact, the number of unregistered refugees is a matter of political debate as it will be covered through the discourses of opposition parties in the following sections of the article.

[4] As explained in the following sections, Turkey became a party to the Geneva Convention in March 1962 and 1967 Protocol in July 1968 with a "geographical reservation" granting refugee status only to people coming from Europe.

[5] Syrian Barometer, a series of detailed public opinion surveys prepared by M. Murat Erdoğan, published in 2014, 2017, 2019, 2021 also shows the "fading welcome" by the public over the years. This point will be discussed in relation to the repatriation debate below.

[6] There is a vast literature that studies anti-immigrant conceptions of particularly populist radical right parties and their supporters in Western Europe. Some include: Sinem Yüksel, "Securitization of Migration: Turkey-EU Relations," Marmara Journal of European Studies, 22(1), 2014; Martin Kahanec et al., "Pitfalls of Immigrant Inclusion into the European Welfare State," *IZA Discussion Papers* No. 6260, 2011; Müge Aknur and İbrahim Saylan, *Batı Avrupa'da Popülist Radikal Sağ Partiler*, Ankara: Nobel Yayınevi, 2021.

[7] See, for example, Fulya Memişoğlu & Aslı Ilgıt (2017), "Syrian refugees in Turkey: multifaceted challenges, diverse players and ambiguous policies," Mediterranean Politics, 22 (3): 317-338; Ali Mertcan Köse, Ulaş Sunata, & Eylem Deniz, "Relationships of social dominance orientation and empathy with perception of Syrian refugees as threat: Structural equation modeling with the examples of Çankaya and Altındağ," *Sosyal Politika Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 40(2): 283–314; Suat Kınıklıoğlu (2020), "Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Changing Attitudes and Fortunes," *SWP Comment* 2020/C 05, https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/ syrian-refugees-in-turkey-changing-attitudes-and-fortunes (25.07.2022); Mehmet Hanefi Topal,

further attention, especially due to recent repatriation debates initiated by the newly established Turkey's first explicitly anti-immigration party, Victory Party-VP (*Zafer Partisi*). Regarding opposition party discourses, Yanaşmayan et al. (2019) examined the refugee-related discourses of both incumbent and opposition parties between the 2014 and 2018 general and presidential elections while Aydemir (2022) qualitatively analyzed party group speeches between 2011 and 2019 to explain how and why they frame Syrian refugees in different ways. Demirtaş (2020) compared the attitudes towards Syrian refugees of the five largest political parties with parliamentary representation.[8] In the same vein, Gülmez (2019) in his analysis of political party discourses towards Syrian refugees concluded that political parties with the exception of JDP played a crucial role in the securitization of the issue and then the rise of xenophobia in Turkey.

The present study analyzes Turkey's opposition parties' attitudes towards the Syrian refugee crisis with a specific emphasis on the repatriation debate that was invigorated in the spring of 2022. Turkey witnessed the rise of anti-immigration politics with this debate which has been favored by a great majority of opposition parties. In order to question whether opposition parties in Turkey securitize the Syrian refugee issue and the changes that have taken place with the recent debate, this research analyzes the opposition parties' discourses since the inception of the refugee inflow until the present time. Drawn on the Copenhagen School's securitization theory and Hogan and Haltinner's (2015) three-dimensional analytical framework that is designed to examine anti-immigration discourses of populist radical right parties, our analysis of opposition parties' discourses concentrates on economy, culture and security dimensions of securitization.[9] In doing this, among other opposition parties, this research focuses on the Republican People's Party-RPP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*), Good Party (*İYİ Parti*), People's Democratic Party-PDP (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*), and the recently established Victory Party-VP (*Zafer Partisi*). The study starts with 2015 general elections, since these were the first elections following the initiation of the massive inflow of refugees in 2011.

Except for Victory Party, these parties are significant political actors of the opposition in Turkey given their votes and presence in the parliament. Compared to other minor parties like Democracy and Progress Party (*Deva Partisi*), Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*) and the Future Party (*Gelecek Partisi*), the VP is included in the research mainly for two reasons: First, the VP is the first explicitly anti-immigrant party in Turkish politics. Second, it has been prominent political player that fueled the repatriation discussion since the spring of 2022. The repatriation debate that was started by VP has contributed to increasing securitization on refugees issue.

Starting from the 2015 elections, the study reviews party programs, election manifestos, public statements, and speeches given by prominent party members in the areas mentioned above. Secondary sources include newspapers and policy papers as well as the scholarly works on the issue.

Ufuk Özerk, Emrah Dokuzlu (2016), "Public Perception of Syrian refugees in Turkey: An Empirical Explanation using extended integrative threat theory," *Conference Paper*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/308286832_Public_Attitudes_Towards_SyrianRefugees_in_Turkey_Shedding_Light_on_Turkish_People_ Opinions (24.07.2022); Engin Dağdeviren (2022), "Syrian Refugees' Perceptions about the Representations of Syria and Syrians on Turkish New Media" Media & Culture, The Journal of Cultural Studies and Media, 2 (1): 28-42.

[8] For other studies of opposition parties' discourses, see Ali Çiçek, Erkan Arslan, Ömer Nabi Baykal, "2018 Seçim Beyannamelerinde Suriyeli Göçmenler Sorununun Ele Alınışı ve Çözüm Önerileri," Türkiye'de Toplum, Yerleşim ve Yönetim Tartışmaları Bildiri E-Kitabı, eds. Hasan Yaylı, 25-27.10.2018, Kırıkkale Üniversitesi, Kırıkkale, p. 152. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330900677_SECIM_BEYANNAMELERINDE_SURIYELI_GOCMENLERIN_ELE_ALINISI_VE_COZUM_ONERILERI (20.08.2022); Pelviz Alu, "Türkiye'de Siyasi Partilerin Göç Politikaları," Masters Thesis, Çanakkale 18 Mart Üniversitesi, Çanakkale, 2018.

[9] Although this framework is designed to analyze the anti-immigration discourses of populist radical right parties, in our study, it will also help us to analyze a social democratic party, RPP and an ethnic oriented leftist party PDP.

The organization of this article is as follows: It first discusses the Copenhagen School's theoretical framework of securitization and the methodology of the research. It then presents Turkey's immigration policies, particularly regarding the recent inflow of Syrian refugees and JDP's policies concerning this issue in details. The major part of the study is dedicated to the analysis of the opposition parties' discourses on the dimensions of economy/welfare, culture/identity and security. In the conclusion part, while similarities and differences between discourses are identified, the changes propelled by the repatriation debate are revealed.

Thus, this study aims at contributing to the existing literature on the Syrian refugee issue in two ways: First, the impact of the recent repatriation debate on political parties' discourses is evaluated. In that sense, we will examine whether the securitization of immigrants has increased in recent years and whether it has become the mainstream of political parties. Moreover, unlike the Copenhagen School, which sees the 'audience' as a passive recipient of discourses already constructed by political actors, this essay considers intersubjectivity to be a two-way dynamic between political actors and audiences. Therefore, it pays more attention to the public opinion polls reflecting expectations and demands of the public from political parties. Such a perspective does not lead to the use of a sociological view in theoretical sense since the research looks at the political parties rather than the audience side.[10] Nevertheless, this point is stressed to prevent "overemphasizing the performative role of the language" (Toğral Koca, 2016) within the light of the fact that interest aggregation and articulation are among major functions of political parties (Duverger, 1959). Thus, political parties do not construct reality alone; they are in constant contact with the public, which implies the existence of an interactive relationship.

2. Theoretical Framework: Migration as a Security Issue

The Copenhagen School's approach provides a useful theoretical framework to explain the nature and dynamics of securitization of migration. Reflecting the growing importance of constructivism in international relations studies, its scholars, particularly Buzan et al. (1998) have developed a new, critical, and wider theoretical framework. Instead of just focusing on power relations between nation-states, they explore the dynamics and processes of security as a social construction in various social realms. This implies that security extends beyond the military/state arena to other sectors: political, societal, economic, and environmental. The Copenhagen School also comes up with "securitization" in exploring dynamics of security as a socially constructed phenomenon (Buzan et al., 1998: 23-24).

Another prominent Copenhagen School scholar, Waever (1995a: 6-7) argues that security is a speech act constructed through securitization in three consecutive steps: "existential threats, emergency action, and effects on interunit relations by breaking free of rules" (Buzan et al., 1998: 26). More specifically, securitization is triggered by the political actors' perceptions, which happens when a state identifies a threat, declares an emergency, and formulates necessary preventative measures (Waever, 1995b: 405). However, securitization does not simply flow from state actors to citizens; rather, it is intersubjective. That is, whether based on objectively real or subjectively perceived threats, securitization requires an audience that accepts the state actors' speech act (Buzan et al., 1998: 31).

Consequently, the Copenhagen School argues that since securitization is triggered by political actors, securitization of an issue results from a political choice. Huysmans (2006) makes the same argument, but from a poststructuralist perspective, whereby securitization represents more than a rational actor response to real or perceived threats. Instead, it is a political technique of framing

[10] Paris School of Security Studies/IPS (International Political Sociology) provides a useful theoretical framework for the sociology of security. See, for instance, Didier Bigo (2008), "International Political Sociology", in Security Studies: An Introduction, P.Williams (ed.), (Abingdon: Routledge), pp.116-128. Nevertheless, the focus of this study is discourses of political parties rather than bureaucratic decisions, the use of techonologies and processes of rationalization which altogether explain securitization process according to IPS.

questions used by political actors. In other words, the "politics of securitization" requires the political construction of insecurities and the mobilization of the politics of fear. Ultimately, political actors seek to shape political and social life on the base of widespread fear toward immigration.

Thus, the choice to frame issues as security-based has political and normative foundations and critical consequences for social and political life. For instance, migration adopts different meanings if framed in humanitarian, economic, or security terms, leading to the formation of different relations to refugees. If humanitarian, refugees are seen as rights holders whereas a fear-based security framing promotes territorial and administrative exclusion (Huysmans, 2006: 37).

Indeed, migration exemplifies the increasing tendency to securitize various issues due to its various security-related dimensions especially when migration occurs in large numbers and in a short period of time (Demirtaş, 2020).[11] Once securitized, however, this dimension dominates other aspects. Despite previously being primarily associated with human rights, migration has undoubtedly become a security issue in many parts of the world, including Europe. 9/11 and bombings in European cities in the early 2000s ignited fears of terrorism and increased Islamophobia. Since then, while states have increasingly embraced restrictive policies against migrants and asylum seekers, populist radical right parties which consider migration, especially from Muslim countries, a threat to European security, identity and wealth have remarkably increased their electoral support. (Kallis, 2015; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013; Aknur and Saylan, 2021).

The growing securitization wave has shifted the focus to irregular migration. To keep potential migrants in their countries or prevent them crossing Europe's borders illegally, European countries have adopted restrictive and exclusive policies. These policies included strict border controls, tough visa regimes, and barriers against non-European countries like Turkey. European countries have also systematically externalized migration through readmission agreements with third countries sharing borders with EU member states. The EU has given or promised improved visa facilities and financial assistance in return for hosting irregular migrants within their territories, thereby keeping migrants outside Europe's borders (Apan, 2021: 897).[12] This case exemplifies how migration is first framed as a security issue through speech acts before related policies are implemented with the participation of particular actors and institutions (Aydınlı 2015; Apan, 2021).

Migration has undoubtedly become politically contested issue in recent decades, with both states and political parties assuming significant roles. Governing parties have used the opportunity to shape state policies to match their political programs while opposition parties, whether having parliamentary representation or not, have also developed migration-related discourses. The forms and extent of this securitization can be analyzed using specific criteria, such as the sectoral approach of Buzan and others. Analytical frameworks specifically developed to investigate the securitization of migration are particularly valuable.

Hogan and Haltinner (2015), for example, argue that populist radical right parties' anti-immigration discourses relate to threats to economy, culture, and security. In detail, according to "threats to economy discourse", immigrants take jobs that should have belonged to native-born citizens, they cut wages, increase unemployment, increase the cost of living, and overburden public health, education, and welfare systems. "Threats to security discourse" used by these parties associates immigrants with increasing violence and crime rates, bringing diseases, and exposing the nations to terrorism. (Ibid.

[11] M. Murat Erdoğan (2020a: 89) also states that "cross-border human mobility, whether regular or irregular, poses a political and inevitably a security-related issue".

[12] For detailed information about the goals, procedures and the list of readmission agreements please see European Commission, Migration and Home Affairs, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/irregular-migration-and-return/return-and-readmission_en

528-529). "Threats to culture discourse" is expressed through such claims that "immigration and multiculturalism threaten 'traditional' or 'indigenous'(white) culture, promote reverse discrimination against the native-born, and increase social divisions" (Ibid. 531).

Similar to Hogan and Haltinner's analytical framework, Ceyhan and Tsoukala (2002) suggest four axes to examine discourses of anti-immigrant political parties: socio-economic due to migration's association with unemployment, the informal economy, and the welfare state crisis; securitarian due to migration's threat to sovereignty, territorial borders, and internal and external security; identitarian because it endangers the culture and identity of the native population; and political since parties expect political benefits from an anti-immigrant discourse. For populist radical right parties, the identitarian axis can easily include xenophobic and racist discourses. As the securitization of migration has become largely mainstream, these migration-related discourses generally combine some or all axes depending on each party's ideology.

Hogan and Haltinner built their analysis on the terms of economy, culture, security, whereas Ceyhan and Tsoukala prefer to employ the categories of socio-economic, identitarian, and securitarian. This study prefers to rely on these three overlapping categories. However, Ceyhan and Tsoukala's "the political dimension" is not considered as a separate category since this research takes securitization itself as a way of doing politics. As explained above, according to Copenhagen School and Huysmans, securitization is a political choice for political actors. In this sense, one can argue that among other political options, politics of migration is shaped by politics of insecurity which is framed on a discourse of securitization. Within this context, national community and the state as the referent objects are claimed to have been existentially threatened by migrants on three fundamental grounds: economic welfare, cultural identity, and security. In the case of securitization of migration, political parties can be motivated by normative principles and/or pragmatic purposes. As it will be examined below, VP's securitization discourse directly results from its affiliation with populist radical right ideology, while JDP's recent explanations in favor of repatriation are overwhelmingly related to its electoral pragmatism. RPP's and Good Party's attitudes towards securitization of the refugee issue can be considered as a reflection of their nationalism and pragmatic stance on the eve of general elections.

As explained above, securitization is intersubjective in that political parties need an accepting audience for their discourses. Given this reciprocal relationship, and the implication of political pragmatism that orients them to seek electoral benefits from anti-immigration discourses, parties must listen to the public as well as try to shape public opinion, thereby creating a dynamic interaction between them. Therefore, this study values public opinion polls as a way of identifying how the public influences party discourses.

Political parties order surveys from public opinion research firms to measure voter support for themselves, to take a picture of public view regarding the nation's most pressing problems, and to hear public opinion on specific issues such as migration. Stressing the significant role of the public opinion in terms of party discourses as well as success of integration policies, Erdoğan (2020b) makes use of the concepts of "securitization from society" and "social acceptance". In other words, Erdoğan convincingly argues that securitization does not only result from political party discourses or routinization by bureaucrats but also from society itself due to its concerns and fears about the newcomers.

Briefly, while securitization by political parties can be considered as securitization from above, concerned public about the newcomers is likely to securitize migration from below. Political parties may benefit from politics of fear; but they cannot create those fears and concerns out of nothing. Such a theoretical stance requires a discourse analysis without ignoring significance of public opinion polls in the construction of party discourses about the Syrian refugees in Turkey.

3. Methodology

Moving from the idea that the uses of language take critical roles in the construction of social reality, critical discourse analysis examines "the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (Van Dijk, 2001: 352). Critical discourse analysis focuses on social problems and political issues. It does not only describe discourse structures; it also seeks to explain them in terms of social interaction. Discourse structures are specifically analyzed to explain and challenge relations of power and dominance in society. Within the broader framework of critical discourse analysis, political discourse analysis deals with power, domination and social inequality through studies of political text and talk. As well as parliament, government, international, intranational and supranational organizations, political parties actively take part in the framing of political issues in specific ways (Chilton, 2004).

Regarding migration, political discourses of Turkish political parties contribute to securitization of the refugees' issue. They depict migrants as "others" who threaten the Turkish nation and the state on several grounds. In this study, securitization discourses of opposition parties towards Syrian refugees are analyzed on the three axes of threats to security, economy and culture as employed in the studies of Hogan and Haltinner as well as Ceyhan and Tsoukala. Political texts and talks in the forms of party programs, election manifestos, public statements, and speeches given by prominent party members are examined through a set of key concepts and linguistic expressions which are used in the process of securitization. While "unemployment," "economic cost," "informal economy" and "decreasing living standards" are taken into consideration under threats to economy, "territorial integrity", "border security" and "internal security" are studied within the context of threats to security. Threats to culture are examined through the linguistics expressions and concepts of "Turkishness," "Turkey belongs to Turks" and "demographic structure".

Migration has recently become a politically contested issue in Turkish politics. The majority of political parties in Turkey have contributed significantly to the securization of migration by framing it largely as a danger to security, identity, and the economy. While political parties have been increasingly promoting a politics of fear, the suggested solutions tend to be exclusionary ones that worsen already-existing social inequalities and strengthen power and dominance relationships. Therefore, political discourse analysis provides a useful analytical tool for explaining the processes and implications of securitization of migration by political parties.

This study focuses on party discourses in the securitization of the Syrian refugee crisis in Turkey, but it does not ignore securitization from below. Therefore, the public opinion dimension reflected through public opinion polls is included in the analysis. However, rather than amounting to a sociological analysis, such an inclusion is limited to considering public opinion as a significant ingredient to the construction of party discourses towards the refugees.

4. Turkish Migration Policy and Governing JDP's Policies towards the Immigrants

Migration has always been part of Turkish life starting from the days of the Ottoman Empire and throughout the Republic of Turkey. While the main issue of migration consisted of the exchange of Greek and Turkish populations in the 1920s, during the 1980s, it was the Iranians who stayed in Turkey following the 1979 Iranian Revolution and during the 1990s, it was the Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks who fled from Bulgaria due to the communist regime's mistreatment and Bosnians escaping the 1992-1995 war following Yugoslavia's civil war. Starting with Iraqi refugees fleeing the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) and the Gulf War in 1990, Turkey became more reluctant to retain its doors open due to the Iraqi Kurds' connections with PKK (*Partiya Karkaran Kurdistan*—Kurdish Workers Party). PKK endangered Turkish territorial integrity by aiming at establishing an independent Kurdistan (Aydınlı, 2015: 50-52; Sert, 2017: 161; Latif, 2020).

Currently, Turkey faces another serious refugee question. Since Syria's civil war erupted in 2011, Turkey has hosted around 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees as well as 320,000 persons from other nationalities (UNHCR Türkiye). However, as a party to the 1951 Geneva Convention for the Status of Refugees, Turkey included a "geographical limitation criterion" whereby "refugees" referred to Europeans affected by World War II. Although the 1967 Protocol on the Legal Status of Refugees removed this limitation, Turkey maintained its reservation. Thus, Turkish immigration policy defines a "refugee" as someone emigrating from Western Europe whereas others are labelled as foreigners under "temporary protection" (Ertan & Ertan, 2017). This reflects Turkey's security concerns regarding potential refugee flows from long-unstable neighboring Middle Eastern countries (Aydınlı 2015: 47-48).[13] As a result, Turkish government adopted the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (*Yabancılar ve Uluslararası Koruma Kanunu*) in April 2013, the first to address its asylum and immigration system. The law no 6458 in the Law of Foreigners and International Protection transformed the concept of asylum seeker into the concept of conditional refugee (Balcı & Göcen, 2018, 5). In October 2014, it issued the Temporary Protection Regulation (*Geçici Koruma Yönetmeliği*), which "guaranteed unlimited stay, protection against forcible returns, and access to reception arrangements where immediate needs are addressed" (Sert, 2014: 163).

According to the 2015 EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan (*Türkiye-AB Ortak Eylem Planı*), the EU promised €3 billion for refugee assistance in Turkey. In return, Turkey assured to impose border restrictions to hinder refugee flows into Europe (Reliefweb, 2015). The Regulation on Work Permit for Foreigners under Temporary Protection (*Geçici Koruma Sağlanan Yabancıların Çalışma İzinlerine Dair Yönetmelik*) adopted in January 2016 reflected the government's plans of not returning Syrian refugees home anytime soon. In March 2016 Turkey and EU signed a readmission agreement that intended to stop irregular migration to Europe through Turkey. In return, Turkey would receive €6 billion to improve conditions for refugees in the country (International Rescue Committee, 2022).

Since the inception of the Syrian refugee wave in 2011, the ruling JDP has been harshly criticized by a great majority of opposition parties due to the party's migration policy and its critical consequences for the country. JDP pursued an open-door policy towards Syrian refugees, and it adopted a religiously-based humanitarian discourse which has been shaped by the party's ideological preferences and political calculations. The party defended its open-door policy as a moral duty to welcome fellow "Muslim brothers". It has occasionally used "ensar-muhacir" analogy with reference to history of Islam.[14] The party very often referred to the Ottoman past stating that tolerance had been a component of Turkish civilization. Turkey also considered itself as the saviour of Syrians suffering the Assad regime's violence (AK Parti, İnsan Hakları Başkanlığı, 7, 11, 13, 19).

The concept of religious brotherhood has also had internal ramifications since JDP by favoring Islamic features has thus sought to reshape ethno-secular definition of the Turkish nation. This contrasted with the Turkish Republic's deeply entrenched approach of only accepting Turkish immigrants (Aydemir, 2021: 4) thereby receiving Turkish and Muslim refugees from the Balkans but not from the Middle East. JDP's populist discourse also drew on Turkey's Ottoman heritage to claim Turkey as the center of Muslim *ummah*. Transcending the national territorial boundaries, JDP's concept of religious brotherhood has a civilizationist dimension. Unlike the West, Turkey was showing hospitality to its religious brothers (Yanaşmayan et al., 2019: 40). Therefore, the civilizationist discourse did not only underpin a religious nationhood for Turks, it has been also used in the

[13] Non-European refugees were not given refugee status but resettled to third countries or encouraged to voluntarily repatriate with UNHCR help.

[14] According to this analogy, when in the early years of Islam, Prophet Mohammed and his supporters had to migrate from cruelties of Mecca's dwellers and became immigrants ("muhacir"), the "ensar" (the dwellers of Medina) welcomed Prophet Mohammed and his supporters.

construction of this identity through the otherization of Europe who has been allegedly indifferent to human tragedies (Demirtaş, 2020: 158)

JDP's discourse towards the Syrian refugees has also referred to significant contributions of the immigrants to the Turkish economy. Yasin Aktay, chief advisor to President Erdoğan, has argued that Turkish economy would be seriously damaged in case of repatriation of Syrians (Cumhuriyet, 2021a). Finally, JDP's politics of migration has also implications in terms of EU-Turkey relations as the party has occasionally used the issue as a trump card against the EU (Cumhuriyet, 2016; VoaTürkçe, 2019).

In sum, JDP's religiously-based humanitarianism has not been free from a set of political ideals and ensuing political calculations. The party's "non-securitarian discourses" should not overshadow the fact that "JDP's migration policy has been implemented in a security framework which emphasized control and containment" as exemplified by official policies and practices in the labor market towards Syrian refugees (Toğral Koca, 2016: 55). As a last point, in fact, JDP's discourse gradually evolved to include repatriation plans as early as 2019. JDP seemed to relate political cost of two important developments at that time with the growing public discontent towards the Syrian refugees. First, by 2018 economic crisis began to hit the Turkish citizens harder, thus making them to attribute their increasing economic hardships to the refugees. Second, JDP lost municipalities of Istanbul and Ankara to the alliance of opposition parties in 2019 (Karasapan, 2019; Kınıklıoğlu, 2020).

5. Opposition Parties Discourses concerning Syrian Refugees

The rapid increase in Syrian refugees across Turkey has pushed immigration to the center of political debate. Thus, election manifestoes paid more attention to this issue in 2018 than 2015. Moreover, the repatriation debate started by the Victory Party's leader Ümit Özdağ in May 2022 has attracted increasing attention due to Turkey's current economic difficulties and the approaching 2023 elections.

As the analysis below will show while the pro-Kurdish PDP's pro-refugee discourse has similarities with JDP's, the two main opposition parties, RPP and Good Party, have adopted highly critical discourses about the refugee issue. They also criticize JDP's migration policy Syrian refugees on economic, security and cultural grounds. Given that the VP was established primarily to oppose refugees, it blames them for all Turkey's problems and strongly supports their repatriation.

5.1. Republican People's Party's Discourse Concerning Syrian Refugees

RPP that was founded in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was led by him until his death in 1938. Having ruled during the single-party era until 1945, it was central to the creation of the modern Westernized state and society. RPP's political program, enforced under a "tutelary authoritarian regime," was based on Kemalist principles of republicanism, nationalism, populism, secularism, statism, and reformism (Heper & Criss, 2009). Since JDP took power in 2002, RPP has been the main opposition party, characterizing itself as "a party which blends Kemalism with universalistic principles of social-democracy in harmony with the requirements of the contemporary world" (CHP Seçim Bildirgesi, 2018:15).

Regarding its migration discourse, RPP combines the security, economic, and culture dimensions of securitization. Despite occasionally referring Syrians as "refugees," it has always emphasized that they were "guests" to be hosted decently during their temporary stay in Turkey (CHP Seçim Bildirgesi, 2018: 207-210). Using a humanitarian discourse, RPP calls the Syrian refugees "our brothers," or "our relatives" (CHP E-Bülten, 2021), while arguing for a highly securitized approach. It considers "JDP's adventurous foreign policies" as the major reason for the inflow of millions of migrants and criticizes JDP for its anti-humanitarian use of refugees to threaten Europe (CHP Seçim Bildirgesi, 2018: 27, 121).

Regarding the economic dimension, RPP has always been concerned about "economic cost" of hosting millions of Syrian refugees. Criticizing JDPs' readmission agreement with the EU, RPP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu asked, "do we have to take care of 3,800,000 Syrians in Turkey?" (Dünya, 2022a). Erdoğan Toprak, chief advisor to the RPP's leader argues that the crisis has already cost Turkey 250 billion US dollars since 2011: 50 billion on immigrants directly; 50 billion for increased security; and 150 billion in lost trade with Syria (Cumhuriyet, 2022a). In a policy paper, RPP İstanbul deputy Prof. Fethi Açıkel points out that Turkey spends its resources inefficiently to Syrian refugees. The paper states that as a result of the "informal economy" created by Syrians, tax-paying Turkish workers are facing an unfair competition. It maintains that unregistered employment and the cheap labor of Syrians are creating unemployment for Turkish citizens (chp.org.tr, 2019a). By pointing out "the decline in the quality of life for Turkish people", RPP has promised to provide Turkish shopkeepers with equal conditions to Syrians entering the domestic market (CHP Seçim Bildirgesi, 2015: 206-207). The party also points out that the quality of education and health services for Turkish citizens are declining due to the sharp increase in the number of Syrian refugees (chp.org.tr, 2019a). RPP stresses the need for education and labor market regulations without necessarily aiming to integrate forced immigrants into Turkish society. (CHP Seçim Bildirgesi, 2018: 208).

RPP's discourse on immigrants also has a cultural dimension as it sees mass immigration as a threat to Turkey's "demographic structure" with RPP-run municipalities warning the central government about the consequences of uncontrolled migration. Kılıçdaroğlu claimed that while the people of Black Sea were treated as second class citizens, Syrian refugees were treated as first class citizens (Gazete duvaR, 2017). Lütfü Savaş, RPP mayor of Hatay Municipality, claims that Hatay's high Syrian population is a "national problem". Out of Hatay's population of 1,671,000, there are an estimated 450,000-550,000 Syrians and, according to Savaş, there are other 100,000-300,000 unregistered immigrants (Medyascope, 2022). He argues that Hatay's mayor could be a Syrian within 12 years since 75% of children born in Hatay are now of Syrian origin. Likewise, Vahap Seçer, mayor of Mersin, which has Turkey's sixth largest Syrian population, claims that population of Mersin is now 20% Syrian. He notes, "I am against both racism and political horse trading. Peace is so close in Syria, I am sure Syrians will want to go back to their country" (Aykırı, 2022). By pointing out "how the European states aims at destabilizing the Middle East region for their imperialistic ambitions", RPP spokesperson Faik Öztırak stated that "Turkey will not be Europe's migrant ghetto" (chp.org.tr, 2021a).

RPP's discourse also includes security elements. For example, responding to mass illegal immigration from Afghanistan, it hung posters on party buildings, reading "The border is honor" (Sözcü, 2021a). RPP spokesperson Öztırak points out that the increasing number of Syrian refugees is creating a "survivability" problem for Turkey (chp.org.tr, 2019). RPP deputy Utku Çakırözer in the investigation motion he gave to the parliament stated that due to the inflow of 5.5 million irregular Syrian and Afghan migrants, the parliamentary committee should take the necessary steps to achieve "border security" as well as social and cultural peace of Turkey. So that "influx of new immigrants" can be prevented. He pointed out that the uncontrolled immigration is leading Turkey to catastrophe (Cumhuriyet, 2021b). Regarding internal security concerns, Kılıçdaroğlu raised the question of whether JDP government was conducting security clearance check for Syrians before their naturalization. If not, what was JDP's real intention? (Birgün, 2022). Thus, the RPP leader combined his party's security concerns with demographic concerns.

Briefly, RPP blends the security, economic, and cultural aspects of securitization in its discourse on migration. Consequently, the option of sending refugees back rather than integrating them into Turkish society stands out among other policy recommendations.

5.2. Good Party's Discourse Concerning Syrian Refugees

Good Party (*İYİ Parti*) was established on 25 October 2017 by the prominent members of the Nationalist Movement Party – NMP (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*). Under Meral Akşener's leadership it split from pro-nationalist MNP over its alliance with JDP. NMP's support for the shift from a parliamentary to the current presidential system in the 2017 constitutional referendum also contributed to this split. Good Party, with its slogan "Turkey will be good," promises to overcome social injustice by forming a well-functioning social state. The party characterizes itself as centrist, nationalist, and secularist, following the principles and ideals of the Republic's founder, Atatürk. The party program emphasizes the restoration of the parliamentary system and protection of the integrity of the judicial system and other institutions. (Örmeci, 2017; Hürriyet Daily News, 2008; İYİ Parti Programı).

Good Party, in its report titled Strategy Document and Action Plan on National Migration Doctrine criticized the government for pursuing an open-door policy for Syrian refugees and, not implementing a "settlement plan" and a "quota system" and allowing Syrian and other refugees to spread throughout the country (İyi Parti Milli Güvenlik Politikaları Başkanlığı Raporu-İPMGPB Raporu, 2022: 1). The party supports the repatriation of Syrian immigrants by following the discourse that "everyone is happy in his/her own country." (İYİ Parti Ankara İl Başkanlığı). As the second principle in its National Immigration Doctrine, the party promises to find peaceful, diplomatic means to send the Syrian refugees home rather than advocating outright expulsion. The third principle, the "preventive migration principle," focuses on taking necessary measures to prevent the migration wave before it reaches the Turkish border in order to stop future migration waves. The fourth one, "international migration consensus principle" guarantees the agreements and steps that will be taken in the international arena (İPMGPB Raporu, 2022: 4).

Concerning the economic axis, the party has highlighted the burden of refugees for the economy, and promised not to accept new refugees. Akşener criticized the government for spending 65 billion dollars on Syrian immigrants during the COVID-19 pandemic rather than on Turkish citizens (Cumhuriyet, 2021c). In September 2021, chief advisor and deputy to the party leader, Aytun Çıray, noted how Turkey has 25 percent youth "unemployment" while Syrian immigrants provide cheap, uninsured labor (Odatv, 2021). In 2018, Akşener by criticizing the provision of free health services to Syrian immigrants pointed out the decline in the quality of life of Turks since Turkish citizens also needed health insurance. She also argued that by starting businesses without paying taxes and creating an "informal economy", Syrians were bankrupting Turkish businesses that were obliged to pay taxes. Akşener states that while Syrians are treated as citizens in border cities, Turks are treated as hosts (Medyascope, 2022). In May 2022, she emphasized that the government should prohibit foreigners, especially Syrians, from purchasing real estate in provinces like İstanbul and Ankara, which have the biggest real estate sales (CNN Türk, 2022).

Concerning the cultural axis, Akşener pointed out that Syrian immigrants were "changing Turkey's demography" and increasing "economic hardship" (Euronews, 2022b). She claimed that the free health services were encouraging the dramatic increase in the population of Syrians, who were becoming a majority in Kilis, Hatay, Urfa, and Gaziantep (Medyascope, 2022). Similarly, in May 2022, deputy Lütfü Türkkan claimed that over 10 percent of the population in Kilis, Hatay, Gaziantep, Urfa, Mersin, Adana, and Mardin were now Syrian, threatening the "demographic structure" and "national security," and causing social unrest. He called for urgent measures to alleviate the demographic crisis and reduce national security concerns. Türkkan also submitted an amendment titled "Settlement Bill" to the Turkish Grand National Assembly, which proposed people under "temporary protection status" (i.e.,

Syrian refugees) should not exceed 10 percent of the population of any province, town, village or district. Furthermore, such people should not be allowed to establish separate neighborhoods (Dünya, 2022b). Party's vice president Ünzile Yüksel stressed that Turkey should not be confused with Afghanistan, Syria or Libya and this land would remain as Republic of Turkey's territories forever. She stated that "Turks had been living on this land for centuries and would continue to live so" (Cumhuriyet, 2021b). Good Party program also promises measures to prevent changes to Turkey's socio-cultural composition (İYİ Parti Programı).

Regarding the security axis, as the first principle in its National Migration Doctine the party focused on the border security. It stated that as a sovereign country, Turkey will ensure full control and supervision at its borders. The party adopts the principle of "Border is Honor". Therefore, the party will not allow illegal crossings through the borders of the country. To do that it will complete the construction of the walls on the borders with Syria, Iraq and Iran (İPMGPB Raporu, 2022: 3). The party program also promised border security to prevent military and ideological elements from infiltrating Turkey (İYİ Parti Programı). Akşener's speeches have highlighted the "survivability risks" created by hosting 3.5 million Syrian refugees (Yeni Çağ, 2018). In September 2021, Çıray claimed that Syrian immigration and an uncontrolled inflow of Afghans had become a "national security" and "survivability issue" because Syrian immigration was changing the population's composition while Al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorists were entering alongside Syrian immigrants (Odatv, 2021).

In sum, Good Party prioritizes border security by treating it as a matter of honor. Then, it focuses on resolving the refugee problem diplomatically and through international agreements, as well as finding a solution to the problem at its root by taking precautions to stop the migration before it reaches the Turkish border.

5.3. Peoples' Democratic Party's Discourse Concerning Syrian Refugees

The People's Democratic Party which was established in 2012 is the latest pro-Kurdish party since the 1990s. As a left-wing party supporting the rights of Turkey's Kurdish population, it supports peace, gender equality, labor, environmental protection, self-government, freedom, and equality (Peoples' Democratic Party Website). The party managed to receive barely above the ten percent threshold in both 2015 and 2018 elections.

The party has a two-dimensional policy towards Syrian immigrants. On the one hand, the 2015 and 2018 election manifestos both supported rights for Syrian refugees. On the other hand, it seems motivated to do so as a party established to protect Kurdish rights in Turkey. That is, it identified protecting Syrian immigrants' rights with doing so for Kurds in Turkey. According to Yanaşmayan et al., (2019: 45) the party seems to be more concerned with supporting Syrian Kurds while trying to present the issue as multicultural.

Regarding the first dimension, as can be observed under the heading "Equal and Free Life for Asylum Seekers and Refugees," the party's 2018 election manifesto has taken an inclusionary approach by embracing "rights-based approaches to immigration" that included a free and equal society for the Syrians. The party promised the following issues: open the refugee camps to national and international inspection; follow anti-racist policies; lift the reservations on the 1951 Geneva Convention to include Syrians within refugee status; ensure safety of refugees by accurate registration and providing housing and health service; help them with unequal treatment, job security, and unionization rights; help women facing oppression in work and social life and ensure native-language education for Syrian children (HDP, 2018, 20-21).

The second dimension is to draw parallels between the rights of Turkey's Kurdish population and Syrian immigrants. According to Aydemir (2022, 10-11), PDP prioritizes its own ethnicity as a party leaning toward ethnic identity. She also argues that the party mostly addresses Syrian immigrant issue

either when Kurdish people migrate from Northern Syria or when the government conducts military intervention in Kurdish-populated cities, such as Kobane and Afrin in Northern Syria. According to parliamentary minutes, the party leaders have also criticized the government for helping Sunni Syrians while ignoring Shiites, Alawites, and Yazidis, highlighting the "inequitable treatment" regarding native language education of Sunni Arab children versus Kurdish, Assyrian, and Yazidi children (TBMM Tutanakları, 2015).

Regardless of the party's motivations for protecting Syrian immigrants, its pro-refugee policy is undeniable as it does not support the repatriation of the Syrian immigrants, unlike the other opposition parties. Instead, it contends that while majority do not truly intend to return, Syrian immigrants have now developed roots in Turkey and have nowhere else to go. Syrians intend to integrate in Turkish life by residing in cities rather than camps and giving birth to more than 600,000 children in Turkey. (Rudaw, 2020).

Some PDP deputies in constituencies close to the Syrian border have raised concerns regarding local citizens' "economic problems" due to the Syrian immigrants, although not to the level of considering repatriation. A survey conducted by Social Democracy Foundation (*Sosyal Demokrasi Vakfı*—SODEV) in November 2021 indicates that PDP voters have more moderate attitudes than others towards Syrian immigrants and have no problems having Syrians as neighbors (Politik Yol, 2022).

Regarding the cultural dimension, as stated by Çiçek et al., (2018: 153) prior to 2014, PDP criticized JDP for attempting to change the demographic balance of southeast to the disadvantage of Kurdish citizens. However, this argument lost relevance once Kobane and Yazidi Kurds from Iraq entered Turkey. Contradicting other opposition parties, PDP deputy Züleyha Gülüm criticized the government's policy of moving Syrian refugees once their numbers exceeded 25 percent of the population of their current district (t24, 2022).

Concerning the security axis, the party argues that, rather than being a danger, Syrian immigrants face security threats from Turks. For example, at a parliamentary group meeting in May 2022, party co-chair Mithat Sancar criticized other opposition parties for creating enmity between Turkish people and Syrian refugees and scapegoating Syrians for Turkey's economic and societal crises (Bianet, 2022). In many parliamentary group meetings, party deputies have warned the government about "increasing racism" and attacks by Turkish groups on Syrian refugees and their businesses, particularly in İstanbul and Ankara (Independent Türkçe, 2021).[15]

Alongside the normative foundations of its pro-refugee stance, the party makes use of the Syrian refugees issue on the political front in order to promote the rights of Kurds living in Turkey. As a result of this, PDP often criticizes the government's policies, including JDP's promises to repatriate Syrian refugees to mitigate Turkey's economic crisis (Bianet, 2022).

5.4. Victory Party's Discourse Concerning Syrian Refugees

Founded in 2021, Victory Party-VP is a new, right-wing populist and ultranationalist anti-immigrant political party. Ümit Özdağ, the party leader and professor of political science, also stresses the party's strong loyalty to Kemalist principles. As Turkey's first anti-immigrant party, with many similarities to equivalent European parties, its main slogan is "Victory Party will come and refugees will leave."[16]

[15] See the party's spokesperson Ebru Günay's statement in Independent Türkçe, 12.08.2021 and see the statement of party's Immigrants and Refugees Commission Co-Spokepersons, Gülsüm Ağaoğlu and Veli Saçılık in kronos35, 11.01.2022.

[16] There are various interpretations claiming that VP resembles *Rassemblement National*, the United Kingdom Independence Party, and *Lega*. See (Callaghan, 2022); (Karşıt-Foreign Policy, 2022).

According to Mudde, such parties share populist, nativist, and authoritarian ideological characteristics (Mudde, 2004). However, VP is most remarkable for its nativism argument which makes the distinction of "us" vs "them". With its slogan of "Turkey belongs to Turks", the party argues that both JDP and the so-called Kemalist RPP have betrayed voters as RPP's pro-repatriation stance is insincere. Considering itself the only true representative of Turkish national will, VP promises to "give the Turkish state back to the Turkish nation" (zaferpartisi.org.tr). As a typical populist radical right party, its strictly securitized approach to refugee issue comprises following axes:

Regarding the economic axis, by highlighting the "economic cost," the party leader Özdağ in an interview in April 2022, claims "Turkey has spent 100 billion dollars on housing, medical care and schooling for about 3.7 million Syrians" (Hacaoğlu, 2021). Given that Syrian immigrants create fewer employment opportunities and "unemployment" for Turkish citizens, and poorer education and health services, refugees should not have access to the social security system or any rights to work or start businesses (Zafer Partisi Programı, 2022: 50-51). In the same interview in April 2022, Özdağ stated that while many Turks were struggling with a roaring inflation, it was time to stop spending Turkish citizen's taxes on foreigners. He added that Turkey rather than making expenses to the Middle Eastern, Asian and African refugees that pass through Turkey to go to Europe should spend its wealth for its own people (Hacaoğlu, 2021).

Concerning the cultural axis, VP as already stated adopts the slogan of "Turkey belongs to Turks" and claims that Turkey faces an existential threat to its national identity due to imperialistic plot of "strategic migration planning" to "alter its demographic structure" through "silent occupation." A short film on this has gained five million views on Youtube since May 3, 2022. Its dystopian scenario, set in 2043, portrays Turks as foreigners in their country, now ruled by Arabs. (Youtube, Sessiz İstila, 2022). According to the party, this threat is imminent since there are actually 8 million immigrants in Turkey, including 5,3 million Syrians, rather than the official figure of 4 million. In addition, refugees' high birth rates mean that Turkey will soon have a majority Arab population in some regions, leading to political turmoil and civil war, thereby enabling a separate Kurdistan to emerge (Zafer Partisi Programı, 2022: 31, 50). In short, Turkey's rapidly changing demographic structure supposedly poses an existential threat to the Turkish state and nation. Regarding Syrian and Afghan refugees, the VP states: "We are not your enemy. We just do not want to share our homeland with you. Turkish people are tired of hosting you. Now it is your time to go back and reconstruct your country" (Zafer Partisi Kuruluş Manifestosu, 2021:15). Like other anti-immigrant parties, VP rejects accusations of racism and xenophobia. On the contrary, it argues that Turks are suffering from racism since Syrians are favored by the existing system (Zafer Partisi Kuruluş Manifestosu, 2021: 10).

For the Victory Party the refugee issue has a clear securitarian dimension. Feeding on the politics of fear, the party brings the securitization discourse to its most extremes. The party argues that the returning of the Syrian refugees back to their country equals to the protection of the "territorial integrity" of Turkey. In his trip to Turkish Iranian border in April 2021, party leader Özdağ opened a banner that stated "our borders are our honor" (Habererk, 2021). Echoing "Fortress Europe," the party proposes repatriating Syrians and building a "Fortress Anatolia." Associating the "Syrian refugees with crime", the party claims that recently established drug trafficking Syrian and Afghan mafias threaten Turkish youth. Syrian-origin Arab spies easily operate in Turkey while Jihadist Salafism, which is an enemy to Islam, is spreading. Finally, droughts in Asia are expected to further increase migration flows in the coming years. The party then promises decisive military, political, legal, diplomatic, and intelligence precautions to prevent new immigrant inflows (Zafer Partisi Programı, 2022: 51, 58, 59). Özdağ has also promised to lay Turkey's first land mines on the Turkish-Syrian border in Reyhanlı, which he justifies for preventing further refugee flows (Rudaw, 2022).

VP which is Turkey's first explicitly anti-immigrant party apparently contributes to increasing securitization of migration issue. By promoting politics of fear among the public, its exclusionary discourses on Syrian refugees have helped normalize xenophobia in the country.

6. The Repatriation Debate in the Face of Fading Public Welcome

There is no doubt that rapid and massive refugee inflows have generated widespread identity and security concerns among Turkish citizens. The massive economic burden of hosting millions of people has also increased public discontent. In this process, while public attitude turned from "hospitality to intolerance" (Demirtaş, 2020: 155), the image of Syrian refugees changed from "aggrieved/victim" to "threat" (Erdoğan, 2020: 87). According to Syrian Barometer 2020, a large majority of Turkish citizens either "agree" or "completely agree" that Syrians will damage Turkey's economy, sociocultural structure, public services, and identity. The figures are 72.3%, 68.1%, 67.9%, 65.6%, respectively. Nevertheless, 47.7% of the public think that "none return home" while 32.9% say "the majority will stay in Turkey" (Erdoğan, 2020: 126, 137).

Given this worsening public opinion, Turkey's increasing economic difficulties, especially since 2020, have empowered populist arguments that scapegoat refugees. According to a recent poll, 82% of Turkish people say that Syrians must return home, rising to 84% among JDP supporters (Cumhuriyet, 2022b). After economic hardships (22.7%), refugees (17.9%) were ranked as Turkey's second most significant problem in 2021. In contrast, only 3.7% saw refugees as the most important problem in 2019, when coronavirus and terrorism topped the list (Aydın, 2022). JDP deputy leader Mehmet Özhaseki, acknowledges that these surveys indicate that the public views the economy and refugees as the most important problems (Gazete duvaR, 2022a).

These combined problems have increased opportunities for political parties to politicize the refugee issue, particularly for opposition parties to benefit electorally by criticizing JDP more harshly ahead of presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for 2023 (aljazeera, 2022). This politicization is unsurprising considering interactive dynamic relationship between political parties and the public regarding such a complex and multidimensional issue with various short- and long-term impacts. Given these changing conditions, both established and newly-formed political parties have framed it to suit their ideological preferences and electoral interests.

The populist radical right VP is undoubtedly the party that has most openly politicized the issue. As soon as it was established, VP brought the "repatriation debate" on the top of the national political agenda. VP's clear-cut anti-immigrant stance has so much appealed to a considerable sections of society that it has rapidly become the spokesperson of the refugee issue (Foreign Policy, 2022). The party suggests authoritarian and exclusionary solutions to the Syrian refugees' issue. VP's populist discourse presents the party as the only true representative of the Turkish national will since it defends the Turkish state and nation against the supposed "silent occupation" backed by "imperialist actors and their domestic collaborators". At the same time, the party puts forward its "Fortress Anatolia" as a strategic plan to protect "Turkish homeland" by sending "eight million refugees" to their countries in a "safe and humanitarian manner". The orientation of VP's plan of "Fortress Anatolia" is not only to repatriation but also to prevent any "incursions" in the future (zaferpartisi.org.tr).

The repatriation debate has been so influential that other parties have been unable to ignore the political impact of VP's populist discourse. Hence, both RPP and Good Party needed to provide detailed repatriation plans which are now announced in accentuated ways. As explained in the evolution of the party's discourse, repatriation is not a new idea to RPP's stance on the refugees. As early as 2015, the party leader Kılıçdaroğlu stated that RPP would not interfere in internal affairs of its neighbors, bring peace to the Middle East, and send "our Syrian brothers back to their country since everybody could

be happy only in his homeland" (Milliyet, 2015). RPP explicitly stated that when the party came to power, it would send "our Syrian guests" to their country in two years (Gazete duvaR, 2021).

A more detailed plan of repatriation was released by the party in April 2022 when the RPP leader Kılıçdaroğlu explained a four-step "repatriation plan" for the Syrian refugees. He promised that they would implement this plan once they come to power. According to this plan RPP first aims at starting negotiations with the Syrian government by opening embassies. Second, in order to provide a suitable environment for the refugees, the party with the help of funds from the EU, plans to start building houses, schools, hospitals and kindergartens for the returnees in Syria. It also aims at rebuilding Syria's infrastructure and industrial capacity. Third, by signing protocols with the Syrian government and cooperating with the EU, RPP aims at to ensuring these returnees safe living conditions in their home country. Fourth, in order to provide work for these returnees, the party would encourage Turkish businessmen, particularly from Gaziantep to start making investments in Syria (gazete duvaR, 2022c; Sözcü, 2021b; CHP E-BÜLTEN, 2022).

Similar to RPP, Good Party has been also actively involved in the repatriation debate. Good Party supports repatriation by making plans on international cooperation to create safe areas in Syria while recognizing Syria's territorial integrity and official administration. One of the four principles that were accepted in the September 2022 Good Party meeting titled "The action plan for the Syrian Refugees" was concerned with a "repatriation plan" that was structured on two alternatives. The first alternative was to start negotiation talks and cooperation between Turkey and Syria. This plan also aims at including cooperation of the EU in the reconstruction process of Syria. The party hopes to "create a comfortable environment for the returnees." In case of failure of this first alternative, the party proposes Turkish government to resort to its own solution by creating a safe zone. In any case, the party aims at returning the Syrian refugees to their homeland and liquidating the PKK/YPG[17] structure in northern Syria (Gazete duvaR, 2022b).

Popularity of the repatriation debate has even forced JDP to promise the return of at least one million refugees in the short term (Cumhuriyet, 2022c). The party added that this return would be voluntary (BBC, 2022). However, one week after this statement, JDP needed to go back to its "ensar-muhacir" discourse (Euronews, 2022a). JDP's discourse oscillated between the two ends since 2019.

Compared to other opposition parties and JDP, PDP has maintained its stance against repatriation. Adopting an inclusionary and rights-based approach, this party supported naturalization of Syrian refugees and giving them the right to speak and have education in their native language (Bianet, 2022). Thus, PDP's rights-based approach allowed the party through the refugee issue to express the party's primary political goals of empowering Kurdish political and cultural rights.

7. Conclusion

Due to Syria's civil war and regime change in Afghanistan, Turkey has faced the largest immigration wave in its history. JDP's open-door policy towards Syrian refugees led Turkey to host the biggest number of refugees worldwide. Since the Republic of Turkey's establishment, governments used migration policy for nation-building while considering the issue as a security problem. Turkey has maintained its geographical limitation, which only considers European immigrants as refugees. However, this has changed significantly following recent regional political developments and JDP's political choices.

JDP's open-door policy has had significant implications in Turkish society and politics. While JDP defends this policy through religiously-oriented humanitarianism, opposition parties have securitized

[17] YPG stands for Peoples' Defense Units or Peoples' Protection units. It is a Syrian Kurdish militia group aiming at the independence of Kurds in Syria. It is a component of the Syrian Democratic Forces.

the massive refugee inflow. Increasing economic difficulties in the country and the rising number of Syrian refugees, who were initially accepted as "guests," have created discontent among the Turkish public, including JDP supporters. Public opinion polls indicate that this mainly results from economic, identity, and security concerns. With the exception of PDP, opposition parties have responded by securitizing the refugee issue, specifically through discourses promoting a politics of fear.

Our analysis of opposition parties' discourses shows that these parties have framed the massive refugee inflow as an existential threat to Turkey's economy, culture and security. Their combination can be clearly observed in the two main opposition parties' discourses. Both the center-left RPP and center-right Good Party criticize JDP's migration policy for creating a national problem. They argue that hosting approximately 3.6 million refugees has huge economic costs that harm Turkish people by decreasing their share of the national income, providing poorer social services, increasing unemployment, and encouraging the informal economy. Given their secular nationalist stances, both parties do not consider the possibility of a large-scale integration.

Both parties focus on the security axis by stating that borders are honorable and both highlight the danger of infiltration by terrorists disguised as Syrian refugees. They have participated in the recent repatriation debate, supporting peaceful repatriation. Both advocate negotiations with the Assad government to establish a safe environment for the returnees.

Concerning the cultural axis, both parties highlight Turkey's changing demographic structure, particularly in border provinces. In general, RPP and Good Party favor a secular national identity characterized by a common culture; a national community bound by a belief in a common past and shared ideals to achieve in the future. These characteristics imply the existence of Turkish nationals who are imbued with loyalty to their nation and the state. Both parties consider the massive inflow of the Syrian refugees as an open threat to this fundamental tie between the nation and its state. In this sense, the differences in terms of their discourses towards the Syrian refugees between these two parties are a matter of degree rather than kind.

Nevertheless, PDP's discourse is in stark contrast with the discourses of RPP and Good Party, PDP's discourse reflects a rights-based humanitarian approach, which is connected to its substate nationalism. The pro-Kurdish PDP identifies the problems facing Syrian refugees with those facing Turkey's Kurdish citizens to support integration of Syrian refugees. PDP disagrees with the arguments that Syrian refugees cause a security threat, economic hardship, or identity problems. One exception is their criticism that JDP has increased the Sunni Muslim Syrian population in some provinces to the detriment of local Kurdish population. Defending a rights-based perspective, PDP claims that the "Temporary Protection Regime" violates international norms. Accordingly, it refrains from calling Syrians "guests" and proposes to lift Turkey's geographical limitation to the Geneva Convention so that Syrian immigrants can be treated as refugees and receive legal rights to live and work in Turkey. Unlike other opposition parties, PDP does not support repatriation of Syrian immigrants as it accepts that they have established roots in Turkey and have no country to return to.

Compared to other opposition parties, VP is an extraordinary phenomenon in Turkish politics. Although both RPP and the Good Party have long considered repatriation as the best political option, repatriation debate was ignited by VP in 2022, putting the refugee issue at the top of the political agenda in the country. As the first explicitly anti-immigrant party in Turkey, VP was established in 2021, at a time when public opinion towards the Syrian refugees remarkably worsened with the effect of economic crisis. In contrast to RPP and Good Party's caution about linguistic expressions that they used to define the refugee issue and to identify the refugees vis-a-vis Turkish nationals, VP's indisputable nativism is constructed on a rigid "us and them" distinction. Its aggressive and discriminatory discourse instigates an ultra-Turkish nationalism which normalizes xenophobia.

VP's xenophobic discourse includes all the characteristics of populist radical right parties, namely populism, nativism, and authoritarianism. The party presents itself as the true representative of the Turkish nation while accusing both JDP and RPP of betraying the Turkish nation, which it imagines as a homogenous unity. Its slogan "Victory Party will come and refugees will leave" best expresses its proposed solution. As well as repatriating refugees as soon as possible, VP also proposes a "Fortress Anatolia" to protect the Turkish homeland and nation against future "incursions". While RPP, Good Party, and VP agree on the need for repatriation, the first two avoid xenophobic or racist discursive elements in their programs and actions.

By igniting the recent repatriation debate, VP pushed other opposition parties to become more vocal in their critical discourses regarding refugees. Equally importantly, opposition parties increasingly refer to the issue due to approaching general elections in 2023. Securitization of migration has thus become more apparent and significant. The repatriation debate has generally contributed to the political actors' widespread use of securitization discourses. Given widespread economic, security, and identity concerns among the public, even JDP has declared that it plans to repatriate one million Syrian refugees in the short term. Nevertheless, JDP's plan has resulted from public pressure rather than the party's consideration of the refugee issue as an existential threat.

In sum, empirical evidence of this study shows that normative principles and/or pragmatic calculations of political parties shape their discourses towards refugees. Copenhagen School securitization theory is able to provide a useful analytical framework to examine securitization of party discourses. Nevertheless, since the relationship between parties and the audience is mutual, impact of public opinion in shaping party discourses should not be ignored. Finally, it is seen that repatriation debate has led to further securitization of political party discourses in Turkey, which is likely to make the refugee issue more complicated in the near future.

Authors Contribution Statement

The contribution of the 1st author to the article is 50%, the contribution of the 2nd author to the article is 50%.

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The authors declare no competing interests.

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