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TURKISH YOUNG ADULTS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE RUSSIAN INVASION
OF UKRAINE AND TURKEY'S POSITION IN IT

Master's thesis

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I have written this Research paper/Bachelor Thesis independently. Any ideas or data taken from other authors or other sources have been fully referenced.

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1. Introduction

Russian Federation launched a full-scale invasion on Ukraine, its neighbour and former Soviet state, on 24 February 2022. The country had strategically worked towards “a new world order” evolving around Russia for years (Karaganov, 2018), but took the decisive step when it saw Ukraine still “drifting towards the West” to remind the world of its power and status (Götz & Staun, 2022). The actual start of this conflict goes already back to 2013 protests in Kiev and the following annexation of Crimea after the Ukrainian people showed clearly that they are siding with Europe (Maio, 2016). The invasion and the rise of the autocratic systems in the world has put some countries’ policies under the eye of international arena’s attention who had normally been able to balance their position between the West and the East. Turkey’s geopolitical and identity positioning has for centuries been “on the periphery of two continents” having become from being the “other” for Europe to being a formal candidate of the European Union (Nas, 2001). Now the war in Ukraine poses a significant challenge for Turkey to keep its balanced stance between Russia and the West (Dalay, 2022). Among the global effect of the conflict and Turkey being a strategic partner for Russia, the aim of this research is to find out how the Turkish young adults perceive and explain the conflict happening in Ukraine and Turkey’s position in it. During the fieldwork conducted for this research in Turkey and Spain the youth have shared where their values stand as a nation between the West and Russia and how the situation between their neighbouring countries has affected their life. The discussion of this research includes a part in which the shared perceptions and explanations on Russian aggression in Ukraine are put into the context of the Turkish young adults’ identity from the perspective of Europeanization and feeling of belonging to Europe.

The importance of youth was entwined into the basic values of the citizens of the new Turkish Republic in the initial stages of developing the nationalistic Kemalist society (Senay, 2008).

“ Youth!

It is you who strengthen and inspire our courage. With the education and knowledge you are receiving, you will be the most valuable symbol of the virtue of humanity, the affection of the fatherland and freedom of thought. O rising new generation! The future is yours.”

These are the words of the father of the new Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Atatürk saw the Turkish youth as a “symbol of national culture” and it was his fundamental goal to develop a nationalistic identity and responsible character in the young people to sustain the Republic. Now the future of Turkey is again in their hands as the decisive elections are approaching. Politico (2023) has deemed the elections to be the “most important elections” of 2023. The significance of the decision taken on 14 May 2023 by the people of Turkey is huge – changes will be expected in the country’s regime, its EU accession status, closeness to Europe and transparency in relations with Russia (Stamouli, 2023). There is scarce literature on Turkish public opinion regarding the Russian attempt at an invasion of Ukraine. Most Europeanness studies of Turks also remain in the first ten or fifteen years of the 21st century when Turkey was actively pursuing the EU accession and looking into Turk’s identity was essential. However, it should be analyzed now as well whether the unsuccessful accession and political position of Turkey between the West and Russia has in any way affected the European identity and values of Turks. This paper seeks to fill this void by presenting a first-hand data from the Turkish youth themselves who are experiencing the effects of the war on their life daily and are preparing for the important elections in May. It is central to this research to explore how the Turkish young adults explain and perceive the Russian aggression in Ukraine and the reasons behind it.

Opinion studies rarely catch the attention just for the sake of being an interesting insight – the importance of these is the possible probability in being able to predict people’s behaviour (Lee, 1947). Due to the small and specific sample size of this study, the central focus of this research is rather to provide a richer, in-depth understanding of the educated Turkish youth enabling to discover what matters the most to them and what issues are seen as most prominent. This research targets the young Turkish adults until the age of 29 who hold a law background. In order to successfully reach a more in-depth understanding of the perceptions in such field it is essential that the participants are knowledgeable of the topic and able to give explanations. Therefore, the sample has been well-defined to reach accurate and focused results. Furthermore, it is the law-educated youth who may eventually end up in the public sector leading the Republic’s future directly, considering that one of the participants is already a member of an opposition party actively pursuing a democratic future for Turkey.

The paper first gives the background of the conflict and an overview of Turkey’s position in it in the literature review chapters. Both Turkey’s relations with Russia and Ukraine are outlined among the review on Turkish policy and actions over the last year in

relation to the Russian attempt of an invasion in Ukraine. The literature review concludes with a look into the paradoxical Turkish identity from the perspective of Europeanization and Turkey's hovering between the West and the East. A methodological and research design overview precedes the chapter of discussion and analysis of the results. The methodology chapter describes the choice of the sample, analysis method and conducting of the interviews in detail and provides a brief look into the formation of this paper's themes. By conducting semi-structured interviews with 10 young Turkish law professionals and following a thematic analysis into the gathered data, this research detected three main themes which will be discussed in the discussion and analysis chapter: perceptions and explanations of Russo-Ukrainian conflict, reflection on Turkey's policy in the latter and war's effect on Turkish young adults' daily lives.

Paper's conclusion will summarize the findings following the three main research objectives, present the limitations of this analysis and make suggestions for further research in the future where the findings can be used.

Keywords: Russian Invasion of Ukraine; Turkey's Balance Politics; Youth Opinion; Turkish Identity; Turkish Youth.

Research classification code (s) (CERCS): Sociology (S210).

2. Research Aim and Questions

The purpose of this research is to explore the perceptions and explanations of the young Turkish adults regarding the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. Due to the research's qualitative nature, the selected sample of youth with a law background is focused, purposeful and specific to provide accurate and information-rich data which enables to reach an in-depth understanding of the perceptions. In-depth exploration of the youth opinion on the war in Ukraine enables to discover and assess Turkish young adults' values and feeling of belonging to Europe in the context of a polarizing world between the democratic and autocratic systems. Achieving the research aim is supported by three research questions that the findings seek to answer:

- 1) How is the Russo-Ukrainian conflict and Turkish policy in it perceived and explained by Turkish young adults?
- 2) How has the conflict affected Turkish young adults' life?
- 3) What do the perceptions say about Turkish young adults' identity in the context of the conflict from the perspective of Europeanization?

The literature review provides the background and most prominent issues that the Turkish participants have shared their perceptions on. By providing the context it supports in understanding the findings and answering the research questions. An overview of Turkish government's policy is given with an aim to provide a state of affairs which the participants have provided their opinion and explanations on. Furthermore, establishing a clear overview of the situation enables the author to draw parallels in where the participants' perceptions identify with its country's perceptions or where there may be a possible level of unknowing in some matters. That enables to discover what are the most important issues for these young Turkish adults and also what are the reasons for this. As the chapter concerning the Turkish public opinion on the conflict shows, the studies into the Turkish citizens' opinion and narratives on 2022 invasion into Ukraine are limited to more general polls conducted rather near the beginning of the conflict meaning that the opinions and understandings may have changed now that the war has gone on for over a year. In addition, these polls did not look into people's motivations and explanations for their perceptions in-depth. This is the gap this paper seeks to fulfil after conducting semi-structured interviews with 10 Turkish young adults. The findings can be used in further research in Turkish identity- or conflict studies or comparative analysis' by providing a thorough look into this educated focus group's understandings of the Russo-Ukrainian war.

3. Literature Review

The literature review of this paper will give a brief overview of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict and Turkish position in it. Besides the introduction of the background, it is also necessary to define what period of the conflict this research paper concerns since two different points in time could be separately brought out here: the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the large-scale 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Though in essence we are dealing with an escalation of the former conflict and fundamentally these are no different conflicts, it is necessary to differentiate these two points in time due to the research aim of this paper where the Turkish young adults were interviewed mainly for the perceptions and narratives on an attempt of a full-scale invasion of sovereign Ukraine in 2022 in contrast to a dispute over the certain Russian-occupied territories in Eastern Ukraine since 2014. Further, the review will move on to looking into how the Turkish Republic and its current leader have reacted to the war, what are the relations of Turkey with both Russia and Ukraine and what are the speculations over Turkish stance on the conflict after the 2022 invasion. It is important to cover what is thought about Turkey's actions over the last year, because the perception of the Turkish young adults also concerns how Turkey has handled this situation and having established the appearing Turkish position in this war enables us to see how the young adults' perceptions identify with Turkish government's values.

As one of the aims of this research is to understand and explore the Turkish young adults' perceptions on Russian aggression in Ukraine, the literature review also introduces works of scholars or polls which have researched the public opinion in Turkey so far about the conflict and, furthermore, the Turkish identity question. Reliable literature on Turkish public opinion on the 2022 invasion however remains scarce – there have been some more general polls conducted, but an in-depth research into the public's perceptions and the reasons behind those has not been completed yet. Therefore such research into Turkish young adults' perceptions on the 2022 invasion is the first of its kind. The following subchapter on identity looks briefly into how historically the Turkish identity has formed. The overview of that and the result of the analysis will enable the author of this paper to assess the status of Turkish youth identity in the light of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. These young people have grown up in a modern and secular Turkish Republic, however it needs to be taken into consideration that most of their lifetime it has been Erdogan who has been leading Turkey. Therefore, we can assume that how they position themselves is also related to their opinion on their government. Finally, perception on an armed conflict so near to Turkey and between the parties all important

for the direction of Turkey's future is a good way to see where the values of Turkey's young people, who are also the future, stand.

3.1. Turkish position in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict

Turkey holds a strategic position in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, having maritime borders and meaningful relationships with both sides of the conflict. As Russian aggression in Ukraine is doing a fairly good job today in dividing the world into the supporters of Ukraine or Russia, respectively, and showing everyone's real colors, it is essential for us to evaluate where does Turkey, formally still an EU candidate, stand with its values. By any means, 2022 was no easy year for the Turkish Republic – while both the West and Russia have kept their eyes on where Turkey positions itself while navigating between both sides, the country has been at the same time fighting an economic crisis, preparing for upcoming elections and negotiating with NATO over the accession of Sweden and Finland into the military alliance. Even in case of the latter, Turkey's critics have speculated that Erdogan is only making it so hard for the two candidates to benefit Russia (Ildem, 2022). That is one example of the critical view Turkey is receiving in relation to its position in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. After all, from the NATO members, Turkey has been said to be the “friendliest” towards Russia nor has it joined the West in imposing the sanctions (Kusa, 2022). However, at the same time Erdogan has clearly expressed that Turkey will “never recognize the illegal annexation of Crimea” (Oral, 2022) and in September 2022 in an interview with PBS NewsHour he stated also regarding the escalated conflict that “undoubtedly” should all the invaded parts of Ukraine be returned to Ukraine and assured that his views on Crimea have not changed either (Erdoğan, 2022). First days into the invasion in 2022, Erdogan made a symbolic move of implementing the 1936 Montreux Convention to limit the movement of Russian warships through Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits. (Bechev, 2022) Symbolic, because the Montreux Convention includes conditions for exercising the right to close the Strait which can not prevent the Russian vessels from returning to their home bases: this is due to the Convention holding separate rules for the States bordering the Black Sea, and Russia is one of them (Kraska, 2022). Therefore, we may assume that Turkey attempted to show its sympathy towards Ukraine with looking into how Montreux Convention can be made use of in such situation.

3.2. Turkey's balance politics with Russia

Historically since the creation of the modern Turkish Republic, Turkey and Russia have engaged in such a balance as today also before where being on opposite sides or sharing different views on a conflict is accompanied by cooperation and respect for strategic

communication in association to other matters, such as economic interests (Ildem, 2022). A former NATO Assistant Secretary General and former Permanent Representative of Turkey to NATO and the OSCE, Tacan Ildem (2022) has referred to Russia being actually the most regular opposite side for Turkey in conflicts around the Republic, bringing as an example the disputes in Lybia, Syria or Karabakh, but has at the same time emphasized the skillful diplomatic communication between the two countries, which have learned how to “agree to disagree” in such situations and maintain the relations and cooperation where needed. However, in today’s situation, a question may still rise in one’s head concerning Turkish decisions on relations with Russia at a time where many other Western countries, especially the European Union member states and the United States, have established it clearly where they stand with their actions. In case of Turkey, the steps taken concerning the conflict seem to support both Ukraine and Russia undermining with it the Western efforts to influence Russia with sanctions and prevent them from obtaining technology that could be used against Ukraine. So where does Turkey stand, is it part of the Western community or not? And what is the Turkish people’s view on that? From the perspective of Turkey being a NATO member, it actually sounds very awkward for the military alliance to see one of its members possibly helping Russia in the war efforts. That is a further reason to look into how the young people of Turkey interpret its government’s actions and see the relations of Turkey with Russia, because some day it will be them leading the country. Additionally, they are all part of the voting population currently and the important elections are coming, which decide Turkey’s direction for years.

The latter remark about Turkey possibly contributing to Russian war efforts points to the situation at the beginning of 2023 where US needed to warn Turkey for it has been selling chemicals and microchips with Western origin to Russia rendering with it the Western sanctions pointless as the supply chain still reaches Russia. Referring to the possibility of Russia using such products in the conflict with Ukraine, United States threatened also Turkey with sanctions affecting its opportunities of trade with G7 countries. (Spicer, 2023) Earlier, Turkey has actually stated that it will do what it can to not interfere with the sanctions on Russia and has also, though as a result of US pressure, taken some steps in response, such as leaving Russian Mir payment system (Jenkins, 2023). However, this has not prevented Turkey from being a safe destination for Russian money, businesses and also Russian citizens fleeing the regime or sanctions.

3.3. Turkey as a destination for Russian immigrants

Reportedly, there were 1363 companies registered in Turkey in 2022 by Russians and 155 000 residence permits given out to them (Glinski, 2023). It is very easy for anyone wealthy enough to obtain Turkish citizenship. Since 2017 there is a separate program called the “Türkiye Citizenship by Investment Program” that promotes becoming a Turkish citizen by “economically contributing to Turkish society”. It is marketed by emphasizing the visa-free destinations that the citizenship provides, a good climate and an extension to the family members of the applicant. All applicants are eligible who are willing to contribute between 400 000-500 000 USD worth of money or who are able to offer a job to at least 50 people. (Henley & Partners) Let it be mentioned that there is no regulation on who the fresh citizen has to employ, leaving with it open the possibility that no locals benefit from this arrangement (TÜRK VATANDAŞLIĞI KANUNUNUN UYGULANMASINA İLİŞKİN YÖNETMELİK/Implementatioin of Turkish Citizenship Law Regulation, 2010). In the context of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, the result of the Turkish immigration policies are rising real estate prices, formation of Russian community in the Turkish cities where Russians decide to settle and even appearance of Russian language on the city’s advertisements. As the question of perception on both Ukrainian and Russian immigrants is asked in this research from the Turkish youth in order to see if there is any preference by them regarding Russians or Ukrainians, it shall be looked into what the earlier literature says about the general public opinion on immigrants on Turkey to help us find the meaning of the later-presented perceptions.

Before the fleeing of Syrian refugees to Turkey in large numbers, Turkey had been a relatively low-immigration country with a purpose rather being a transit point for immigrants than end destination. Today the Republic sees a lot of asylum seekers and refugees for whom it is not safe to stay in their home country nor can they enter European Union. Theoretically, large numbers of immigrants tend to make it more difficult for locals to find jobs and Turkish people have agreed already in the beginning of the 2000s before the significant influx of Syrians, Afghanis and Iraqis that there are negative effects on the quality of life and economy in a country that hosts many immigrants. In addition, the polls conducted in early 2000s showed that Turkish people then preferred immigrants from the same race as them. The only non-problematic area at that time seemed to be the effect on culture. Therefore, as the threat theory on attitudes to immigration suggests, the locals consider the immigrants a threat to its homeland’s national resources, such as the labour market (Kocag & Longhi, 2022). There are different kinds of threats that the local citizens may feel per the theory regarding the received

immigrants, expanding from competition for land or jobs to a threat on political power or even health. In addition, the locals may feel an undermining influence on their values and morals of their community, a “symbolic threat” per se. (Stephan, Ybarra, Martinez, Schwarzwald, & Tur-Kaspa, 1998) In contrast, there exists an opposite theory, the contact theory, that explains when there is a supportive attitude towards immigrants with whom Turkish locals have established some kind of relations already or share the same worldviews (Kocag & Longhi, 2022). Latter theory assumes an “overcoming of differences” as a result of non-problematic contact where there is a bigger group of immigrants accompanied by increased communication and interaction with them possibly enabling an emergence of shared goals and understandings (Jolly & DiGiusto, 2014). The two theories become relevant later in the analysis of today’s Turkish youth perceptions on the Russian and Ukrainian immigrants and help develop understanding for with which immigrants the Turkish youth identify more closely. Indeed, this paper does not analyze this certain matter in depth through these two theories, but offers a brief material for future studies regarding this question.

3.4. Turkish public opinion on the conflict

As mentioned above, there is scarce research done on Turkish public opinion on the conflict in Ukraine that escalated last year. That is further reason why it was important to conduct these interviews concerning this topic with the young people of Turkey. However, some polls have looked into the matter, such as the Turkish pollster Metropoll. It is necessary to consider here that latter poll was conducted in spring 2022 already, when the war had not gone on for as long as it has today. So the opinions presented there may have changed and show rather the first reactions for the full-scale attempt on invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. According to Metropoll, at that point only 33.7% of the respondents held Moscow responsible for the war and almost half saw the United States and NATO accountable for why Moscow attacked (Tahiroglu, 2022). Tahiroglu (2022) speculates that this is a result of Turkey’s own government’s policies and years-long propaganda, additionally, she refers to the mistrust for the West in Turkey due to the two-faced attitudes and the Russian-propagated idea of them being a victim in contrast to the aggressor in the context of the relations with the West. Interestingly, as is later represented, the youth participants from this research also emphasized the importance of considering the existence of Russian propaganda biased against the West in Turkey when attempting to understand the Turkish opinion on the conflict. Ildem (2022) has pointed out the same problem referring to Turkish media promoting relations with Russia at the beginning of war causing pro-Russian attitudes with it among the public – however, he says that the public’s opinion has started changing towards

anti-Russia view as the war goes on and the Turkish government has stated clear non-recognition for the Russian-occupied areas.

Regardless of who was being blamed initially, the poll did not show that the Turkish public supported what Putin is doing, latter more specifically for the reasons of threats for Turkey itself (Tahiroglu, 2022). A strategic relationship between Russia and Turkey goes back to the very creation of the modern Turkish Republic, Soviet Union being one among the first to recognize the new government in 1921. Throughout the decades of instances where the two were on opposite sides in different conflicts and Turkey was developing also its relations with the West, both still kept their economic partnership alive for mutual benefit. (Ildem, 2022) However, as the saying goes, one can't always have the best of both worlds, especially during war-time, which brings out the nationalistic character in everyone and identity becomes a more important factor than ever. The result of juggling between the West and Russia is that Turkey today is very dependant on Russia economically. In a way, it has been the challenges posed by the West towards Turkey, that have made it so important for Turkey to be in good terms with Russia if one refers to the instability that describes the status of relations between the West and Turkey in economic and security matters (Goff-Taylor, 2017). However, it is much harder to maintain that balance during a period of a conflict.

3.5. Turkey's dependance on Russia

Turkey has seen before the detrimental effect that Moscow's decisions have on its economy. When in 2015 Turkey shot down the Russian warplane, Russia cut off Turkey as a tourism destination, which led to challenges in Turkey's tourism sector. (Goff-Taylor, 2017) Atilla Yesilada, an outspoken Turkey's political analyst and commentator has evaluated that the revenue from the usual influx of Russian tourists balances out around half of the country's trade deficit (Osterlund, 2022). If Turkey doesn't want to lose the contribution of Russian tourism to its economy, it has to overcome the limits posed by the suspension of using the Mir payment system that enabled the Russian tourist to use credit cards in Turkey (Müller, 2022). In addition, it is very critical for Turkish economy now to not lose the energy trade relations with Russia: in 2021, 44.9% of the Turkish necessity for gas was provided by Russia (Gaber, 2022) and as a result of the sanctions on Russia, Turkey has also obtained a first place in importing crude oil from Russia, claiming 46% of the Russian total to itself (Black Sea Institute of Strategic Studies; The Monitoring Group of BlackSeaNews, 2022). However, this is not only about Turkey's dependance on Russia, but when looking at the latter example of the crude oil exports, one can see that it is also Russia who is very much dependent on Turkey's market now as it has lost the Western „clients“ (Prokopenko, 2022).

Prokopenko (2022) has suspected that the relationship between Russia and Turkey may even shift towards „Turkey’s favor“ as the influence of Turkey’s ideas have shown to bring some results from Russia to cooperate with Ukraine. Such an example would be Moscow agreeing to the grain deal with Ukraine to keep the Ukrainian grain flowing out of the country – while initially Putin probably wanted to use his control over the deal as leverage, his backing down from it did not succeed assumably thanks to Erdogan. Due to the sanctions, Russia does not have much of a choice anymore regarding its partners, especially in trade, and has become to rely on Turkey in several necessities. In a way, since the Western countries do not trade with Russia anymore, Turkey acts as a middle-man benefitting economically from each movement of goods. (Prokopenko, 2022) The speculation remains though on what are the political costs for Turkey eventually and does the situation spin out for Turkey’s benefit or will it have to pick a side at some point? How much can Turkey trust Russia and does it still want to become closer with the West? We should not forget that despite of the long-term cooperation between Turkey and Russia, Turkey is still Russia’s military opposition as a NATO member (Cheterian, 2023).

3.6. Turkey’s relations with Ukraine

Diplomatic relations between the new Turkey and Ukraine started soon after Ukraine gained independence in 1991. The Ukrainian territory was important already for the Ottoman Empire which saw it as a „buffer zone with Russia“. (Gökmen, 2022) The initial cooperation plan in 1992 saw a rapid development of relations on all levels: political, military, economic, cultural, educational and so on. 13 years later it was Erdogan himself who emphasized again the importance of strategic cooperation between the two by signing a Joint Action Plan with Ukraine on matters of „terrorism, organized crime, economy, transit potential of the two countries, science and technology, humanitarian affairs, environment and maritime issues“ and most importantly, the European integration and security questions around the Black Sea. (Özdal & Demydova, 2011) The early 2000s were successful years for the economic relations between the two countries, Turkey being the 4th trade partner in exports for Ukraine. (Gökmen, 2022) Today, in 2023 Turkey is the largest foreign investor into Ukraine and just before the invasion in 2022 the two neighbours signed a free trade agreement (Adar, 2022).

Apart from that, Turkey and Ukraine are connected by the Crimean Tatars, a diaspora holding Turkish ancestry that had been living on Crimean peninsula until the first Russian annexation of Crimea forced them to flee. (Özdal & Demydova, 2011) Then again in 1944, it was Russia who arranged a „forced deportation“ of the Crimean Tatars and again in 2014 it was Russia who was opposite the Crimean Tatars on their homeland annexing the peninsula

once more forcing the diaspora to take Russian citizenship, face human rights violations or flee. (Özcelik, 2020) As it also appears later in the discussion chapter, Turkey's connection to Ukraine over the fate of the Crimean Tatars shouldn't go unnoticed. The issue is once again an example of where Turkey and Russia stand on opposite sides. Furthermore, the 2022 full invasion is just another time where Russia has forced more Crimean Tatars to flee to Turkey, this time due to the illegal Russian mobilization conducted on the illegally-occupied Crimea where Russia attempts to send Tatars against their own Ukrainian brothers (Ukrainska Pravda, 2022).

Furthermore, in addition to economic level, including in energy sector, where the two aim to guarantee energy security through cooperation, Ukraine and Turkey have always regarded the region's security question and successful defence cooperation to be part of their important jointly-led agenda. The partners signed an Agreement on Cooperation in Fields of Military Training, Technics and Science already in 1994 and there have been new joint agreements and projects in the field continuously until today. (Gökmen, 2022) Just before the invasion of 2022, Erdogan met with Zelenskyy in Ukraine over defence training and new agreements, selling Ukraine its drones at the same time when the Russian military was already gathering behind the Ukrainian border. Asli Aydintasbas from the European Council has described the countries' defence cooperation as something necessary for both: while Turkey is providing the production of the drones, Ukraine is supporting Turkey in latter's weaker aspect, the production of engines, where Ukraine has a leading know-how in the world. Turkey is forced to look for reliable partners in the defence industry, such as Ukraine, due to the Western sanctions. (Jones, 2022) Due to this Turkey is aiding simultaneously Ukraine militarily, whereas also West is aiding Ukraine militarily, but the West is in turn not cooperating with Turkey, a NATO member, on full-scale in the defence matters. It is expected that the West's trust for Turkey worsens even more if Turkey continues its tight relations with Russia (Dalay, 2022). As it is discussed later, the participants of this research do not understand the West isolating Turkey in the defence industry now and feel like the West is giving a blind eye towards Turkish aid for Ukraine.

Since before the invasion, Turkey has provided Ukraine with the effective Bayraktar TB-2 drones and worked in cooperation on the unmanned combat aircraft „Red Apple“, it has additionally supported its neighbour in developing modern naval forces and production of mine-resistant vehicles (Ildem, 2022). Leaving the military aid aside, Erdogan is actually the one Western leader who talks to Putin and this has given Turkey a chance to promote peace between the sides. The most recent example being the leaders' phone call on 25 March 2023

where Erdogan requested „immediate cessation“ in the war against Ukraine (Sharma, 2023). A month into the war in 2022, Turkey immediately started arranging the peace talks between Russia and Ukraine. In 2022 both sides' negotiations sat down in Istanbul for a try to find a solution diplomatically. Erdogan has expressed publically that it is his „aim to bring together Putin and Zelenskyy in his country to open the way to set the seal on this crisis“. (Daily Sabah, 2022) Though Russia has chosen to continue the military operation on Ukrainian soil despite the encouragement for negotiation, it has been the meetings arranged by Ankara that have brought some deals between the sides forward. For example, as a result, in September 2022 the conflict sides exchanged around 300 war prisoners (Ogirenko & Yaakoubi, 2022). However, there have been instances where Turkish state media has announced new successful deals which in reality did not happen, such as the new prisoner exchange talks in Ankara at the beginning of January 2023 that did not reach any conclusion on returning the wounded (AFP, 2023). It is hard to know if this was an honest mistake of misinterpretation or a Turkish propaganda supporting Erdogan before the elections.

However, a significant side deal was reached in Istanbul last year regarding food, fertilisers and grain exports. The deal was a result of United Nation's and Turkey's cooperation and enables both Russia and Ukraine to export its goods through Black Sea under control from Istanbul. As Kyiv is seeing a devastating drop in its economy and has to direct everything they have into the defence budget, this deal helps to „soften the blow“ to at least some extent and enables Ukraine to develop relations with the countries dependent on their grain. The deal does however not only support Ukraine, but also Russia, which also may export its agricultural products through the same ways and under the same control. (International Crisis Group, 2022) A year later, the remaining of the deal is going through some challenges as in April 2023 Russia blamed Ukraine on sabotaging the exports by slowing down inspections. However, Moscow has confirmed later that the inspections are still flowing and the confusion over the deal is fixed. (Reuters, 2023) Reasonably, every deal between Ukraine and Russia now is very sensitive to even a smallest rupture. What is important for this research is that all of these deals have been negotiated with Turkey in the table. According to Adar (2022) European Union is very well-aware that a relationship based on mutual trust with Turkey can not be left without attention due to latter's geopolitical position. However, even if Europe is willing to work on the relationship and call Turkey out on its mixed signals about values on democracy and relations with Russia, one also needs to consider where the Turkish people's own identification as part of the West stands.

3.7 Europeanization in Turkish identity and its place in the West

The shaping of today's Turkish identity and Europe's role in it goes further back into history than the formation of the modern Republic of Turkey after the Ottoman Empire collapsed. As Nas (2001) has pertinently said, two strong attitudes developed in Turkish identity when the Ottomans' decline began in 17th century and they were looking towards Europe to overturn it: there was a "yearning for Europe coupled with a sense of mistrust". The same elements are still very much alive in modern young Turk's identity, having gained strength also due to Turkey's unsuccessful and confusing accession process to the European Union as it appears from the interviews with the participants of this research, and from the US sanctions on Turkey which is forced to look towards Russia due to Western two-faced attitude. As a result Turkey's position as part of the West is shaking. Walker (2003) has called Turkey a "torn country" not just by fault lines and earthquakes, but by the "human fault lines" between the East and West, the North and South, and the Islam and Christianity. Oguzlu (2012) has put Turkey's position today in relation to Europe strikingly into words: "Europeanization without membership". Essentially, in order for Turkey to become part of Europe, it is its people's identity which needs to look "desirable". Currently the Turkish identity is constantly negotiated against the European one, though this is not necessarily a bad thing. This negotiation may lead to both identities justifying each other if the interests of both sides are common. (Rumelili, 2008)

"A ground basis for social or political action, a collective phenomenon denoting some degree of sameness among members of a group or category, a core aspect of individual or collective selfhood or a product of social and political action" – these are the notions conceptualizing "identity" (Lebow, 2008). Defining a Turk's identity was a thing of heart for Atatürk after he founded the Republic of Turkey. As the Republic was meant to be a complete transition from the Ottoman Empire to a modern Turkish state equal to the "prosperous" Western nations, Atatürk aimed to "craft" citizens who would hold the values of democracy, independence and equality simultaneously with no doubt in mind over defending the sovereignty of their country militarily, if necessary. (Morin, 2022) Part of it was the aggressive promotion of a secular system – latter including the legal adjustments over matters which were permitted under Islamic law earlier, such as polygamy (Landau, 1997). Re-positioning Islam in the society was no easy task, but he succeeded, by providing the people with a new fully-founded ideology. Kemalism found real opposition only in 2002, when the current leader of Turkey, Erdogan won the elections. However, until this day

Kemalism is determining Turkey's ideology and course, despite Erdogan's efforts to eradicate it, by its legacy being strongly evident in Turkish identity. (Morin, 2022)

In opposition to Erdogan's ploy to advance the religious conservativeness in Turkey, the youth has become less connected to conservative religiousness or its rituals more emphasizing liberal ideas now (Kirdis, 2022). The Turkish identity could be explained using the notion of "cultural hybridization" or "hybrid identity". One way to explain the concept is that an individual possesses a combination of a global and local identity (Smith & Leavy, 2008). A person with a hybrid identity has experienced some kind of "doubleness" and has embraced new elements from a new culture which blends into the individual's other identity, as if the person had two identities. Labelling by others plays also a role here. (Smith & Leavy, 2008) Putting it into the Turkish context, we have an Ottoman identity renewed into a modern Turk whereas the religion is taken with on individual level, but is separated from the State-level which introduces new elements and values to be considered besides the religious identity on individual level. Furthermore, A Turk is labelled at once as a Turk, in other instance an European or in some other context as Middle-Eastern, it heavily relies on the situation where it is necessary to picture a Turkish citizen as something or something else. The hybridity of Turkish identity in 21st century is an interesting phenomena to study in more depth, but in this research the concept's theoretical essence is rather used as a tool or approach to explain the perceptions of the Turkish youth and their Europeanness or belonging to Europe in the context of the conflict in Ukraine and Turkish position in it.

3.7.1 Europeanization

Generally, the concept of Europeanization can refer to either a change on State-level or an individual one. The former referring to adjustment in government's policies, approaches and political structures for example. The latter to the shared values from an identity-perspective on an individual level. (Eriksen, 2015) One of the aspects that was assessed during the active EU accession process for Turkey was its Europeanness, not only geographically, but also culturally. Historically, Turkey has always been seen as the Other in the eyes of the Europeans for it's Ottoman military character and Islamic religion. (Kanbur & Bernat, 2013) Furthermore, in today's context, Europeanness is often seen in relation to being a member of the European Union with a goal of developing a pan-European identity which tangles with the nation's own identity or identities. Essentially, Europeanization refers to the "European identity as a shared social value" not only the process of fulfilling the EU accession criteria. As in addition to bringing governance to the European level through

creation of relevant institutions, an Europeanized nation should feel unified with the rest of the Europeans with an aim to strengthen the EU. It is no easy task to reach that collective unity that unavoidably erodes the own national identity in regions where nationalism is strong and the relation to Europe has historically been formed for a long time in an “us-versus-them” manner. (Eriksen, 2015) The participants of this research have become adults during the years where Turkey has been mostly been pushed further from the Europe, whether it be the EU’s own policies or Erdogan attempt to re-shape the Turk’s identity towards a more conservative and religious character. Although the more liberal youth in the urban areas of Turkey are not so tied to the religious notions in their identity, it appears from the discussion of the participants’ answers that their mistrust and cautiousness regarding the West is real. Therefore, the research also aims to assess the Turkish youth feeling of Turkey and it’s people belonging to Europe and the factors surrounding it.

4. Methodology and Research Design

The research followed a qualitative inductive approach in data-collection and analysis. The data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and analyzed using a thematic analysis method. The aim of this chapter is to give an overview of the research design and used methodology in more detail that supported answering the following research questions of this paper:

- 1) How is the Russo-Ukrainian conflict and Turkish policy in it perceived and explained by Turkish young adults?
- 2) How has the conflict affected Turkish young adults' life?
- 3) What do the perceptions say about Turkish young adults' identity in the context of the conflict from the perspective of Europeanization?

4.1 Data-collection in Turkey and Spain

In order to achieve the aims and objectives, ten interviews were conducted with Turkish young adults mainly face to face in Turkey and Spain with a few arranged over a video call due to the circumstances. The interviews were semi-structured, enabling exploration of the background of the topic, but at the same time structured enough to cover all the pre-planned aspects with all participants. While the objective was to interview all participants face to face, the plan needed to be adjusted during the interview week in February 2023 due to weather conditions and the destructive earthquake happening in Turkey on the second day while the author was there for the fieldwork. Understandably, the situation postponed several meetings and cancelled around five to ten of them, because it was emotionally and time-wise not the point for the potential participants to be interviewed, the local youth of Turkey who I encountered were all using their time to put as much effort into helping the victims as possible. Therefore, comparing to the motivation that was shown by Turkish young adults initially to share their perceptions on the matter it was eventually much harder to find interviewees due to a national crisis. However, the fieldwork was still successful - finally six interviews were conducted face to face: one in Istanbul, two in Ankara and three in Spain. In addition, a better understanding of the Turkish youth views was reached also during the informal conversations with locals during the fieldwork. Even so that while the author hadn't yet shared the topic of the research with one targeted participant during an informal gathering, the participant took up the topic of the conflict himself already. Further, one interview was done over a video call, while both in Istanbul due to government's warning of bad weather conditions outside and another three were organized to be done over video calls. The interview of two participants was held together face to face per their own request.

Therefore, in the Table 1, the length of the interview for participant 3 and 4, is actually a shared time of discussion with both. The average length of an interview was 46 minutes, the longest lasting for 94 minutes and the shortest for 29 minutes. Six of the participants were male and four were female.

4.2 Sampling strategy

The sampling strategy for this research was affected by several criteria and was therefore a mixture of purposive and snowball sampling. Firstly, the decision was affected by the sensitivity of the topic. As the purpose was to learn about youth opinion, the age conditions needed to be established. According to the National Youth and Sports Policy Document, youth in Turkey encompasses the ages between 14 and 29 (Commission, 2023). However, aiming to interview under-age participants is bound to ethical considerations - due to the sensitivity of the topic it was decided that the participants should be at least legal adults. It was in addition considered that the sample should be able to represent some fraction of the population and be focused, e.g the participants should not be too different by background and should, estimatedly, hold some knowledge about the topic they are being interviewed about. So to ensure information-rich data collection, it was decided that the research targets young adults with law background. The snowball strategy appeared to be necessary for the purposes of finding new participants when the pre-planned meetings were cancelled due to the earthquake crisis. A gatekeeper familiar with the author of this paper from earlier youth project in Turkey provided acquaintance with the first participant who in turn directed the author forward to new people in their field. Generally, the male targets were more motivated and willing to share their opinion on this matter more easily, some referring to even not finding the anonymity necessary as they want to be heard. It was a little more difficult to find motivated females to participate as worry or suspicion was apparent over their anonymity.

4.2.1 Sample

The criteria established was that the participant holds at least a Bachelor's degree in law. Eventually, the participants chosen included young adults from both undergraduate, graduate and PhD-candidate levels, all with law background and already either working as a qualified lawyer or going through the mandatory internship. More importantly, this is a sample of young people who will be leading the Turkish Republic eventually – firstly, they are part of the voting population, but also with a legal background, they may end up in public offices and influence the direction of Turkey's legal system as well. One of the participants

was already working for the opposition party in Turkey and therefore is directly related to the future of Turkey, which makes this participant's perspective a very valuable addition to this research. Career plans of such nature were actually concern points for some other participants who were more wary about the anonymity of their identity if they decided to participate.

4.3 Fieldwork

At the beginnings and when setting up the interviews, all participants were introduced the purpose of the interview, the topic and conditions of participating in the interviews. For the purposes of introducing the topic, some example questions were given to the participants from the semi-planned interview structure and the participant was made aware that he or she may at any point refuse to answer. From the conditions side, the participants were acknowledged that their identity remains anonymous and the interview is voluntary. The estimated duration of the interview was given with a bit of reserve, acknowledging the participants that it may take up to 1.5 hours. For the purposes of preserving the content of the interviews, it was asked whether it was acceptable to voice-record their answers or did they prefer the author taking physical notes. Recording the interviews was acceptable for everyone and full content of the recordings remains only with the author of this paper. The location for performing the interview was chosen according to the participant's preference, some preferred to conduct it at a private setting and some in public areas. For keeping the anonymity of the participants, the paper will refer to specific answers in the analysis part with using the "number" of the interviewee, such as Participant 1 for example. The numbers of the participants are not in any way related to the order in which they were interviewed and is completely randomly set.

Table 1

List of participants

Respondent	Age	Gender	Origin/residence	Length	Format	Date
Participant 1	25	Male	Trabzon/Istanbul	47 min	Face to face	05.02.2023
Participant 2	23	Female	Antalya/Istanbul	40 min	Video call	07.02.2023
Participant 3	25	Male	Konya/Ankara	94 min	Face to face	09.02.2023
Participant 4	25	Male	Isparta/Ankara	94 min	Face to face	09.02.2023
Participant 5	25	Female	Izmir/Istanbul	39 min	Face to face	10.02.2023
Participant 6	29	Male	Ankara/Barcelona	71 min	Face to face	11.02.2023

Participant 7	29	Male	Istanbul	56 min	Video call	11.02.2023
Participant 8	25	Female	Istanbul/Barcelona	29 min	Face to face	11.02.2023
Participant 9	27	Male	Izmit/Istanbul/UK	54 min	Video call	16.02.2023
Participant 10	27	Female	Istanbul	30 min	Video call	11.03.2023

Source: Compiled by the Author

The semi-structured interviews worked through five wider divisions of topics with some additional separate questions which enabled the author to get more context and background on the participant's perception. First, the participants shared their age, level of education and religiousness. Next the participants were asked where they are from and where have they spent most of their life or recent years. Latter made it clear that mainly the participants are from the bigger cities of Turkey and the results are valid for the law-educated youth in urban areas. In addition, it must be taken into consideration that the outcome of this paper represents the views of highly educated youth. A few participants have also moved to Europe recently for studying purposes.

The first part of the interview about the conflict in Ukraine touched upon the first reactions and thoughts of the participants when Russia attempted to fully invade Ukraine in 2022. It included questions on what has most surprised the participant about the conflict and if anything that has happened in the past year after the invasion has changed his/her opinion on the matter. Knowing the first reactions and emotions are helpful in understanding the participants' perceptions. In addition, for the purposes of being able to possibly explain the opinions of the participant better, it was asked where and how often the participant follows the news about the situation. As it was established already earlier in the paper, the topic is surrounded by media propaganda on all sides. Further, the interview explored the participants' narratives on why the war between Ukraine and Russia is happening at all. This section included questions on Putin's and Russian nation's agenda, protests in Russia, the 2014 Crimea conflict and preferred solutions by the Turkish youth. Questions on Russian agenda established a difference in participants opinions regarding whether they see Russian regular citizens as supportive of the war or not. The protests' topic was relevant, because Turkish people know how it is to live in a country where people are not fully free to express their opinions and so may think of this matter differently comparing to a Western young adult who has never been shackled by restrictions on freedom of expression.

In the third section, the interview moved on to questions regarding Turkish role and position in the conflict. It was explored how the participants perceive the decisions Turkey has taken until now and what they see as Turkey's rightful way of action here in the future. The section included also questions about their leader, Erdogan to establish what are the values Turkish young adults are looking for in their government and the direction of their country, especially since the elections are just around the corner. This part also enabled the author to evaluate how important is the factor of foreign policy for a Turkish young voter in the context of the future Turkey. Finally the interviews' last sections looked into the participants' opinions on the Ukrainian refugees and Russian immigrants coming to Turkey and how a war in a neighbouring country influences Turkish youth daily life. The very last question about the effect on participants' life gave the participant a freedom to talk about whatever topic is the most important for them in this context, such as for example the economic influence or emotional toll.

4.4. Method

Methodologically, the research followed an inductive approach of reflexive thematic analysis and a qualitative data-collection method. An inductive approach was preferred as the research aimed to analyze in its essence the data gathered from the interviews, not to test an existing theory. Firstly, the data was transcribed manually – manual transcribing enabled the author to familiarize with the data in more depth and avoid any mistakes that could be made by an automatic program, since some recordings were affected by the noises in public setting. Followingly, the interviews underwent the initial manual coding process exploring all possibly relevant codes for the research aim. An inductive approach enabled to uncover any significant patterns in the data the participants had shared and that could be relevant for the research objectives. The goal of coding was to discover important themes of quality, not necessarily the most repeated ones, which could not be useful in this research per se, so the appearance of codes was not quantified, but a fully qualitative approach was followed. However, through all the interviews, a data saturation was still reached in several themes, all participants clearly repeatedly inclined towards similar storylines. Certain themes appeared, which were important for all participants to bring up. As a next step, categories were developed for the codes with simultaneous re-coding and re-grouping where necessary to grasp the very essence of the answers given by the participants. The themes were further developed relying on the inductively developed categorization and adjusted during the process of analysis of the data as needed. The final codes developed for the analysis can be found in Appendix B.

5. Results and Discussion

As explained in the methodology chapter, the thematic analysis of the data gathered during the the interviews was used to detect common patterns in the participants' answers. As a result, 3 themes were developed for the discussion and analysis chapter: perceptions and explanations on Russo-Ukrainian war, reflection on Turkey's policy in the conflict and Russo-Ukrainian conflict's effect on Turkish young adults' life.

5.1. Perceptions and explanations on Russo-Ukrainian war

The interviews with the participants revealed a shared support and respect for both sovereignty of Ukraine and its people, but also an understanding and sympathy for the Russian nation who is by most participants not seen as the monster in this scenario. The Russian invasion into Ukraine in 2022 was a shocking and surprising event for the participants, a few of them expressing also scaredness and concerns for their own security.

„A lot of people have died and it's because of man's decision“ (Participant 3)

The leader of Russia, Vladimir Putin is almost unanimously seen as the sole aggressor in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. Regarding the support for the war by the Russian regular citizens, the participants either find a protective explanation, such as „they are brainwashed by the propaganda“ or explain their understanding towards Russian nation being unable to do anything in this situation. Only two participants show doubt for the sincerity of Russian people not supporting the war and it is asked that „how can we be sure that Russians do not support that war“. Otherwise, the answers describe how Russian nation is divided by the situation and due to the regime's wrong choices, it is the Russian citizens as well besides the Ukrainians who have to leave their homeland. Therefore, mainly the war is being seen as Putin's personal agenda, supported for now by his closer circle in the government and among wealthy. This is opposite to the earlier presented poll results where shortly after the beginning of the invasion a significant amount of poll participants shared a view that the West is to be blamed for the war. Among the youth participants of this research who hold Putin responsible, there are four main aspects that are seen to be driving Putin's agenda in Ukraine: power, expansionism, threat to the legitimacy of his regime and better access to trade and energy.

Putin's power hunger includes the aspects of control and creating legitimacy. It was expressed that Putin probably wants to be the most powerful man in the world and his power-hunger is compatible with the characteristics of an autocratic leader: they need to show

ambition and „feed their supporters“ not to lose their seat. Taking the fight to full territory of Ukraine is also seen as a powermove against the Europeans in order to move his control beyond the border of the European Union. Controlling Ukraine and Belarus gives Putin a „sphere of influence“ enabling him to disrupt the order in Europe (Palacio, 2022) The further goal from that, as we have heard from Putin’s speeches, is to rearrange the world order, a phenomena which Benedikter (2022) interestingly calls a „two globalizations system“: one for the West and other for the autocrats. That is something which was referred to also in the interviews accompanied by a concern on where Turkey positions itself in this new system. There was no participant who would prefer being on the side of the autocratic countries, such as Russia and China, and it was expressed that Turkey needs to further itself from the autocrats.

The need to show power goes hand in hand with feeling threatened. Legitimacy is a sensitive aspect for every autocratic regime making legitimation a crucial mission for the dictator (El-Menshaw, 2022) It was a common reason for the war brought out by the participants that Ukraine was getting too close to NATO and EU threatening with it the legitimacy of Russian regime. It was speculated that if Ukraine, and also Belarus, would get closer to the West and democratic values, it would raise support among Russian nation for a democratic regime in Russia as well. One participant blamed Volodymyr Zelenskyy for being too loud and provoking with his plans regarding joining the Western side. As a Turk, the participant is used to „having to play it the clever way“ as Turkey has been doing it with Russia for a long time and is also trying to do now. In addition, there were a few participants who saw US and NATO responsible for provoking Russia by „pushing in the direction of Russia“ and Ukraine is seen as the chess-piece in this power game. However, in essence the participants do not think that it’s „Russian business“ which organization Ukraine joins as latter is a sovereign country. It is understood that Ukraine hosts many ethnic Russian minorities, but that doesn’t justify Putin’s agenda and the overall attitude of the people living in Ukraine in seen by Turks actually as pro-Ukrainian and even nationalistic, so the participants do not fathom how Putin could think that taking over their government would be possible at all. Ukrainian nationalism has been an interesting discussion in the academics since the 2014 Euromaidan revolution. One could say the literature and narratives around it which are trying to grasp the essence of Ukrainian nationalism are even varicoloured. There are narratives which see Euromaidan as a turning point for the Ukrainians, an uniting experience bringing together their pro-Ukrainian and pro-Western civic consciousness, and there are the narratives that see the revolution as an event that inflamed the ethnolinguistic

difference between the Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking citizens explaining with it an understanding for the Crimean annexation (Zhuravlev & Ishchenko, 2020). The latter narrative goes fully against the perspective of the Turkish youth participants from this research. Several participants expressed sadness and anger when the topic reached the status of Crimea. Firstly, the participants see Crimea strictly as a part of Ukrainian territory. Secondly, there is a certain feeling of connection for the participants with the Crimean Tatars, who they see as part of the Turkish ancestry being only enabled to carry on their identity when they are part of Ukraine, not Russia.

„My sincere intent is that Crimea should be given back to Ukraine, because the Tatars are willing to join Ukraine. They know their rights and they know that their autonomy is guaranteed under Ukraine.“ (Participant 7)

Historically, the predecessor of modern Turkey, the Ottoman Empire has fought with Russia over Crimea before (Koru, 2016). Crimea was a close partner of the Ottoman Empire for centuries before the Turko-Russian war in the 18th century. Culturally and linguistically, the Crimean Tatars were very similar to the Anatolian Turks of the Ottoman Empire. As a result of the Russian first annexation of Crimea in 1783 many Crimean Tatars had to flee to the Ottoman Empire territories to avoid the abuse by Russians who took over the peninsula. (Koru, 2016) And as mentioned before in the chapter about Turkish-Ukrainian relations, it was not the only time Russia has pushed Crimean Tatars out from their homeland. The participants emphasise this emigration happening again since the 2014 Crimea annexation by Russia and these young adults want to see the Tatars be able to return to their home. Though the returning of Crimea to Ukraine is of great importance to the participants, a scenario where Crimea will become a part of Russia is brought up by several participants as the only possible, though sad solution where Ukraine can keep their sovereignty, just without Crimea. That is not by supporting such solution, but the participants see this rather as a win over Putin who is forced to retreat to the Eastern areas due to strong Ukrainian resistance. However, it is not excluded that if the war goes on for years, Ukrainians are able to arrange a counter-attack as it's seen that the time supports rather Ukrainians than Russians and with Western support, Ukraine is eventually able to defend its country and take back the Russian-occupied areas as well. This leads to another worry the participants hold: Russia using either the nuclear or biological weapons since Putin has not been able to fulfil his agenda and is seen as a failure.

„I foresee two possibilities. First is that Russia uses a nuclear weapon, second is that they won't.“ (Participant 10)

The background of this participant's comment is that there is no way that Putin can win this war anymore in the eyes of the participants. However, due to the surprising Ukrainian resistance cornering and undermining Putin, he has become more dangerous. The nuclear weapon scenario is not seen as a way for Russia to win the war, but rather as Putin's possible way of „leaving the post“ as such a turn in events would most certainly cause Putin to lose his seat. One participant finds that Russia has „clearly gone mad“, other doesn't see any reasonability in Putin's mind anymore and the others refer to the governments' unpredictability that we had forgotten until the invasion in 2022 reminded us that States, especially Russia, can still do whatever they want. So in this scenario where it's „all or never now“ a nuclear attack happening is not excluded at all and is actually a big worry for the Turkish as they would be affected by it as well.

On top of the power and legitimacy reasons, the participants gave forward a strong message about Russian ever-expanding ideas. There were two divisions here between the participants regarding the motives for such expansion: either Putin is stuck in the idea of the historical greatness of Russia by territory and power or he just wants to gain access and control over trade routes and energy market. Eventually, both of these are tangled and interdependent on another anyways, but the former is meant here as being more about the principle and values and the latter about Russian economic success. Vladimir Putin has compared his invasion of Ukraine with the Great Northern War led by Peter the Great– the territory of Ukraine was, like the land taken in 18th century, something that needs to be „returned“ and „strengthened“ for this is about their ideological existence (Roth, 2022). The participants believe that Putin either wants to arrange puppet-regimes or take over the lands of all former Soviet countries for he doesn't recognize any nations, which have been historically under Russian power as their own, but as Russians. In essence, it all comes down to control again. As does the trade narrative, but this time the participants also include Turkey as the party being in danger if it doesn't cooperate, because of the importance of the Bosphorus Strait and the Black Sea for Russia. The latter two act as a trade corridor for the port of Novorossiysk, which is important for both Russia and Central-Asia in terms of trade access and historically there has always been a geopolitical tension over the Sea between Russia and Turkey (Stronski, 2021). The participants see control over Ukraine as a way for

Russia to succeed in gaining more power over the Black Sea routes and access to the Mediterranean Coast. The main keyword here, therefore, is energy.

5.1.1. Ukrainian resistance

„The most surprising thing is Ukrainian resistance. I wasn't thinking it takes so much time.“ (Participant 4)

„Putin didn't think that Ukrainians could defend their country.“ (Participant 3)

„If it's going this way, Ukrainians will probably even take back Crimea“ (Participant 7)

„And the belief of Ukrainian people, it was something great to witness.“ (Participant 10)

For all the participants, except for one, was the most surprising thing about this war the Ukrainian resistance. And they think it was for Putin as well. The one not surprised by this didn't doubt that Ukrainians will put everything they can into defending their sovereignty. However, mostly it was believed that the war would last for a couple of days or a week as Russia had been seen as a strong military power and there was doubt whether NATO countries would support Ukraine in any way. Once the participants had seen the bravery of the Ukrainian people, they felt sympathy and respect for the Ukrainians, but embarrassment for Russia and feel that the long war has turned towards Ukraine's advantage. The fact that Zelenskyy stayed in Ukraine and remains there to fight with his nation is seen as well as something very positive. Kunach (2023) has analyzed President Zelenskyy's speeches since the beginning of the invasion in 2022 and found that the charismatic leader has been standing besides his people by „praising the bravery of the Ukrainian soldiers and the whole nation and encouraged the Ukrainians to withstand the Russian aggression“ in addition to leading the country towards the accession to EU at the same time (Kunach, 2023). Leadership is very important in succeeding in military conflicts – there is a reason why army leaders need to possess certain attributes, such as empathetic character, resilience or interpersonal tact. A leader is not just a commander, but acts also as a motivator providing purpose and inspiration for the soldiers. (University of Akron) The participants see Ukraine getting

stronger day by day now and are waiting for a counter-attack by Ukraine on the Eastern occupied areas as well.

5.2 Reflection on Turkey's policy in Russo-Ukrainian conflict

The general message coming from the answers regarding Turkish policy in the conflict is that Turkey should isolate itself from the autocratic countries, such as Russia here, but can't do it extensively. Therefore, the balance politics followed by Erdogan so far is understood as far as it helps Turkey to „survive“ economically and avoids bringing war or new flow of Syrian refugees to Turkey. The participants do express uncertainty though in Erdogan's intentions referring to unpredictability and focus on financial winnings of short-term and there were some exceptions where the participants did not support Erdogan's Russian policy at all.

„In many parts of the world we confront Russia, but we can't cut our ties with them. In this war we have always expressed that we support Ukrainians. We are voting against Russia in the UN, but we can not cut our ties with them.“ (Participant 3)

Turkey's economy got hit as well by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 while it was already going through an economic crisis due to its government's bad decisions over the years. By the first reaction to the invasion the energy market doubled the cost of the monthly average gross energy imports for Turkey. This was just another addition to the pre-existing problems in Turkish economy. (Kubilay, 2022) Turkish lira has rapidly lost its value, nearly 50% in 2021, in recent years due to the economy collapsing and Erdogan insisting on unusual interest rate policies (Kubilay, 2021). Russia, in turn, provides Turkey with its energy, grain and tourism (Dalay, 2022) among other areas of cooperation. While the participants see the necessity for economic cooperation with Russia, they are also convinced that Erdogan is taking advantage wherever he can. For some participants this is related to unpredictability and mistrust for his policy as his approach is being seen as „opportunity-based“ and the participants do not exclude him jumping sides for a bit of financial gain. However, Erdogan is seen as a „good politician“ in foreign matters who is also ready to exploit Russia as the conflict goes further. The notion on Erdogan being a good politician here does not mean that any of the participants supported him. Among all ten interviewees there is zero people who are willing to vote for him in the next elections. But the good politician description was used to describe his ability to juggle between two sides diplomatically. Erdogan's decision to stay

calm in the context of the war in Ukraine is actually seen by many participants as the one thing where he „did normally“. Though the participants are negatively affected by his citizenship policy and unregulated immigration also regarding the movement of people in this war, they still see that avoiding provoking Putin has been the smart way to do this. Russia, otherwise, is seen as a natural enemy of Turkey in the eyes of most participants, referring to the history and recent Syrian, Lybian and Armenia-Azerbaijan conflicts. One participant emphasized Russia over Ukraine in Turkey’s good relationships and this was due to the participant seeing Russia more supportive of Turkey in different fields and during the February 2023 earthquake. Latter perception could be explained by other participants notion of Turkish media being biased in support of Russia. It is said that there is a lot of focus in the national media on how the Russian nation and the oligarchs are being affected by the sanctions and how Russia is negotiating with Turkey regarding delaying the gas payments. Interestingly though, the other participants do not see any benefit from the delay of that payment, other than that Russia has brought the prices for it down for Turkey, because they are sure that under Erdogan the saved money won’t go to the right directions and is being used by him in his election campaign. There are other referrals to his corruptive practices in the answers, such as the military cooperation supporting Ukraine also being for the benefit of his son-in-law, Selcuk Bayraktar.

However, leaving aside the way Erdogan is doing things, all participants see Turkey as an important actor geopolitically in this war for all sides. Firstly, the participants think that as the war goes on, Russia will need Turkey. So as the paper mentioned above, the relationship may turn towards Turkey’s advantage and control. The participants see an important role for Turkey once the war ends as well in both scenarios, be it either Russia or Ukraine who wins. It would be Turkey who would construct the new infrastructure of both sovereign Ukraine or Russian-dominated Ukraine. That is where the participants reach the topic of Turkey’s importance in the region. These young people acknowledge well that their home is a strong geopolitical ally for Russia, EU, US and Ukraine who can mediate the sides thanks to its relations to everyone. Turkey pursuing the mediator’s role is seen by all participants as a positive thing. Turkey’s strength in their eyes is mainly about what Turkey’s location and experience in that region has to offer. Middle-East is rather known for its instability and the participants emphasize the importance of Turkey knowing how to „swim in these waters“. The youth sees Turkey as a centre, which can strategically become more and more important as a contact point between Europe and Asia. However, they point out that

today Turkey is not doing well in using all of its opportunities and this is where Erdogan and the economy are to blame.

5.2.1 Turkey as part of the West

There appears a certain division among the participants regarding how decisive and harsh should Turkey be towards Russia. There are more participants who support the calm and balanced way of doing this, but there are also a few who think that Turkey should be more clear in joining the West and impose similar sanctions on Russia. They emphasize that the West would need to rethink its stance in cooperating with Turkey in that case by being able to „fill the void“ created by cutting down on trade with Russia, but they see it eventually as a good thing.

„I think our government shouldn't be the backgarden of Russian economy. We should be respectful with the sanctions“. (Participant 3)

„The Russian elite is coming to Turkey to launder money. Turkey doesn't ask where the money comes from. Now Turkish level as a trustable country is getting lower, I think it will be like Zimbabwe at some point, because we don't even ask for taxes and money's origin. This is affecting our trustability. It is my biggest concern.“ (Participant 5)

These are the examples of views shared by participants who are worried that Turkey will ruin its chances of becoming closer with the West and becoming a reliable democratic country trusted by the EU. These participants refer to Erdogan and Putin being „really good friends“ who are „both dictators“. It is seen that Erdogan's policy in this war does not take into account the opinions of Turkish people, which are described as being against the Russian government. A research into Turkish youth perspective for Turkey's future that was conducted in 2021 concluded that a „vast majority“ of Turkish youth (in that research aged between 18-30) do not see cooperation with Russia as a positive thing in Turkey's future (Youth Perspective on Turkey's Future, 2021). This view is fully supported by the participants of this research as well as long as Russian aggression in Ukraine lasts.

However, despite most of the participants seeing becoming part of the European community as a good thing, the participants do not „trust“ the Western partners. This is actually not anything new among the Turkish people. Nas (2001) research on Turkish identity in the context of perception on Europe concluded on exactly the same note – there is a

„paradox of Turkish identity“ where the Turks hold „both a sense of admiration and a sense of mistrust“ for Europe. However Nas (2001) predicted that this paradox and confusion would be solved once the Europeans accept Turkey into the EU – otherwise the Turks move forward with being stuck between two continents also in the context of identity. The prediction from year 2001 has proved to be completely applicable until today. The participants express the will of being closer to Europe, but at the same time it is accompanied by a confusion in them related to whether they would even want to be part of the EU anymore for example. „There is no other friend to the Turk than the Turk himself“ (Nas, 2001). The saying has once again become relevant. There is a common perception among the participants that once, while Turkey’s accession to EU was actively moving, they wanted to certainly become part of the EU. However, on this day the judgement here has become doubtful and divided. Some participants do not see any point in joining the EU at all, while the others, some who see EU as a wonderful project, show strong feeling of doubt in believing that Europe wants Turkey to become one of them. A sentence like „they don’t want us“ is widely evident among the answers. Couple of participants also refer to being Muslim as a reason for EU keeping Turkey behind the door. Therefore the speculation in the chapter on Turkish identity under the literature review part of this paper concerning the EU’s policies in recent years regarding Turkey pushing further the Turkish youth becomes true relying on the perspectives of the participants of this research. Maybe „pushing further“ is too harsh a term to use here and this phenomena certainly needs more looking into in more-depth, but the participants’ answers do contribute to that speculation in this paper as well. However, a referral to supporting the European values is existent in most of the participants’ answers. Notions like „I am a pro-Western guy“, „I’ve always felt we were more European than Middle-Eastern“ or „European values are closer to me“ are made between explanations. All participants share the same vision for strengthened cooperation with EU, even if Turkey doesn’t become a Member State and hope that the West comes to support Turkey more so that it doesn’t have to be dependant on Russia anymore. That is seen as a way to gain more trust towards the West, which right now is being referred to as not being „honest“. The participants would like to see more appreciation by Europe and US towards Turkey – the youth see their home as an influential political ally important for the West however they make it clear that until the West keeps pushing and pulling Turkey won’t be able to cut down on the relations with Russia either. It seems to me that the youth expect a clear signal by the West that Turkey can be part of their community that is shown by actions.

There is a certain aspect apparent among these participants where the Turkish youth identifies with Russian nation as well. This is the autocratic character of both of nation's regimes. The Turkish youth identifies with the absence of freedom of expression.

„I can understand the situation in Russia, since I am Turkish and we are also being ruled by kind of an autocratic government.“ (Participant 9)

While asked about what Russian nation could do to affect its government's decisions, the participants give a strong message forward about protesting being both too dangerous and also pointless. They emphasize the importance of not „demonizing“ the Russian people and culture and deem it as a wrong way of doing things if we want to cooperate with Russia in the future in the case where Russian current regime possibly collapses and there is a chance for a change. It is explained that isolating the Russian people now will make the West pay later.

„That can be very hard to understand for the Western people, but I can understand the situation in Russia, especially if you're a member of opposition.“ (Participant 9)

Participants repeatedly mention the prejudice the West holds towards Russian nation. It is highlighted that the Russian people have nothing to do with Putin's decision, but regardless they are held responsible for its government's actions. On the other side, couple participants bring out the issue of Russian people being brainwashed by the Russian propaganda and regime. Therefore, it is believed that those people, mostly in the rural areas, do not even have chance to hold a different opinion, because they are being kept separate from the truthful news. Kizilova and Norris (2022) have analyzed the question of Russian public's opinion on Russia invading Ukraine. They treat the polls into Russian opinion with great caution as the State is known for manipulating people through its propaganda. While the early polls showed 60% support for it's leader's course of action in Ukraine, the same people have been drowning in disinformation regarding this conflict since 2014 developing their opinions solely based on the information they are shown by Russia. Furthermore, we can never be 100% certain in the Russian companies conducting the polls. There is reason to believe that the Russian State is seeing opposition in its public towards the conflict, proved by the big number of Russians fleeing the country or protests where its nationals end up in jail. (Kizilova & Norris, 2022) In addition, there has been a suspiciously high number of

Russian businessmen or other high-level executives dying under wary circumstances who have expressed opposition to Putin's actions in Ukraine (Brezar, 2022).

The importance of Russian oligarchs was brought up by the participants as well. They see either the Russian wealthy or Putin's own close circle as the most probable people here who could change the course of things in Russia, not the ordinary masses. The participants see Russia as a country of revolution and see no reason why it shouldn't happen again. This is how they do things. Once the life quality of Russians has got so bad that they can not take it anymore, the participants expect them to rise up. The same goes for the oligarchs for whom it is thought that eventually they will be bothered by the effect of the war on their money so much that they will turn against Putin. A revolution is bound to happen eventually if Putin doesn't retreat.

From the identity perspective, the young are torn. They want to be closer to Europe, but for each participant, it comes with a „but“. Per 10 participants there was only one who didn't see any perspective in joining the EU and emphasized the Russian support for Turkey. The reason for not being excited about joining the EU being an economic one, the participant did not think it helps their economy. Others either hoped for Turkey still eventually joining the EU or at least wanted Turkey to pick the European side. The main conclusion from the answers is that Turkish youth still see Europe as a good direction for Turkey, but have become more wary about it due to the complicated relations of Turkey with the West. It was hoped that the elections will bring success to the opposition and this will re-start Turkey's good relations with Europe and US.

5.3 War's effect on Turkish daily life

The worry over the economic effect on Turkish people's lives that has resulted from the migration of wealthy escapees of the conflict was the most popular topic among all participants and also on informal level while the author was discussing the matter with different young adults in Turkey and Spain. The economic problems of Turkey are at the moment so important for its people that according to the participants, foreign policy won't be an influential aspect at all in the coming elections, leaving aside the extremists.

„Many people are coming from these countries and they are buying and renting houses and they have so much more money than our citizens.“ (Participant 2)

„Turkish people are in bad situation, especially in Antalya and Istanbul. It has increased our rents.“ (Participant 8)

„I am struggling to find an apartment after I go back to my country. The rents are really increasing so I can not pay my rent in the future.“ (Participant 8)

These are some of the answers given by young Turkish adults holding a law degree and career. The highly educated youngsters working as lawyers or in the public sector who need to now share apartments, because of the increasing real estate prices. Mostly it is held that it's the result of the Russian immigration, some add wealthy Ukrainians into the mix and it is mentioned also that it is an overall problem in Turkey also with Asians and rich Gulf businessmen who are easily able to get the citizenship. Russians became first in home purchases in Turkey in 2022 tripling the number of their real estate purchases comparing to earlier (Daily Sabah, 2023). While the overall inflation and bad economy is pointed at the government's decisions and war's effect on gas market, the real estate prices are fully put on the immigrants' shoulders. The participants from Ankara say that it is easier in the capital which doesn't attract so many immigrants, but the situation is bad in Istanbul and the South. There are some additional aspects here contributing to this sharp perspective - it is the possibility to become Turkish citizen just by paying money and the already complicated situation with the refugees in the country.

5.3.1 Immigrants and refugees

As it is explained above in this paper, Turkey is enabling anyone to become a Turkish citizen by fulfilling certain conditions which are about money. The participants deem this citizenship ridiculous and a threat to their nation. Referring to being a nationalist country, they question Erdogan's sincerity – by image the leader is proud of his nation, but in reality he is selling off his country's nationality. One participant called the law a „national insult“. There are real concerns for those young adults regarding the preserving of Turkish nation as the immigrants settle there permanently, mixing of families was brought out as one example and the other nations being able to vote as the other. The participants refer to some areas of Turkey already being taken over by Russians, such as Antalya. They say that in schools one can now hear mostly Russian and even the ads on the streets are not in Turkish language anymore. Though the participants emphasize themselves as a hospitable culture generally, they expect respect from the immigrants and better regulation from the government. They are willing to accept here any nation who is fleeing from war, but refer to Russians sometimes

being unrespectful towards locals and deem such behaviour unacceptable. The cultural level, therefore, is stressed as well.

„Now in Antalya and Southern parts we have many Russians and Ukrainians, we are not really used to Slavic culture. It is weird for us. Doesn't feel like home.“ (Participant 5)

The participants refer to their culture being already so mixed by the huge wave of Syrian and Afghan refugees that an addition to the mixture makes them uncomfortable. However, they do not differ between Ukrainians and Russians here. In the eyes of the participants, Ukrainian refugees and Russian immigrants are equally welcome in Turkey. In case of former the Turks see them as escapees from either the regime or the mobilization and for latter, it is obviously the war. They just express the need for better regulation so that it ensures the returning of those immigrants and refugees back to their countries after the conflict. Overall though, the Ukrainian and Russian immigration is seen as a small problem comparing to the Syrians. The resulting problem from both the Syrian refugees and wealthy Russians coming is the division on the streets. According to the participants, the streets or areas have become so divided from the difference of the immigrants it is either not safe or not affordable for a local Turk. As predictable, the young Turks are the ones pushed out of the safer areas to the more dangerous ones where they can only afford a home now.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to explore the Turkish young adults perceptions on the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 along with their explanations for the Turkish position in the conflict. The research further inspected how the war has affected the Turkish youth life in Turkey and found that, most importantly, it has taken an economic toll on their lives. The youth perceptions were followingly put into the context of Turkish identity to explore meanings and changes in it. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 young Turks in Turkey, Spain and virtually to gather an in-depth data for the analysis with a purpose of answering three research questions.

The participants view Russian aggression in Ukraine as Putin's agenda for which the Russian nation should not be demonized. Their approach explains Putin's actions with a hunger for power and control, expansionist ideas, prevention of his regime's collapse and better trade and energy access. While Russia has previously been seen by young Turks as a strong military country, it's reputation now is an embarrassment. The participants were shocked about the actions of Putin and initially felt a sense of scaredness also regarding their own security. In addition, there is a strong message in the participants' answers about their ties to Crimea, which is held as a very issue for Turkey. Though the youth mainly saw the reason escalation of the attack solely as Putin's fault, a perception was apparent among some participants regarding the invasion as a result of West's provocation or Ukrainian's leader's stupidity. The Turkish youth acknowledge the cautiousness that needs to accompany a country's diplomacy which neighbours Russia. Turkey is not only influenced by Russia from North, but also from South where Russia is, among all the other conflicts, again on the opposite side of Turkey.

The participants hold sympathy and understanding for both Ukrainian and Russian nationals. Ukraine is highly respected in its efforts and resistance, which was a surprise for the young. It was a common expectation for them that the war would be over in a couple of days or a week. Now, a year later, the Turkish youth has shifted the scale to the advantage of Ukraine, who they see able to take back all of its territories if the conflict drags out long. However, the Turks do not understand the Western prejudice towards Russian nation. Due to living under a government with autocratic tendencies themselves, they identify with the Russian people who live under fear and absence of freedom of expression. The Turks see the effects of Russian propaganda already in their own country, so they acknowledge the influence it may have on people living in Russia. Therefore, if the conflict comes to an end or

Putin's regime collapses, the Turks promote an understanding for the Russian citizens who should be rather integrated into the world in contrast to isolating them.

Turkish balanced policy in the conflict is understood by the youth as long as it avoids bringing war home, however, regarding the other effects such policy brings with, the participants are critical. The youth acknowledges the need to retain relations with Russia however prefers a course for Turkey towards Europe in the future. It is visible that if Russia wasn't so dependant on Russia economically, they would support cutting the ties with the autocratic neighbour. There is no support whatsoever among the participants for becoming part of the community of autocratic States in the world now that Putin promotes a new world order, but they simply do not see Turkey economically powerful enough to enable itself the sanctions such as the West is posing on Russia. It is explained that if Europe supported Turkey more and US would develop a stable relationship with them, removing of course the sanctions as well, Turkey would possibly consider furthering itself from Russia. However, as long as it's about Turkish survival, the country is staying calm.

As indicated already, Turkish economic situation is a big actor in all the perceptions given by the participants. The harsh economy and war's effect on it reaches them on the individual level in daily life. The main message regarding the second research question is about the wealthy immigrants. The inflation and changes in the energy market are not as important for the youth in contrast to how the rich immigrants affect the regions in Turkey where they settle. The participants see an economic and also cultural effect from this. Firstly, the local Turks themselves can not afford to live in their cities anymore. Even highly educated people with proper jobs have to share apartments. When the participants shared the comparison of their rents with me a year ago and now, the numbers have at least doubled. The young Turks hold economy so important in the current day that it is a shared opinion that the economy will be the biggest factor deciding the voting-behaviour in the elections. Foreign policy and the war in Ukraine is not seen as important.

In addition to the rising real estate prices, certain regions have taken in the Russian culture to the extent where Russian language can be seen on the streets or mainly heard at school. It is Turkish youth concern that since these Russians usually receive also the Turkish citizenship along with buying real estate giving them a possibility to vote, the situation will become a threat to Turkish nationality. However, when the immigration flow is compared with the Syrian refugee crisis, it is held as less influential. In essence, the Turkish young adults are willing to welcome both Ukrainians and Russians into their country for as long as they can not stay in their own during war, but demand a better regulation on all matters

concerning refugees and immigrants, including the termination of the current Citizenship Law enabling the real estate buyers obtain citizenship.

Considering the welcomeness of the young Turks towards both Russian and Ukrainian immigrants, it is very much different from the European countries, which have restricted the flow of Russians into the EU since the invasion. However, the participants still share a “feeling” of being pro-Western or more European than Middle-Eastern, for example. Firstly, some participants said it directly themselves, the others expressed it through wanting to become closer to Europe. The thing is that the vision of Turkey as part of Europe was always accompanied by some “but”, the most visible being the referral “they don’t want us”. Turkish young adults hold a proud nationalistic stance on their country and rightfully so, it was developed into their identity already with Atatürk’s aggressive steps on building a nationalistic character. There is a hybridity that is visible in the participants’ identification as well, where they hold this European identity simultaneously with a strong nationalistic one. The mistrust and offended sense could probably be resolved with a more definitive step by Europe welcoming Turkey into its community, but as long as the West keeps the two-faced policy going, the youth has doubts over their position in Europe. However, according to the most general and important storyline in this research, they do not support the Russian aggression in Ukraine and stand with the West in their perception of its wrongfulness.

The hybridity of the Turkish identity after the unsuccessful accession of Turkey into the EU is an interesting phenomena that should be researched in more depth going further from here. Regarding this research’s aims, the limits of this analysis for generalization is the small sample size and quite a narrowly defined target. It is essential to conduct such opinion research also in the rural areas of Turkey, which most probably will provide a completely different look into the youth’s identity there. In order to produce more reliability to the findings, the data could be methodologically analyzed even further with a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods or by several people.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Interview guide

Participants' background:

- How old are you?
- What is your level of education in law?
- Which city in Turkey are you from and where are you living now?
- Are you religious?

First reactions to Russian invasion into Ukraine:

- What were your first reactions or thoughts when Russia invaded Ukraine a year ago?
- What has surprised you the most about this situation? What have been the key events that have affected your mindset about this?

The war narratives:

- Why do you think it's happening?
- What do you see as Russia's or Putin's goal?
- Whose agenda is it?
- How do you think the Russian nation should react internally? What do you think about the protests? How could they affect their government's decisions?
- How do you think the 2014 conflict of Crimea is related to the full invasion? What triggered the escalation?
- What do you see as the solution? Why?
- What do you think about the possibility of other countries joining the war? What about Turkey?

Turkey's role in Russo-Ukrainian conflict:

- What do you feel is Turkey's role and position in this war?
- What is your understanding of Turkey's agenda?
- How do you feel about Erdogan's strategy in this?
- Has this increased or decreased your support for Erdogan? Would you vote for him in the elections?

- Should Turkey establish economic sanctions on Russia? How do you feel about Turkey's decision not to do it?

Perceptions on refugees and immigrants:

- How do you feel about welcoming Ukrainian refugees in your country?
- How do you feel about welcoming Russian immigrants in your country?
- What do you think about the citizenship law enabling immigrants to get citizenship by buying real estate?

Effect on Turkish young adults' life:

- How has the conflict in Ukraine affected your life?

Additional background questions:

- Would you say that you keep your eye on the events happening in Ukraine?
Where are you following the news about it mostly?
- What do you think about Turkey's accession to the EU? Has the war affected your opinion on this?
- Why do you think is Erdogan blocking the accession on Sweden and Finland into NATO?
- How do you feel people around you think about the conflict? Do you talk a lot about this with your friends and family?

Appendix B. Codes

Theme: Perceptions and explanations on war

Category	Codes
Russian agenda	1) Putin's agenda
	2) Long-term plan
	3) Nuclear threat
	4) Power hunger
	5) Danger
	6) Russia feeling threatened
	7) Expansionism
	8) Putin's failure
	9) Dictatorship
	10) Ethnic Russians in Ukraine
	11) Provocation
	12) Puppet-government
	13) Energy and trade
Ukrainian resistance	14) Ukrainian resistance
	15) Sympathy
	16) Sovereignty
	17) Ukraine in Europe
	18) Counter-attack
	19) Frozen conflict
Russian nation	46) Western support
	20) Prejudice
	21) Propaganda
	22) Understanding
	23) Freedom of expression
	24) Protesting

Theme: Reflection on Turkey's policy in the conflict

Turkey's policy	25) Balance politics
	26) Isolation from Russia
	27) Mediator
	28) Sanctions
	29) Backgarden for Russian economy
	30) Russia: a natural enemy
	31) Uncertainty
	32) No picking sides
	33) Military aid
	34) Taking advantage
	35) Gaining Putin's favour
	36) Turkey: a strong geopolitical ally
	37) Erdogan
	38) Nationalism
	39) NATO

	48) Interdependence
Turkey in the West	40) Western values
	41) Non-appreciative West
	42) Western media
	43) Alliance with NATO
	44) Accession to EU
	45) Selfish EU

Theme: How does conflict in Ukraine affect Turkish young adults' life?

Economic effect	46) Economic difficulties
	47) Real estate prices
	49) Foreign policy
Immigration	50) Mismanagement of refugees
	51) Syrians
	52) Hospitability
	53) Threat to Turkish nation
	54) Social equality
	55) Turkish culture
	56) Global problem
Emotional effect	57) Hope
	58) Surprise
	59) Scaredness
	60) Angryness
	61) Shock
	62) Crimea

Resümee

Uurimuse “Türgi noorte täiskasvanute vaated Venema sissetungi kohta Ukrainas ja arusaamine Türki positsioonist konfliktis” eesmärk oli uurida Türki noorte arvamusi ja kogemusi seoses Venemaa invasiooniga Ukrainas. Uurimuse tarbeks viidi läbi 10 poolstruktureeritud intervjuud Türki noortega Türgis, Hispaanias ja üle videosilla ning kasutati järgnevalt induktiivset temaatilist analüüsi, et tabada transkribeeritud intervjuude tekstis esiletulevad mustrid ja teemad. Usaldusväärseid andmeid Türki avaliku arvamuse kohta Vene-Ukraina sõja kontekstis on vähe ja lähenevate valimiste raames on oluline mõista Türki kodanike arusaamist sõjast Ukrainas. Uurimuse valim kujunes mugavus-, sihipärasuse- ja lumepallimeetodil suunaga uurida teadlike ja linnapäritoluga noorte vaateid. Seega jäi valimiks täiskasvanud noor vanuses kuni 29 aastat, kes on linnapäritolu ja õigusteaduses kõrgelt haritud. Uurimisvajadustest lähtudes püstitati kolm uurimisküsimust:

- 1) Kuidas näevad ja selgitavad Türki noored täiskasvanud Vene-Ukraina sõda ja Türki positsiooni selles?
- 2) Kuidas on konflikt Ukrainas mõjutanud Türki noorte elu?
- 3) Mida ütlevad nende vaated sõja valguses Türki noorte identiteedi kohta Euroopastumise perspektiivist?

Uurimisküsimused võimaldasid autoril hinnata Türki noorte samastumist eurooplastega ja nende vaateid Türgist kui liikmest Euroopa ühiskonnas. Lisaks andis tulemus ülevaate, kuidas näevad nemad Türki tulevikku ja kuidas peaks nende arust Türki valitsus Vene-Ukraina sõjas end positsioneerima. Uuringu diskussioon ja analüüs näitas, et intervjuueeritavad näevad Vene sõda kui Putini personaalset agenda, mille eest ei peaks lääs vene kodanikke vastutavana hoidma. Türki noored põhjendavad Putini sõda tema võimuahnuse, ekspansionistlike ideede, vajadusega säilitada Venemaal praegune režiim ja motiiviga pääseda lähemale parematele kaubandusvõimalustele. Paar osalejat toetasid arvamust, et Vene sõda Ukrainas on lääne provotseeritud ning Zelenskyy oleks pidanud diplomaatiliselt targem olema. Türki noored mõistavad Vene naabrite vajadust jääda ettevaatlikuks.

Osalejad väljendasid tuge nii ukrainlastele kui ka venelastele. Nende suureks üllatuseks sai sõja puhul Ukraina vastupanu – algselt arvati, et sõda saab nädalaga läbi. Suure austuse juures ukrainlaste vastu toetavad ja mõistavad nad ka venelasi, kelle suunas on nende arust läänelikud eelarvamused ebaõiglasel. Nende mõistmine tuleneb sellest, et ka nemad elavad autokraatliku kallakuga valitsusega riigis, kus ei ole sõnavabadust. Seega arvavad

Türgi noored, et tuleviku parema integratsioonivõimaluse nimel ei tohiks me vene kodanikke praegusel ajal isoleerida.

Türgi poliitikat mõistavad intervjueeritavad niikaua, kuni see hoiab ära sõja nende kodus ja aitab neil majanduslikult ellu jääda. Kuigi nad ei toeta sõda Ukrainas mingil määral, tunnistavad nad, et neil ei ole majanduslikel põhjustel võimalik Venemaaga suhteid lõpetada. Nad viitavad sellele võimalusele ainult siis, kui lääts looks nendega stabiilsemad suhted. Putini uue maailmakorra valguses väljendavad noored, et Türgi peaks kindlasti jääma Euroopa poolele, kuid tajuvad, et Euroopa on see, kes ei taha Türgit enda ühiskonda ja selle tõttu on ka EL-iga liitumise toetamise juurde lisandunud kahtlus. Türgi majanduslik olukord on nende jaoks niivõrd tähtis, et ennustatavalt ei mõjuta välispoliitika küsimused absoluutselt tulevatel valimistel kodanike valimiskäitumist. Ka sõda on mõjutanud Türgi noorte elu eelkõige majanduslikult, kõige rohkem immigratsiooni mõjul tõusvate kinnisvarahindadega, mille tõttu Türgi noortel ei ole enam võimalik endale iseseisvalt kodu üürimist lubada. Lisaks näevad nad mõju Türgi kultuurile piirkondades, kus kõige rohkem venelasi on paikseks jäänud. Vaatamata sellele mõjule näevad Türgi noored ennast külalislahke rahvana ja on valmis pakkuma võrdselt nii ukrainlastele kui ka venelastele pelgupaika kuni sõda saab läbi või Putini režiim kokku kukub.

Türgi noorte vaated ja jagatud kogemused viitavad nende puhul hübriid-identiteedile, kus on segunenud Atatürki-aegne natsionalism ja tahe olla osa lääne ühiskonnast. Mõned osalejad ütlevad vastuste jooksul otse välja, et nemad samastuvad pigem Euroopaga ja toetavad läänelikku mõtteviisi. Samas on säilinud siiani usaldamatus Euroopa suhtes, eriti peale kõiki neid aastaid, kus Türgit EL-i vastu ei võetud. Kui muus osas on selge, et Türgi noored Vene agressiooni Ukrainas ei toeta, siis suurim erinevus tuleb sisse just vene kodanike kohtlemisel. Erinevalt läänest ei ole Türgi määranud mingisuguseid piiranguid vene kodanikele piiridel ja nad võetakse heameelega vastu.

Edasistes uuringutes on soovitatud suurendada valimit ja uurida ka maakohtades elavate Türgi noorte arusaami.

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