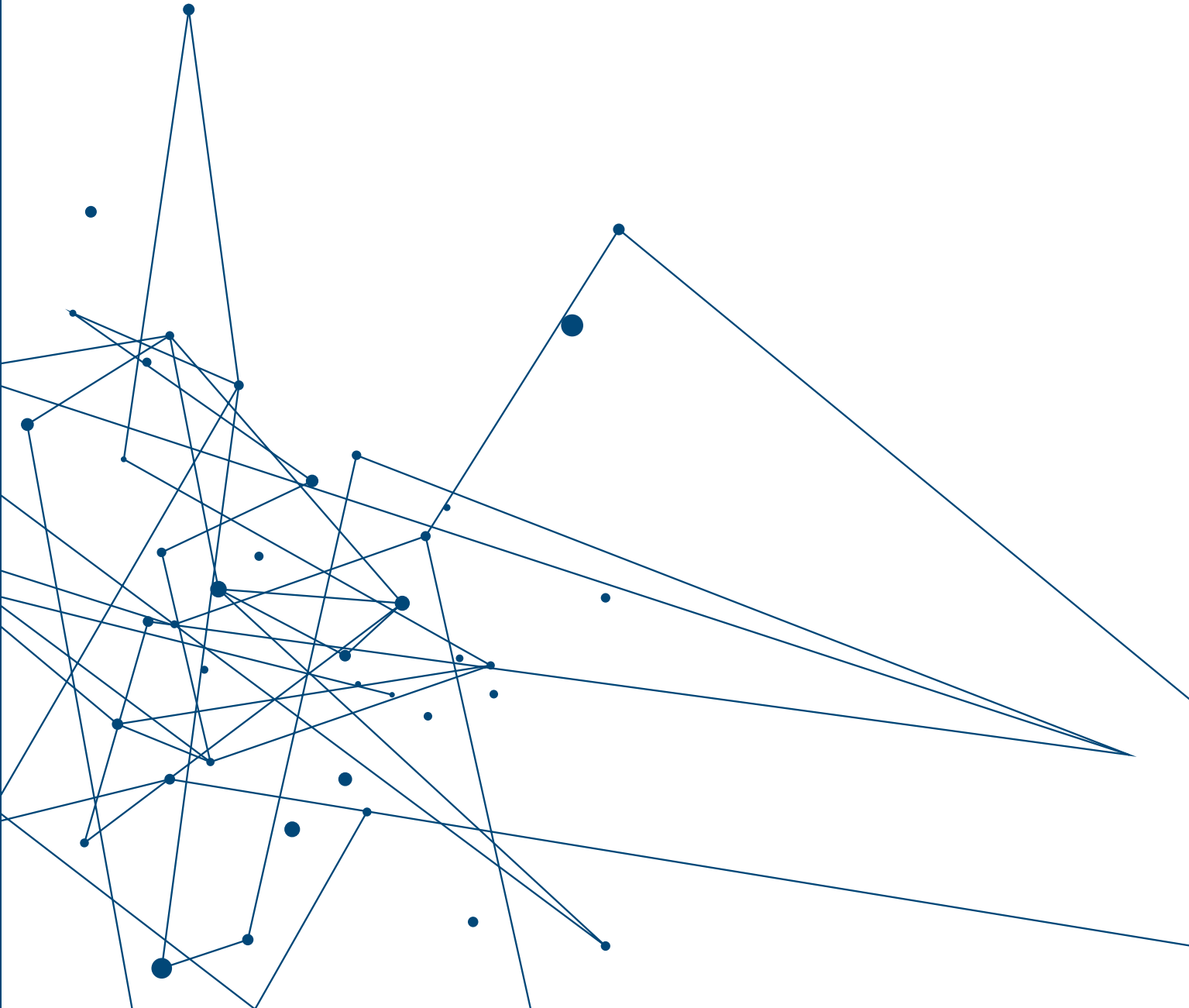


CATS NETWORK PAPER | NO. 10 | 07.10.2024

Turkey's Muslim Diasporas in the Netherlands

Fatih Göksu



In line with the global trend, Turkey has pursued a proactive diaspora policy for more than a decade. In the Netherlands this engagement has produced a core group of Dutch-Turkish citizens who are ideologically attached to the AKP and specifically to the party's leadership. These developments have played out in a context of heated debates on integration in the Netherlands and the rise of far-right parties with very negative attitudes towards migration and Islam.

This report provides an overview of the legal and political context in the Netherlands and explores the integration trends and debates, with a particular focus on the religious realm. It surveys the conservative Turkish diaspora in the Netherlands and reflects on the issues raised by the public debates on migration, racism and discrimination, Islam and the role of Turkish actors. While the Turkish diaspora communities in the Netherlands are diverse, the parallel trends of rising anti-migrant and anti-Islam rhetoric and growing support for Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan give grounds for concern.

This paper is one of five CATS Network Papers assessing perceptions, ongoing debates, and key responses in selected EU member states regarding Turkish diaspora policies.¹

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¹ For writing this report, the author also consulted Dr Zeynep Kaşlı from the International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam

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1.

Introduction

There has been a global increase in the number of diaspora institutions over the last decades. For example, up until 2012, there were 27 states that had established government ministries to explicitly address issues concerning their respective diasporas.² Turkey has also sought to develop a more concerted diaspora policy in order to appeal to its citizens living abroad. In the last two decades since its rise to power in 2002, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has established new state and diaspora agencies and systematised soft-power strategies for mobilising Turkish populations.³ The diaspora policies of the party, however, do not address all Turkish citizens in the same way, but instead favour some and marginalise others. In line with the AKP's foreign policy goals to expand Turkey's influence beyond its borders, the aim is to promote Sunni-Muslim nationalism. To this end, the reach of the AKP's diaspora policy has gone beyond the Turkish diaspora and extended to non-Turkish Muslims as well.

Ankara's diaspora policy as such has drawn intense criticism from the host states, including the Netherlands. The AKP's efforts to gain influence over the Turkish diaspora has taken place in a heated political domestic climate shaped by growing Islamophobia, perceived discrimination on the part of Muslim communities, and tendencies of radicalisations as well as the return to discussions about assimilation in the public discourse. With this background in mind, this report provides a detailed account of the Turkish diaspora in the Netherlands, the specific impacts of the AKP's diaspora policies on it, and the responses from the Dutch government and public.

Section 1 provides an overview of the history of migration to the Netherlands and the place of the Turkish diaspora within it, focusing on the size of the Turkish diaspora, the reasons for migration, the education and legal statuses of Turkish migrants, and their voting behaviour in both Dutch and Turkish elections. Section 2 presents a short discussion on the legal and social contexts in the Netherlands while looking at citizenship laws, laws regulating the religious realm, and the socio-economic integration of people with a migration background. Section 3 will take a

² Alan Gamlen, "Diaspora Institutions and Diaspora Governance", *International Migration Review* 48, no. 1 (2014): 493, <https://doi.org/10.1111/imre.12136>

³ Kerem Öktem, "Projecting Power: Non-Conventional Policy Actors in Turkey's International Relations", in *Another Empire? A Decade of Turkey's Foreign Policy Under the Justice and Development Party*, eds. Kerem Öktem, Ayşe Kadioğlu and Mehmet Karlı (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Press, 2012): 77-109

comprehensive picture of the associational life of the Turkish diaspora, with a focus on conservative organisations and their main activities as well as former and current ties to Turkey. Finally, there is a deep dive exploring the political climates and relations between Turkey and the Netherlands. A discussion is presented on the prevailing issues in the context of public debates on migration, racism, and discrimination in the Netherlands; Islam; and Turkey's involvement. The report is based on our ongoing individual research efforts on this topic as well as our review of the literature on the history of migration from Turkey to the Netherlands and existing studies on the political, social, economic, and religious rights in the country.

2.

Migration Background

Migration has formed a key element of the Netherlands, especially considering the large-scale movement of labour forces, which has resulted in varying demographic, social, and cultural consequences within the European territories as well as its colonies across the world.⁴

2.1

The Recent Migration History of the Netherlands

In the aftermath of the Second World War and the decolonisation movements that followed, nearly half a million Dutch residents left the country between 1946 and 1969 to the “usual” destinations such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Brazil, and South Africa. Meanwhile, the Netherlands had a significant inflow of repatriates from the former Dutch East Indies after Indonesia gained independence in 1949, as well as postcolonial migration from Suriname in the years leading up to Suriname’s independence in 1975 and from the Dutch Antilles in the late 1980s.⁵ The Dutch Antilles is still part of the Netherlands, and Antilleans are Dutch nationals with a right to enter the Netherlands.

Parallel to these waves of migration in the context of decolonisation, in the early 1960s, the Netherlands joined the European trend of hiring guest workers from countries across the Mediterranean.⁶ Recruitment treaties were signed by the Dutch

⁴ Gert Oostindie (ed.), *Dutch Colonialism, Migration and Cultural Heritage* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2008)

For a comprehensive survey of the literature on Dutch migration history see Marlou Schrover, “Dutch Migration History: Looking Back and Moving Forward”, *Tijdschrift Voor Sociale En Economische Geschiedenis (TSEG)* 11, no. 2: 199–218

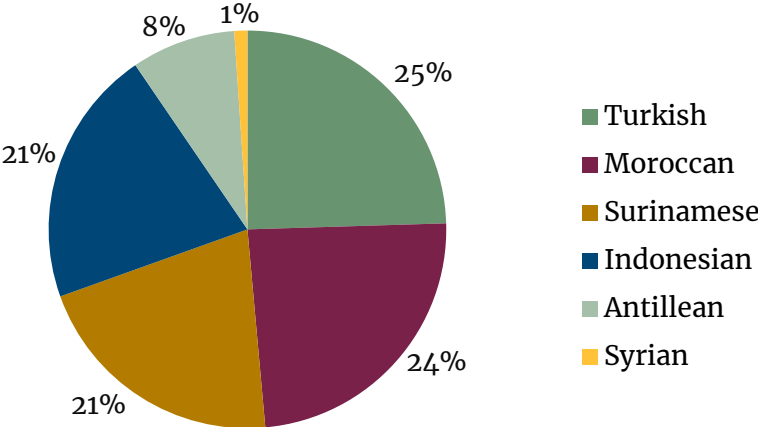
⁵ Masja van Meeteren, Sanne Van de Pol, Rommert Dekker and Godfried Engbersen, “Destination Netherlands. History of Immigration and Immigration Policy in the Netherlands”, in *Immigrants*, ed. Judy Ho (New York, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2013): 113–170

⁶ Erik Snel, Godfried Engbersen and Marije Faber, “From Bridgeheads to Gate Closers: How Migrant Networks Contribute to Declining Migration from Morocco to the Netherlands”, in *Beyond Networks. Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship*, eds. Oliver Bakewell, Godfried Engbersen, Maria Lucinda Fonseca, Cindy Horst (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016): 134–155

government with various countries, specifically with Turkey in 1964 and Morocco in 1969.⁷ With the outbreak of the 1973 oil crisis, the contracts were terminated in order to curb the rising rates of unemployment among Dutch citizens.⁸ Yet, despite the termination of contracts, migration from Turkey and Morocco continued due to the search for work as well as family reunions. In 1975, the Dutch government tackled the increasing number of undocumented migrants in the country using a policy of “tolerance”, naturalising around 15,000 migrants of mainly Turkish and Moroccan descent.⁹ Later in 1980 another wave of naturalisation followed.¹⁰

The Netherlands has also been a country of settlement for a limited number of refugees and asylum seekers in recent decades, especially from Africa and other conflict-ridden areas.¹¹ During the Yugoslav Wars between 1991 and 2001, the number of asylum applicants from this region climbed dramatically to a record number of about 43,000 in the years from 1999 to 2000.¹² In 2016–2018, there were 99,120 first-time asylum seekers, with 2015 of the applicants being from Turkey. Since the failed coup attempt in Turkey in July 2016, the number of Turkish asylum seekers in the Netherlands has increased.¹³

Figure 1: Netherlands Migrant Population (2020)



Source: Statistics Netherlands (CBS), CBS Open data StatLine, 2021a

⁷ ibid

⁸ ibid

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ ibid

¹¹ Masja van Meeteren, 2013

¹² ibid

¹³ Statistics Netherlands (CBS), *More asylum seekers in 2018* (The Hague, 11 February 2019),

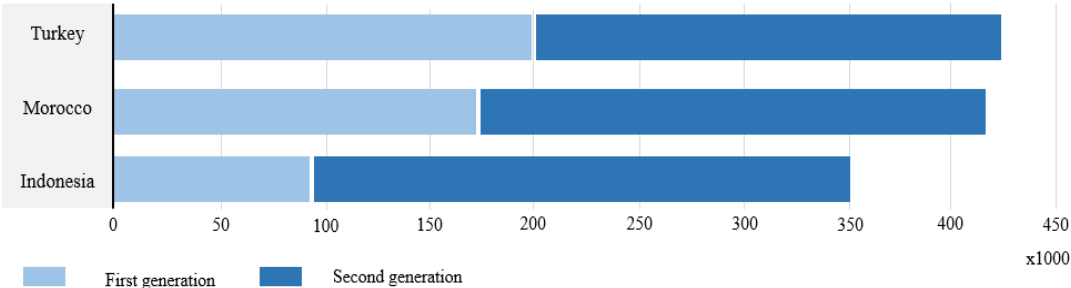
<https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2019/07/more-asylum-seekers-in-2018>;

All CBS data was retrieved at the time of writing this report in 2021; figures may have been updated by CBS in the meantime.

According to 2020 Statistics Netherlands (CBS) Open data StatLine, about 11 per cent of the Dutch population is foreign-born (“first generation”). This number goes up to 20 per cent when the “second generation” – the descendants of immigrants – is included.¹⁴ In 2021, 24.8 per cent of the Dutch population had a migration background, defined by having at least one parent born abroad¹⁵, amounting to a total number of 4,334,384 people. CBS categorises 14.1 per cent of this group as having a “non-Western background”, meaning “a person with a migration background from one of the countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia (excluding Indonesia and Japan) or Turkey”. In contrast, a “Western background” refers to “a person with a migration background from one of the countries in Europe (excluding Turkey), North America and Oceania, and Indonesia and Japan”.¹⁶

The largest Muslim communities “with a migration background” in the Netherlands are immigrants and/or descendants of immigrants from Turkey, Morocco, and Indonesia. As Figure 2 shows, in 2021 the Turks were the most numerous of those with a migration background, amounting to 427,562 people, with 52.6 per cent of these having been born in the Netherlands.

Figure 2: People with a Migration Background from Majority-Muslim Countries in the Netherlands (2021)



Source: Statistics Netherlands (CBS), 2021a¹⁷

¹⁴ European Commission (EC), *Statistics on migration to Europe* (Brussels, 11 April 2024), https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-of-life/statistics-migration-europe_en

¹⁵ Statistics Netherlands (CBS), *Jaarrapport Integratie 2020* (The Hague/Heerlen/Bonaire, 2020), <https://longreads.cbs.nl/integratie-2020/onderwijs/>

¹⁶ Statistics Netherlands (CBS), *Wat is het verschil tussen een westerse en niet-westerse allochtoon?* (The Hague, 2021b), <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/faq/specifiek/wat-is-het-verschil-tussen-een-westerse-en-niet-westerse-allochtoon->

¹⁷ Statistics Netherlands (CBS), *Hoeveel mensen met een migratieachtergrond wonen in Nederland?* (The Hague, 2021c), <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/dossier/dossier-asiel-migratie-en-integratie/hoeveel-mensen-met-een-migratieachtergrond-wonen-in-nederland>

2.2

Migration and Legal Status of Turkish Nationals in the Netherlands

Currently, around 6.5 million Turkish citizens live abroad¹⁸, and 5.5 million of these live in Western Europe. After Germany and France, the Netherlands hosts the largest Turkish community in Europe. Emigration from Turkey to the Netherlands began when Western European countries sought guest workers from less-developed countries to address their post-war labour shortages in 1960s. At the time, successive Turkish governments encouraged its citizens to emigrate to Europe in order to relieve the pressure on its own labour market and ease high levels of unemployment in the face of rapid urbanisation. Bilateral labour agreements were, therefore, considered to be win-win scenarios, as workers would bring remittances and new skills back to Turkey after a few years abroad in Europe.¹⁹ Later, some Turkish citizens also went to the Netherlands on their own initiatives after working in Belgium or Germany. The number increased with the arrival of relatives of the first generations, until the official termination of organised migration in 1974. Still, in the following years the Netherlands witnessed continued migration thanks to family reunifications or family formations of the already settled emigrants.²⁰ Abadan-Unat (2011)²¹ considers this period as the beginning of the intergovernmental negotiations to regulate migration.

In fact, migration from Turkey to the Netherlands continued, as political instability in the former during the 1980s began determining this pattern more than economic motivations. The long-term conflict between the Turkish army and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), on the one hand, and the increasing pressure on Kurds, Alevis, and Islamists by the Turkish governments on the other²² created a wave of asylum seekers. In the 1990s, the Netherlands, like most Western European countries, once again witnessed family reunions between the descendants of Turkish migrants.²³ Therefore, transnational marriages, for example, remained prevalent between

¹⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, *Turkish Citizens Living Abroad* (2019), <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-expatriate-turkish-citizens.en.mfa>

¹⁹ Yaşar Aydın, *The New Turkish Diaspora Policy. Its Aims, Their Limits and the Challenges for Associations of People of Turkish Origin and Decision-makers in Germany*, SWP Research Paper 10, (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik [SWP], October 2014), https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2014_RP10_adn.pdf

²⁰ Damla B. Aksel, "Kins, Distant Workers, Diasporas: Constructing Turkey's Transnational Members Abroad", *Turkish Studies* 15, no. 2 (April 2014): 195-219

²¹ Nermin Abadan-Unat, *Turks in Europe: From Guest Worker to Transnational Citizen*. (Berlin: Berghahn Books, 2011)

²² Damla B. Aksel, 2014.

²³ Zeynep Yanaşmayan, "Citizenship on paper or at heart? A closer look into the dual citizenship debate in Europe", *Citizenship Studies* 19, no. 6-7 (2015): 785-801, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2015.1053793>

second- and third-generation European nationals of Turkish origin and spouses from their families' hometowns or regions in Turkey.

In the 2010s, economic and political instability in Turkey led to a new “migration wave” to the Netherlands. This new generation of emigrants are sometimes labelled as “young Turks”²⁴ because they are mostly secular and highly skilled, and they migrated to the Netherlands and other places for education and work purposes.²⁵ Additionally, there are political dissidents claiming asylum in the Netherlands, including deputies of the pro-Kurdish and left-wing People’s Democratic Party (HDP, recently renamed DEM) and supporters of the Gülen movement, which is accused by the Turkish state of having plotted the July 2016 coup attempt, as well as human rights activists, journalists, purged academics, and civil servants.²⁶ This has made Turkish citizens one of the Netherlands’ largest groups of asylum applicants in recent years. For example, between October 2020 and October 2021, 3,015 out of 32,209 asylum applications were filed by Turkish citizens – this ranked Turkish citizens second after Syrians with 12,464 applications.²⁷ Similarly, in December 2023, asylum seekers from Turkey (6.7 per cent) ranked third after Syrians (39.6 per cent) and Iraqis (8.8 per cent).²⁸

Since the mid-20th century, the Netherlands has seen an increase in the overall number of immigrants arriving, making it a net-immigration country. This brought naturalisation into sharper focus, as was also happening in other European Union (EU) nations. The number of applications for naturalisation skyrocketed in the 1990s and again after 2015. In 1997, for example, 360,000 persons acquired a new nationality in one of the EU member states, and the Netherlands has the third-highest number of naturalisations (60,000) after France (84,000) and Germany (83,000). Although the numbers eventually declined steadily in the following years, the Netherlands received 49,892 applications in 2023, with an approximately 80 per cent acceptance rate.²⁹

In terms of naturalisation, immigrants from Turkey were one of the largest group of residents to acquire citizenship in the Netherlands together with Moroccans. In 2014,

²⁴ Serenay Kaykaç, *Turkey’s Brain Drain: An Interpretive Analysis of Skilled Migrants’ Experiences in the Netherlands* (Leiden: Leiden University, Master’s Thesis, 11 June 2019), <https://studenttheses.universiteitleiden.nl/access/item%3A2626951/view>

²⁵ Zeynep Yanaşmayan, *The Migration of Highly Educated Turkish Citizens to Europe: From Guestworkers to Global Talent* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2019)

²⁶ Zeynep Yanaşmayan and Zeynep Kaşlı, “Reading Diasporic Engagements through the Lens of Citizenship: Turkey as a Test Case”, *Political Geography* 70, (2019): 24–33

²⁷ Ministry of Justice and Security, Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) and IND Business Information Centre (BIC), *Asylum Trends. Monthly Report on Asylum Applications in The Netherlands* (The Hague, December 2023), <https://ind.nl/en/documents/01-2024/at-december-2023-main-report.pdf> (accessed 26 May 2024);

²⁸ *ibid*

²⁹ *ibid*;

Asylum Information Database, *Statistics Netherlands* (The Hague, April 2024), <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/netherlands/statistics/> (accessed 26 May 2024)

the number of Dutch citizens with multiple nationalities in the Netherlands totalled 1.3 million, of which one-quarter held Turkish citizenship and another quarter Moroccan citizenship.³⁰ This trend changed in 2019, when Syrian was the number one country of origin together with Eritreans, Indians, Moroccans and Turks³¹

2.3 Education Backgrounds

Most of the Turkish nationals who were recruited to work in Western European countries in the 1960s and 1970s mostly came from rural areas and had low levels of education.³² This was also the case in the Netherlands for both the first generation of migrant workers and those who arrived due to family unification in the 1980s. This situation has made its imprint on the education trajectory of their descendants.³³

Compared to these earlier decades of migration, a greater number of the descendants of immigrants from Turkey now are pursuing a higher level of education, albeit still lower than the average level of education in the Netherlands. For example, attendance rates for higher secondary education (HAVO: has five grades and is attended from age 12 to 17) or pre-university education (VMO: has six grades and is typically attended from age 12 to 18) were lower than for the native Dutch population (almost 50 per cent). Only 20 per cent of second-generation Turks attended “Voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs” (VWO, “preparatory scientific education”) in 2011. Yet, this rate increased to 27 per cent in 2015, and attendance for pre-university education climbed to 39 per cent in 2019, amounting to a 12 per cent increase in four years.³⁴ Moreover, 31 per cent of students with a Turkish migration background have attended HAVO/VWO in year three of secondary education.

Another striking development is also observed among the dropouts. In 2014, 15 per cent of the attendants with a Turkish background dropped out of school, whereas this number decreased to 8 per cent in the 2018–2019 school year. Having said that, according to the CBS (2020)³⁵ report on education and as indicated in the figure below, even if descendants of immigrants from Turkey between the ages of 25 and 45 have

³⁰ Statistics Netherlands (CBS), 2021: *Twice as many naturalisations in 2020*, <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2021/38/twice-as-many-naturalisations-in-2020> (accessed 26 June 2024)

³¹ *ibid*

³² Ahmet Akgündüz, “Labour Migration from Turkey to Western Europe (1960–1974)”, *Capital & Class* 51 (October 1993): 153–94; Nermin Abadan-Unat, 2011

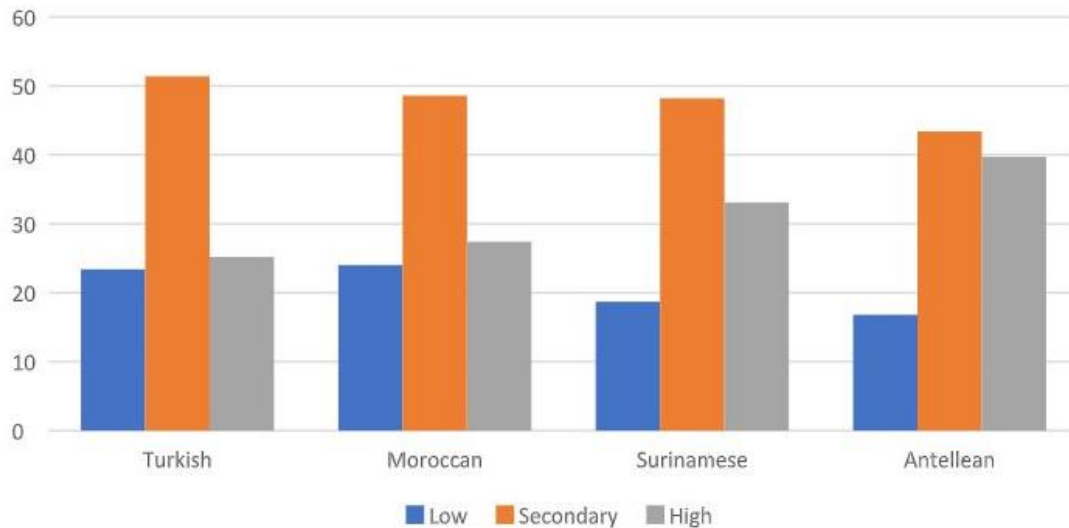
³³ Elif Keskiner, “Youth Transitions among Descendants of Turkish Immigrants in Amsterdam and Strasbourg: A Generation in Transition”, in *IMISCOE Research Series (IMIS)* (Cham: Springer Cham, 01 May 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11790-0>

³⁴ Statistics Netherlands (CBS), 2020

³⁵ *ibid*

the highest rate of secondary education among the main groups with migration backgrounds, they also have the lowest high-education level and come in second for the low-education level among the main groups with migration backgrounds.

Figure 3: Education Level of Second Generation 25 to 45-year-olds with a Migration Background (in %) (2018)



Source: Statistics Netherlands (CBS), 2020³⁶

2.4

Political Participation in Turkish and Dutch Elections

It goes without saying that migrants have their political orientations and affiliations, which are also shaped through their migration experiences. In their study in seven European cities, Morales and Morariu (2011)³⁷ compared three national groups, namely Moroccans, Turks, and Ecuadorians. They revealed that Turkish nationals maintained their interest in the politics of the homeland more than any other migrant population in all seven European cities, not just in the Netherlands. Some scholars

³⁶Statistics Netherlands (CBS), *Onderwijs* (The Hague, 2020), <https://longreads.cbs.nl/integratie-2020/onderwijs/>

³⁷Laura Morales and Miruna Morariu, “Is ‘Home’ a Distraction? The Role of Migrants’ Transnational Practices in Their Political Integration into Receiving-Country Politics”, in *Social Capital, Political Participation and Migration in Europe. Migration, Minorities and Citizenship*, eds. Laura Morales and Miruna Morariu (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011): 140-71, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230302464_7

attribute this to the role of Turkey as the “sending state”³⁸ or (the limitations of) the political opportunity structure of the receiving states.³⁹ Others stress the role of both the sending and the receiving states on the political attitudes of Turkish-Dutch citizens.⁴⁰

Recent political developments in Turkey as well as Turkey’s extension of political enfranchisement, which Yanaşmayan and Kaşlı (2019)⁴¹ call “political inclusion of all at the ballot box”, have a direct impact on the voting behaviour of Turkish citizens in the Netherlands. The practical aspects of overseas voting procedures were not explicitly regulated until the 2008 amendment to the Law on Elections and Electoral Registers (Art. 94/A).⁴² This amendment allowed citizens residing outside of Turkey to vote through three new methods besides the ballot boxes at the Turkish customs points: through regular mail, at the diplomatic representations abroad, and electronically. Out of these, postal voting was annulled by the Constitutional Court and online voting “found to be too complex”.⁴³ At the end, only voting at the customs points and at the consulates remained. With the 2012 amendment, an overseas voters’ register was formed and the roles of the Supreme Election Council (YSK) and diplomatic missions in the organisation and supervision of external elections were outlined. The 2014 Presidential elections were the first time that citizens living abroad had the option of voting at polling stations set up in their countries of residence.⁴⁴

The turnout rate abroad has gradually increased ever since, from 8.88 per cent in 2007 to 50.33 per cent in the 2018 Parliamentary and Presidential elections. The table below clearly reveals this upward trend.⁴⁵ Participation by the Turkish diaspora in the 2023 Presidential and Parliamentary elections reached a new record, with a 52.04 per cent participation rate.⁴⁶

³⁸ Liza Mügge, Maria Kranendonk, Floris Vermeulen and Nermin Aydemir, “Migrant Votes ‘here’ and ‘there’: Transnational Electoral Behavior of Turks in the Netherlands”, *Migration Studies* 9, no. 3 (September 2021): 1–23

³⁹ Ruud Koopmans and Paul Statham, “How National Citizenship Shapes Transnationalism: A Comparative Analysis of Migrant Claims-making in Germany, Great Britain and the Netherlands”, in *Integrating Immigrants in Liberal Nation-States*, eds. Christian Joppke and Ewa Moravska (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001): 195–238; Matthew Wright and Irene Bloemraad, “Is There a Trade-off between Multiculturalism and Socio-Political Integration? Policy Regimes and Immigrant Incorporation in Comparative Perspective”, *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 1 (March 2012): 77–95

⁴⁰ Liza Mügge, Maria Kranendonk, Floris Vermeulen and Nermin Aydemir, 2021

⁴¹ Zeynep Yanaşmayan and Zeynep Kaşlı, 2019

⁴² Law on Basic Provisions of Elections and Voter Registers, Vol. 1, Section III, Art. 94a, T.C. *Yüksek Seçim Kurulu* (YSK) [Supreme Election Council], 3627/298, ysk.gov.tr (accessed 08 May 2024)

⁴³ Zeynep Şahin-Mencütek and M. Murat Erdoğan, “The Implementation of Voting from Abroad: Evidence from the 2014 Turkish Presidential Election”, *International Migration* 54, no. 3 (2015): 179

⁴⁴ Zeynep Yanaşmayan and Zeynep Kaşlı, 2019

⁴⁵ *ibid*

⁴⁶ T.C. Yüksek Seçim Kurulu (YSK) [Supreme Election Council], “28 Mayıs 2023 Cumhurbaşkanlığı Seçimi İkinci Oylama Bülteni” [28 May 2023 Presidential Election Second Voting Bulletin] (Ankara, 2023), <https://ysk.gov.tr/doc/dosyalar/docs/28%20May%C4%B1s%202023%20Cumhurba%C5%9Fkan%C4%B1%20Se%C3%A7imi%202.%20Oylama%20B%C3%BClteni.pdf>

Table 1: Turnout Rates in Turkish Elections Abroad (in %)

	Turnout at the Borders	Turnout at the Representation	Total Turnout Abroad
2007 General Elections	88.80	N/A	8.88
2010 Referendum	7.68	N/A	7.68
2011 General Elections	5.03	N/A	5.03
2014 Presidential Elections	10.60	8.30	18.90
2015 June General Elections	4.34	32.50	36.84
2015 November General Elections	4.78	40.01	44.79
2017 Referendum	3.30	44.60	47.90
2018 June General and Presidential Elections	5.45	44.88	50.33

Source: Zeynep Yanaşmayan and Zeynep Kaşlı, 2019⁴⁷

As shown in Table 1, similar trends are also observed in the voting behaviour of Turkish citizens in the Netherlands. In the Turkish Parliamentary elections in November 2015, 46.66 per cent of Turkish citizens in the Netherlands cast their votes, and the AKP received 69.66 per cent of the votes.⁴⁸ In the 2017 referendum on constitutional reform, the turnout in the Netherlands was 46.83 per cent: 70.94 per cent voted YES, that is, they approved of the amendments to the executive system proposed by the AKP.⁴⁹ This was a much higher rate of approval as compared to the 51.41 per cent who voted YES in Turkey. In the 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections, in which 46.7 per cent of the eligible voters cast their votes, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan received 73 per cent and the AKP got 63 per cent of the votes.⁵⁰ In Turkey, the vote share of Erdoğan was 52.38, whereby the AKP won 42.28 per cent.⁵¹ According to the results of the second round of Presidential election on 28 May 2023, the participation rate increased further to 54.9 per cent in the Netherlands, compared to

⁴⁷ Author's calculation based on T.C. Yüksek Seçim Kurulu (YSK) [Supreme Election Council] website

⁴⁸ "Seçim Sonuçları – 1 Kasım 2015 Genel Seçimleri, Hollanda" [Election Results - 1 November 2015 General Elections, Netherlands], *Sabah* (online), November 2015, <https://www.sabah.com.tr/secim/1-kasim-2015-genel-secimleri/hollanda-secim-sonuclari>

⁴⁹ "Hollanda Referandum Sonuçları- 16 Nisan 2017 Referandum" [Netherlands Referendum Results- 16 April 2017 Referendum], *Sabah* (online), April 2017, <https://www.sabah.com.tr/secim/16-nisan-2017-referandum/hollanda-referandum-sonuclari>

⁵⁰ "Hollanda Krallığı Cumhurbaşkanı Seçim Sonuçları" [Kingdom of the Netherlands, Presidential Election Results], *Sabah* (online), June 2018. <https://www.sabah.com.tr/secim/24-haziran-2018-secim-sonuclari/hollanda-kralligi-secim-sonuclari>

⁵¹ T.C. Yüksek Seçim Kurulu (YSK) [Supreme Election Council], *Cumhurbaşkanı Seçimi ve 27. Dönem Milletvekili Genel Seçimi [Presidential Election and 27th Term Parliamentary General Election]* (Ankara, 2018), <https://www.ysk.gov.tr/tr/24-haziran-2018-secimleri/77536>

84.15 per cent participation rate in Turkey. In that round, Erdoğan received 70.59 per cent of the votes in the Netherlands, compared to 52 per cent in Turkey.⁵²

As can be clearly seen, the AKP has been very successful in attracting the votes of Turkish citizens in the Netherlands⁵³ as well as in other countries.⁵⁴ Unsurprisingly, the eligibility of Turkish nationals living abroad to vote in Turkish elections has given the AKP an opportunity to strengthen and preserve its ties with established Turkish organisations abroad. In addition, as Yanaşmayan and Kaşlı (2019)⁵⁵ state, this trend must be analysed in relation to the polarising politics of Erdoğan's AKP, which has shaped the diaspora's voting preferences and extra-territorial political participation along the lines of loyalty to/dissent from the existing political regime. To reach and mobilise its constituency, the AKP has organised several political campaigns in the Netherlands. The 2017 campaign led to street protests in Rotterdam and long-lasting diplomatic tensions between the Netherlands and Turkey when Turkish politicians organised a rally for the upcoming Turkish referendum in April 2017 and were stopped by the Dutch authorities.⁵⁶ This incident was arranged by an association called the Union of International Democrats (UID), which is discussed further in Section 3. The Turkish diaspora was mobilised to participate not only in the elections of their home country, but also in those of their host countries. The Turkish-Dutch community in the Netherlands has the strongest organisational structures compared to other communities with migration backgrounds.⁵⁷ In fact, a recent study shows that the strong organisational structure of the Turkish-Dutch community has led to higher levels of participation in Dutch elections⁵⁸, confirming the findings of an earlier study that ethnic groups with strong organisational networks are more likely to participate in the elections of the receiving country.⁵⁹

In addition to associational strength, relatively more inclusive political opportunity structures in the Netherlands also play a role in helping members of the Turkish-Dutch community participate in Dutch politics.⁶⁰ Though largely a thing of the past, the country's older tradition of "pillarisation" (*verzuiling*) – that is, the separation of citizens by religion and associated beliefs – has been carried over to present-day cultural, religious, and political organisations with official functions. This has allowed

⁵² "Hollanda Seçim Sonuçları 2023- 2. Tur Seçim Sonuçları" [Netherlands Election Results 2023- 2nd Round Election Results], *Sabah* (online), May 2023, <https://www.sabah.com.tr/secim/28-mayis-2023-cumhurbaskanligi-secim-sonuclari/hollanda/ulkesi-cumhurbaskanligi-secim-sonuclari>

⁵³ Liza Mügge, Maria Kranendonk, Floris Vermeulen and Nermin Aydemir, 2021

⁵⁴ Zeynep Yanaşmayan and Zeynep Kaşlı, 2019

⁵⁵ *ibid*

⁵⁶ Yörük Bahçeli, "Dutch-Turkish Identity: A Very Dutch Affair", *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 16, no. 4, (2018): 75–85

⁵⁷ Mieke Maliepaard, Mérove Gijsberts and Karen Phalet, "Islamic Gatherings: Experiences of Discrimination and Religious Affirmation across Established and New Immigrant Communities", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 15 (2015): 2635–2651

⁵⁸ Liza Mügge, Maria Kranendonk, Floris Vermeulen and Nermin Aydemir, 2021

⁵⁹ Meindert Fennema and Jean Tillie, "Political Participation and Political Trust in Amsterdam: Civic Communities and Ethnic Networks", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 25, no. 4, (1999): 703–726

⁶⁰ Ruud Koopmans and Paul Statham, 2001

many settled immigrants, such as Moroccan and Turkish nationals, to develop strong in-group ties through their own organisations.⁶¹ The “multiculturalist incorporation system” has led to the institutionalisation of ethnic and religious organisations and made resources and places available to them.⁶² This multiculturalist approach also assumes that these immigrants’ interest in the Dutch political system would increase once they acquired the right to vote.⁶³

Indeed, it is possible to observe a considerable change in voter turnout for Dutch elections due to the combination of these factors: a strong organisational culture of the Turkish diaspora resulting from the activities of the Turkish government as well as the political opportunity structure in the Netherlands. For instance, in Rotterdam, the turnout among Turkish-Dutch residents for local elections increased from 28 per cent in 1994 to 56 per cent in 2006.⁶⁴ Also, in Dutch Parliamentary elections, the turnout rate of the Turkish-Dutch community was stable at around 50 per cent up until 2017. Additionally, the political participation levels of the Turkish-Dutch community have always been the highest among all the minority communities.⁶⁵

Yet, what is perhaps more striking is the radical change in the political choices of the members of the Turkish-Dutch community. For a long time, Dutch citizens with a Turkish background were inclined to vote for the leftist Labour Party (PvdA), as the party has always included in its list a candidate with a Turkish background. However, in 2017, with votes from about half of the Dutch citizens of Turkish origin – especially younger residents – the newly formed DENK party (“think” in Dutch, “equal” in Turkish) gained three seats in the Dutch Parliament.⁶⁶ It is assumed that 20 per cent of the voters with a Turkish background who voted for PvdA in 2012 voted in 2017 for DENK.⁶⁷ This contributed to a historic loss of the PvdA, the traditional party of preference of the Turkish-Dutch community.

⁶¹ Han Entzinger, “Changing the Rules While the Game Is On: From Multiculturalism to Assimilation in the Netherlands”, in *Migration, Citizenship, Ethnos: Incorporation Regimes in Germany, Western Europe and North America*, eds. Y. Michal Bodemann and Gökçe Yurdakul (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006): 121-144

⁶² Valentina Mazzucato, “Operationalising Transnational Migrant Networks through a Simultaneous Matched Sample Methodology?”, in *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods*, IMISCOE Research (IMIS), eds. Rainer Bauböck and Thomas Faist, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010): 205- 226

⁶³ Anja Heelsum, Laure Michon and Jean Tillie, “New Voters, Different Votes? A Look at the Political Participation of Immigrants in Amsterdam and Rotterdam”, in *Just Ordinary Citizens? Towards a Comparative Portrait of the Political Immigrant*, ed. Antoine Bilodeau (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2016): 29-45

⁶⁴ *ibid*

⁶⁵ *ibid*

⁶⁶ Joop J. M. Van Holsteyn, “The Dutch Parliamentary Elections of March 2017”, *West European Politics* 41, no. 6 (2018): 1364-1377

⁶⁷ *ibid*

Although DENK does not specifically appeal to Dutch Turks,⁶⁸ it is strongly rooted in the Turkish-Dutch community. The party was founded in November 2014 by one “second-generation” migrant and one “1.5-generation” migrant (refers to first-generation immigrant who immigrated to the new country before or during their early teens) with Dutch citizenship, who were both members of Parliament for the PvdA between 2012 and 2014. They decided to part ways due to disagreements with the PvdA’s views on immigrant integration and invited people from other larger ethnic minority groups, such as the Moroccan-Dutch community, to join them. A similar shift in voting patterns is also observed at the local level. Whereas more than 85 per cent of voters of Turkish descent in Amsterdam voted for the PvdA in 2006, only 40 per cent did so in 2014 in local elections, but many other voted for DENK.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ The term “Dutch Turks” has been used throughout the paper instead of using a longer version for the Turkish immigrants who live in the Netherlands.

⁶⁹ Floris Vermeulen, Eelco Harteveld, Anja van Heelsum, Aad van der Veen, “The Potential of Immigrant Parties: Insights from the Dutch Case”, *Acta Politica* 55, no. 3 (2020): 432–543

3.

Legal and Social Context in the Netherlands

The changes in citizenship and legal status overall reflect shifts in social, political, and cultural circumstances in the Netherlands. This section will briefly lay out these circumstances with a focus on the changes in the citizenship laws and the laws regulating the religious realm, as the two key domains that shape the experiences of diasporic communities from Turkey in the Netherlands.

3.1

Citizenship Laws

The Netherlands bases its citizenship laws on the principle of *jus sanguinis* and requires people to renounce their former citizenship, except for a brief period (1992–1997) when dual citizenship was de facto allowed.⁷⁰ The Dutch Citizenship Law of 2000 and other regulations after 2000 made it more difficult to get Dutch citizenship while also making it more straightforward for Dutch expats to maintain dual citizenship. According to the Dutch law, there are three ways to become a Dutch citizen:

- (a) automatically at birth (if one or both parents are Dutch), through adoption or through acknowledgement of parentage,
- (b) through a short “option procedure” available only to people who belong to a special group defined by law, or
- (c) through a regular naturalisation procedure.⁷¹

In the case of Turkish nationals, the reintroduction of the renunciation requirement in 1997, which means having to lose Turkish citizenship, has been a major obstacle for naturalisation.⁷² As a result, the naturalisation figures for Turkish citizens dropped

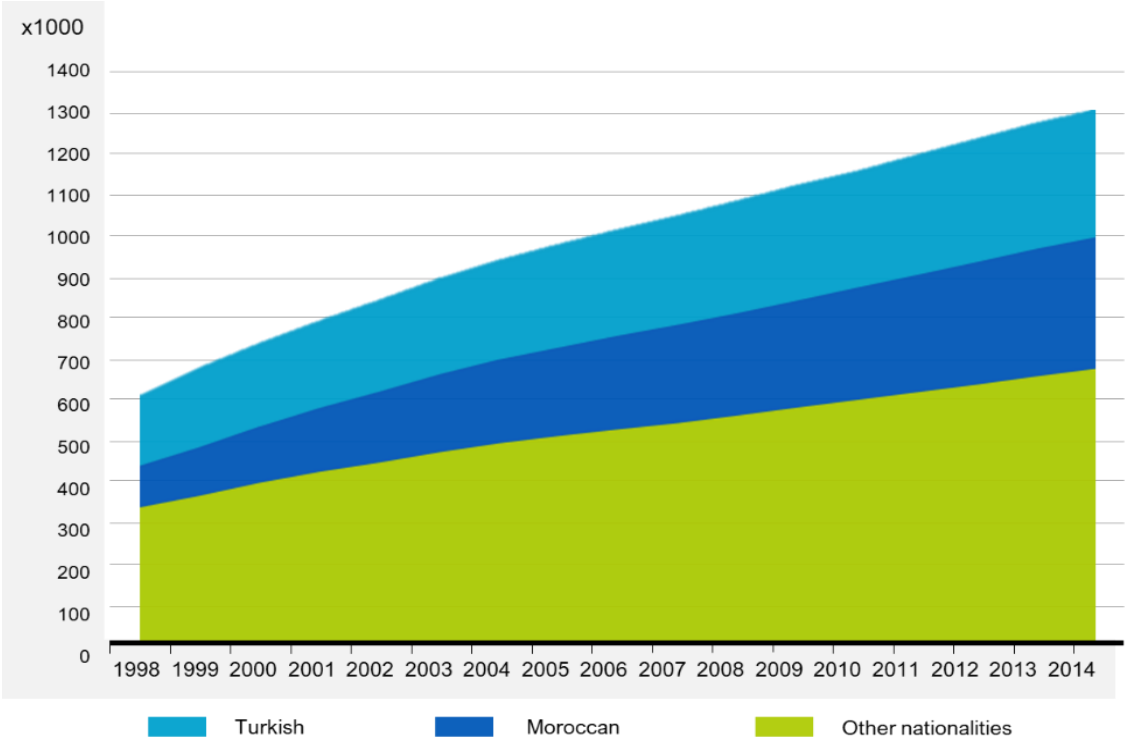
⁷⁰ Zeynep Yanaşmayan, 2019: 82

⁷¹ Ministry of General Affairs of the Netherlands, *Dutch Citizenship* (The Hague, 2024), <https://www.government.nl/topics/dutch-citizenship/becoming-a-dutch-citizen>

⁷² Liza Mügge, “Dual Nationality and Transnational Politics”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38, no. 1 (2012): 1–19

from 20 per cent in 1999 to 5 per cent in 2001.⁷³ However, there is an expanded list of exceptions for persons who can be exempted from renouncing their nationality, such as foreigners whose country of origin does not release them from their nationality (e.g. Moroccans), recognised refugees, and spouses of Dutch nationals.⁷⁴ Under these circumstances, the number of Dutch citizens with multiple nationalities in the Netherlands totalled 1.3 million in 2014, of which 320,782 claimed Moroccan as their second nationality and 312,080 claimed Turkish, with the remaining half holding other nationalities⁷⁵, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 4: Dutch Citizens with more than one Nationality (1998–2014)



Source: Statistics Netherlands (CBS), 2015⁷⁶

In addition, in the Turkish case, the renunciation requirement has gradually been overcome to a great extent due to the “blue card” (initially called “pink card”) scheme, which Turkey introduced in 1995 and further developed with the 2004 and 2009 amendments to its citizenship law. This scheme offers a privileged non-citizen status for Turkish nationals abroad that entitles holders to all rights based on

⁷³B. de Hart, C.A. Groenendijk and A.G.M. Böcker, De toegang tot het Nederlanderschap, Effecten van twintig jaar beleidswijzigingen, in *Nederlands Juristenblad* 80, no. 3 (2005): 157-16, cited in Zeynep Yanaşmayan, 2019: 82

⁷⁴ *ibid*

⁷⁵ Statistics Netherlands (CBS), *Aantal Nederlanders met dubbele nationaliteit gestegen naar 1,3 miljoen* (The Hague, 04 August 2015), <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2015/32/aantal-nederlanders-met-dubbele-nationaliteit-gestegen-naar-1-3-miljoen>

⁷⁶ *ibid*

citizenship in Turkey (except for voting rights), such as residence, inheritance, and property, while allowing them to acquire citizenship in their respective countries of residence.⁷⁷ Nonetheless, comparing highly educated Turkish immigrants' naturalisation decisions in the Netherlands, Spain, and the United Kingdom – countries with the most-restrictive to the least-restrictive citizenship policies respectively – Zeynep Yanaşmayan (2019)⁷⁸ concludes that,

a ban on dual citizenship seems to contribute to a sense of deprivation and produces more contestations and debates around citizenship as a source and determinant of identity, so that the so-called 'crisis' of citizenship becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In addition to this sense of deprivation, the ongoing debates on the revision of the Dutch nationality law also have potentially negative implications on the citizenship status and experiences of Dutch Muslims, including those in the Dutch-Turkish community. On the one hand, the 2017 Coalition Agreement stated that “the government will draft proposals for modernising Dutch nationality law to extend the scope for first-generation immigrants and emigrants to hold more than one nationality. Later generations will be allowed to hold only one nationality and will, at a certain point, be required to choose which one they wish to retain⁷⁹. On the other hand, following a series of terrorist attacks in Europe in 2015 and after, the Dutch government has adopted and expanded its denationalisation laws in recent years⁸⁰ through proactive measures specifically targeting foreign fighters abroad and revoking their right to return.⁸¹ According to legal analysts, the Dutch Nationality Act may more likely tend to denationalise Dutch Moroccans, who make the largest group of Dutch foreign fighters in Syria (55 per cent) followed by those with Turkish background (14 per cent) and several smaller ethnic groups.⁸² Jaghai (2017)⁸³ submits that this law causes social fragmentation among residents in the Netherlands and fosters indirect racial discrimination and distrust of individuals who are considered to

⁷⁷ Zeynep Kadirbeyoğlu, *EUDO Citizenship Observatory. Report on Turkey* (San Domenico di Fiesole, Italy: European University Institute, 2010): 6, <http://eudocitizenship.eu/docs/CountryReports/Turkey.pdf>

⁷⁸ Zeynep Yanaşmayan, 2019: 90

⁷⁹ Ministry of General Affairs of the Netherlands, *Confidence in the Future 2017–2021. Coalition Agreement AVT17/AZ124020. People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), Christian Democratic Alliance (CDA), Democrats '66 (D66) and Christian Union (CU)* (The Hague, 10 October 2017): 9, <https://www.government.nl/documents/publications/2017/10/10/coalition-agreement-confidence-in-the-future>

⁸⁰ “Ook Eerste Kamer achter afpakken Nederlanderschap jihadisten”, *Nederlandse Omroep Stichting (NOS)* (online), 07 February 2017, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2156975-ook-eerste-kamer-achter-afpakken-nederlanderschap-jihadisten>

⁸¹ Tom L. Boekestein and Gerard-René de Groot, “Discussing the Human Rights Limits on Loss of Citizenship: A Normative-legal Perspective on Egalitarian Arguments Regarding Dutch Nationality Laws Targeting Dutch-Moroccans”, *Citizenship Studies* 23, no. 4 (2019): 322, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2019.1616448>

⁸² *Ibid*, 325

⁸³ Sangita Jaghai, *Citizenship deprivation, (non) discrimination and statelessness. A case study of the Netherlands*, Statelessness Working Paper Series No. 2017/7 (Eindhoven: Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion Statelessness [ISI], December 2017), https://files.institutesi.org/WP2017_07.pdf

be “different” from the host society. Dutch Moroccans are more likely to be affected not only because they are the largest group of Dutch fighters in Syria per se but because Article 14(4) applies to individuals joining one of the listed “Islamist terrorist organisations” in Syria and Article 14(8) limits the measures to Dutch dual-nationals becoming foreign fighters.⁸⁴ Hence, the related articles of the Dutch Nationality Act may contribute towards generally associating this particular group with terrorism and, as such, raises serious concerns with regard to discrimination against Dutch Moroccans, which is unlikely to be justifiable under the European Convention on Human Rights.⁸⁵ The societal implications of these proactive denaturalisation procedures on Dutch Muslims and specific minority communities, including the Dutch-Turkish community, requires further research.

3.2

Laws Regulating the Religious Realm

The Dutch pluralist tradition, which aims to incorporate all religions equally into the public domain, has been accommodating Muslim practices as well. The parliamentary debates on the regulation of the ritual slaughter of animals are exemplary of Dutch religious pluralism. On 22 June 2011, the Dutch Parliament voted on a bill – proposed by the Party for the Animals (PvdD) – on the prohibition of the slaughter of unstunned animals for ritual or religious purposes. It was later rejected by the cabinet and the proposal was considered to infringe on religious freedoms.⁸⁶ The current rules on the topic still involve restrictions and conditions on slaughterhouses – acknowledging Jewish and Islamic rites as exception to the rule – and ensure that these are registered with the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority.⁸⁷

In 2019, the debate on ritual slaughter was initiated again by the PvdD and met with opposition once more on the grounds of religious freedoms. Carla Dik-Faber from the Christian Union party (CU) stressed that “wanting to ban ritual slaughter is a form of symbolic politics that does not directly contribute to the welfare of animals and at the same time is a slap in the face for various religious communities in our country”.⁸⁸ Similarly, face coverings in public spaces have also been a matter of controversy and eventually led to the Partial Prohibition of Face Covering Clothing Act, which passed

⁸⁴ Tom L. Boekestein and Gerard-René de Groot, 2019: 331-332

⁸⁵ Ibid, 332.

⁸⁶ Markha Valenta, “Pluralist Democracy or Scientistic Monocracy? Debating Ritual Slaughter”, *Erasmus Law Review* 5, no. 1 (2012): 27-41, <http://repub.eur.nl/pub/51379>

⁸⁷ Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA), *Lists of approved and registered animal by-products establishments* (Utrecht, 2021), <https://english.nvwa.nl/topics/approved-establishments/animal-byproducts>

⁸⁸ Carla Dik-Faber, “Verbieden van rituele slacht is symboolpolitiek”, *Trouw* (online), 11 December 2019, <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/verbieden-van-rituele-slacht-is-symboolpolitiek~b5910a56/>

in 2019. The act is unofficially called the “niqab ban” although it includes all face-covering clothing such as, motorbike helmets, and niqabs.

4.

Associational Context in the Netherlands

As mentioned above, migrants' associational activities have for a long time been defined by the Dutch tradition of "segregation"⁸⁹, according to which every ethnic group and religious community has its own institutions and organisations run according to the beliefs of their community; these include schools, hospitals, social support agencies, cultural/religious associations, newspapers, and even broadcasting organisations.

Most religious Turkish organisations in Europe were founded in the 1980s. The establishment of the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DİTİB) in Germany under the auspices of the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, henceforth Diyanet) was the first initiative in this regard; the same structure has been followed in other countries, such as Austria, Belgium, France, and the Netherlands. Herein, we can mention some of the biggest religious, cultural, and (political) lobbyist associations established by Turkish migrants, some of which have continued to be supported by various Turkish governments over the years.

Hollanda Diyanet Vakfı (Islamitische Stichting Nederland, ISN)

The first religious Turkish institution in the Netherlands was established by the Turkish Islamic Cultural Foundation of the Netherlands (TİCF) in the Hague in 1979 without support from the Turkish government.⁹⁰ Soon after, in 1982, when Diyanet started sending religious officials, the ISN was founded and took ownership of existing mosques. Ever since, the ISN has been run in close cooperation with officials at Turkish consulates and the embassy. It is the largest Turkish religious organisation managing mosques, organising religious activities in the Netherlands and pilgrimages to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, and distributing religious literature. Currently the ISN has 145 mosques connected to the organisation throughout the Netherlands⁹¹, and it is considered to be one of the biggest non-governmental organisations set up by a migrant community in the country.

⁸⁹ Han Entzinger, 2006

⁹⁰ Nico Landman, *Van mat tot minaret: De institutionalisering van de islam in Nederland* (Amsterdam: VII Uitgeverij [VU], 1992): 101

⁹¹ "Hakkımızda" [About us], Hollanda Diyanet Vakfı (HDV) [Netherlands Religious Foundation (ISN)] (online), 2021, <https://diyanet.nl/kurumsal/hakkimizda/>

One of the essential matters to mention here is the role of imams from the ISN in influencing Turkish Muslims in the Netherlands. Imams are official employees of the Turkish state and appointed for religious services abroad. Öztürk (2016)⁹² argues that “Diyanet has been converted into an ideological state apparatus that has been imposing the AKP’s and Erdoğan’s political and ideological preferences very effectively since 2002” with the task of spreading Turkish nationalism and Sunnism.

Sunier and Landman (2015)⁹³ similarly note a “social turn” in the ISN’s activities, as the organisation has changed its function from a “religious institution to a bureaucratic organization” in the past decades (well before the AKP came to power). It can reach out to the Turkish community not only through mosques but also through its use of modern mass media technologies and other social activities. For example, Diyanet started a TV station, whereby the president of Diyanet often speaks about a broad range of issues, including socially and politically important matters.⁹⁴ Diyanet started to invest heavily in non-religious events such as sports, networking occasions for unique goals of the organisation, and the arts. Diyanet is especially active in Western Europe, where many members of the community are, from Diyanet’s perspective, on the verge of abandoning religion. Its growing budget in recent years has definitely helped the ISN to invest in such non-religious events, which serve the purpose of aligning the interests of the Turkish-Dutch community with the Turkish state’s interests in cultural, religious, and political matters.⁹⁵

Milli Görüş (MG)

This is a religious organisation in Europe that is strictly connected to the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party), the predecessor of the AKP, established by Necmettin Erbakan in 1969 with a clear Islamist agenda. In the Netherlands, informal groups linked to MG founded the Federation of Associations and Communities of Muslims (FVGM) in 1970. Currently MG has 50 affiliated organisations in the Netherlands, including youth and women federations. MG has always been popular among young Muslims and perceived as the most influential competitor of the ISN.⁹⁶ The political developments in Turkey in the aftermath of the 1997 Turkish military memorandum have given the upper hand to the older cadres with a more conservative and radical political-Islamic vision.⁹⁷ However, the conservative vision of MG has lost popularity among the

⁹² Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, “Turkey’s Diyanet under AKP Rule: From Protector to Imposer of State Ideology?”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16, no. 4 (September 2016): 629

⁹³ Thijl Sunier and Nico Landman (eds.), *Transnational Turkish Islam: Shifting Geographies of Religious Activism and Community Building in Turkey and Europe* (London: Palgrave Pivot, 2015): 28, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137394224_4

⁹⁴ Ahmet Erdi Öztürk and Semiha Sözeri, “Diyanet as a Turkish Foreign Policy Tool: Evidence from the Netherlands and Bulgaria”, *Politics and Religion* 11, no. 3 (March 2018): 624–648

⁹⁵ *ibid*

⁹⁶ Thijl Sunier and Nico Landman, 2015: 15

⁹⁷ General Intelligence and Security Service of the Netherlands (AVID), *De politieke islam in Nederland*, (Leidschendam, 2018), <https://www.aivd.nl/documenten/publicaties/1998/05/01/bvd-publicatie-de-politieke-islam-in-nederland>

Dutch-Turkish youth, especially with the massive foreign policy efforts of the AKP and the rise of AKP-led religious organisations since the early 2000s. The organisation is still active in the cultural and religious realm in the Netherlands, and it supports the Saadet Partisi (Felicity Party), which succeeded Erbakan's Welfare Party.

Stichting Islam en Dialoog

This is an organisation of the global Gülen movement, which was founded by Fetullah Gülen in 1969 in Turkey with the claim of wanting to advance interfaith dialogue. The Gülen movement has been active in the Netherlands since the 1980s with education centres, boarding schools, housing, and business associations. It participates in democratic civil society, receives government funds allocated for integration, and it is strongly supported by Dutch policy-makers and some members of Parliament. However, according to van Bruinessen, the movement uses its schools for Islamic “indoctrination”, and he accuses it of misleading Dutch society, as it hides its “secret project of Islamization”.⁹⁸ With the failed coup attempt in July 2016, allegedly plotted by Fetullah Gülen, the already fragile alliance between the AKP and the transnational Gülen movement has come to an end. The movement is listed by the AKP-run government as a “terrorist organisation”, and the followers of the organisation have fled Turkey to avoid years-long prison sentences. Stichting Islam en Dialoog currently continues its activities under the Platform INS (voor de Kunst van het Samenleven [the Art of Living Together]) in the Netherlands, acting as an umbrella organisation for associations such as Cosmicus Foundation and the HOGIAF Business Association.

HAK-DER

HAK-DER is the umbrella organisation of Alevis and Bektashis. It is a religious lobbyist organisation that mostly functions as a socio-cultural association in the Netherlands. HAK-DER was established in 1991 in response to the growing dominance of Sunni Islam in Turkey after the 1980 Coup d'État.⁹⁹ The organisation's main goal is to improve freedom of expression in Turkey and the Netherlands.¹⁰⁰ It has strong ties with the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the pro-Kurdish DEM Parti (formerly known as HDP) in Turkey. Both parties' representatives in the Netherlands either have an Alevi or Bektashi background or are connected to HAK-DER, as seen from various activities such as seminars. Additionally, protests and political activities organised in the Netherlands against the current AKP government have been co-organised by HAK-DER or its affiliated associations. HAK-DER supported mainly the pro-Kurdish democratic forces in the Turkish Parliamentary elections in 2015, 2017, and 2018.

Yunus Emre Institute

⁹⁸ Martin van Bruinessen, “The Netherlands and the Gülen movement”, *Sociology of Islam* 1, no. 3–4 (2014): 166, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22131418-00104004>

⁹⁹ Nico Landman, 1992: 143

¹⁰⁰ Federatie van Alevitische Verenigingen Nederland [Federation of Alevi Associations Netherlands] (HABF), Over ons, 2021, <https://www.hakder.nl/over-ons/>

One of the AKP's "non-conventional policy actors",¹⁰¹ the Yunus Emre Institute, was founded in 2007 for diasporic engagements through cultural activities. Inspired by the British Council and Germany's Goethe Institutes, the AKP government attempted to increase its soft power by promoting Turkey's cultural assets abroad through this organisation. Although its bylaws state that it is a non-governmental organisation, the Yunus Emre Institute is a government-sponsored organisation with direct links to both the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture.¹⁰² In the Netherlands, the primary task of this organisation is to teach the Turkish language to children of Turkish migrants. According to the latest information on the Yunus Emre website, currently there are six elementary schools, all of which are in or around the Hague.

The Union of International Democrats (UID)

Formerly known as the Union of European Turkish Democrats (UETD), the UID was established in 2004 in Cologne, Germany. Since then, it has worked as a lobbyist organisation of the AKP government, even though its representatives deny these claims. Through the UID, AKP governments have aimed to improve Turkey's image in Europe, address Turkey's concerns with European countries, and mobilise Turkish migrants in Europe towards the AKP's interests.¹⁰³ Indeed, the UID has been instrumental in organising rallies, particularly in Western European cities, to give visibility to the pro-AKP Turkish diaspora. For example, in 2008, 20,000 Turks gathered in a stadium in Cologne¹⁰⁴ to hear President Erdoğan's speech, even if it was not a part of the official visit but a private event organised by the UID. Another rally in 2011 – again coordinated by the UID – in Düsseldorf attracted more than 10,000 Turkish people, who listened to Erdoğan's speech and protested Germany's opposition to Turkey's accession into the EU.¹⁰⁵ In the following years, the UID organised several other diaspora rallies with broad participation by Turks in Germany, France, Austria, and the Netherlands. These events were also attended by Turkish politicians.

The UID Netherlands became famous due to the political campaigns and controversial activities in the run-up to Turkish elections. This was thanks to the large number of Turkish migrants and their Netherlands-born children, who are sympathetic to the ideological perspective of the AKP government. These controversies reached new heights right before the Turkish referendum in April 2017, for which the AKP needed

¹⁰¹ Kerem Öktem, 2012

¹⁰² Eyüp Ersoy, "Old Principles, New Practices: Explaining the AKP Foreign Policy", *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (2009): 115-127

¹⁰³ Kamil Frymark, "The Turkish Campaign in Germany Rising Tensions between Berlin and Ankara", *Center for Eastern Studie*, no. 234 (2017)

¹⁰⁴ Nastasja Steudel, "Erdogan's lobby", *Deutsche Welle* (online), 21 May 2014, <https://www.dw.com/en/the-lobby-behind-turkeys-prime-minister/a-17652516>

¹⁰⁵ Helen Pidd, "Germany hits back after Turkish PM tells immigrants to resist assimilation", *The Guardian* (online), 28 February 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/feb/28/turkish-pm-addresses-immigrants-germany>

the support of Turkish voters abroad. Right before the referendum and the general elections in the Netherlands, the UID and the Turkish Cultural Centre (a small organisation in Utrecht), which are both close to the AKP-MHP alliance, organised a rally in Rotterdam in March 2017. A large dispute arose between the two countries when Dutch authorities banned two Turkish ministers from entering the Netherlands to attend the rallies. The incident rapidly escalated when many people with a Turkish background joined the protests against the Dutch authorities in Rotterdam and President Erdoğan called Dutch politicians “Nazi remnants and fascists”. Due to this tension, four other UID-led rallies in Austria and one in Switzerland were cancelled.

Nationalist Parties and Connected Associations

Apart from religious organisations with close ties to the AKP government, nationalist Turks in the Netherlands have also mobilised within associations directly supported by the Turkish Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). Idealist Turkish Workers Association (HTİB), also called “Grey Wolves” later on, was established in 1978 with the MHP’s support and functioned as an umbrella organisation for the other nationalist local organisations.¹⁰⁶ While the HTİB was outlawed in the Netherlands in 1983, the Federation of Turkish Associations in the Netherlands (HTDF) – with close ties to the Grey Wolves – was founded in 1982 and ceased in 1986. It later continued as the Turkish Federation of the Netherlands, which was founded in 1995. Compared with the HTİB, the HTDF had a larger membership.¹⁰⁷ Although the initial goal was to disseminate Turkish-Islamic ideology in the Netherlands, after the 1980s the Grey Wolves focused instead on responding to the growing activism of the Kurdish diaspora in the Netherlands. The nationalist Great Unity Party (BBP), which split up with the MHP in the early 1990s, has also kept contact with Turks across Europe. The ideological divide between BBP and MHP sympathisers occurred in the Netherlands a few years before it did in Turkey. However, most MHP followers in the Netherlands continue their activities under the Turkish cultural foundations that are spread across the Netherlands under different names.¹⁰⁸

Unsurprisingly, the current Turkish government aimed to favour conservative-nationalist and Sunni immigrant organisations over those for Alevis or Kurds as well as secular organisations for different reasons. Studies on Turkey’s diasporas show that Turkish governments have viewed the Alevis and Kurds as enemies¹⁰⁹, and that “less controversial migrant organisations” could more easily reach out to Turkish policy-makers than others.¹¹⁰ The Turkish population in the Netherlands is divided

¹⁰⁶ Nico Landman, 1992: 114

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*

¹⁰⁸ Thijl Sunier and Nico Landman, 2015

¹⁰⁹ Banu Şenay, “Trans-Kemalism: The Politics of the Turkish State in the Diaspora”. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35, no. 9 (2012): 1615–1633

¹¹⁰ Eva Østergaard-Nielsen, “The Politics of Migrants’ Transnational Political Practices”, *Center for Migration Studies* 37, no. 3 (2003): 760–786

along ethnic, religious, and political lines¹¹¹, mimicking political cleavages in the domestic politics of Turkey¹¹². Kurds, Alevis, and secular groups have their own organisations in the residing countries. These associations stay beyond the Turkish government's reach and refuse to follow the diaspora policies and cooperate with the AKP government due to the Islamic background of the Turkish leadership. For instance, the Netherlands has seen anti-Erdoğan protests jointly attended by Kurdish and Turkish groups that object to Turkey's incursions into Syria.¹¹³ These opposing ideologies on the part of some Turkish migrant communities limit the AKP's ability to establish control over these organisations.¹¹⁴ It is important to note here that these organisations have over the years developed objectives and interests oriented towards the politics of their country of residence.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Christine Inglis, "Turks Abroad: Settlers, Citizens, Transnationals", *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* 11, no. 2 (2009): 136-154

¹¹² Zeynep Yanaşmayan and Zeynep Kaşlı, 2019

¹¹³ "Spontaan protest tegen Erdoğan op Centraal", *Het Parool* (online), 03 Oktober 2019, <https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/spontaan-protest-tegen-erdogan-op-centraal~b1eaf7fb/>

¹¹⁴ Yaşar Aydın, 2014

¹¹⁵ *ibid*

5.

Public Debates on Migration and Islam

The Netherlands was among the European countries with the highest proportion of foreign-born people in the 20th century, and its multicultural policies were seen as liberal and welcoming. However, since the beginning of the millennium and the aftermath of 9/11, the rise of far-right populism has pushed the Netherlands towards strict assimilative integration policies. Immigration is now portrayed as a more serious issue that poses a danger to social stability and Dutch culture for many Dutch citizens. Islam is at the heart of the immigration debates because of incidents such as the murders of politician Pim Fortuyn (2002) and film director Theo van Gogh (2004). On the one hand, there has been growing pressure on minorities to accept Dutch norms, values, and culture.¹¹⁶ On the other hand, immigration policies have become stricter, promote the return of migrants, and seek to curtail family unification by announcing minimum income and age requirements.¹¹⁷ These changes were interpreted as a shift from promoting the social participation of migrants towards assimilation into Dutch culture and adopting a Dutch identity¹¹⁸, which generated criticism among academics. While some scholars labelled the new approaches as institutional discrimination¹¹⁹, others raised concerns over the high degree of ethnic segregation between the “native” Dutch people and people with migration backgrounds.¹²⁰ Surely all of these changes have also been observed in many parts of migrants’ lives, from their legal status and involvement in migrant associations to their access to education and other institutional practises.

Islam has a central place in these debates. Particularly Islamic schools have been a core focus of the ongoing integration debates. Over the years, the public, the government, and the media in the Netherlands have changed from being open-minded and tolerant to becoming critical and even openly.¹²¹ The main objections to the Islamic schools in recent discussions are fears of terrorism and social segregation.

¹¹⁶ Yörük Bahçeli, 2018

¹¹⁷ Han Entzinger, 2006

¹¹⁸ *ibid*

¹¹⁹ Ellie Vasta, “From ethnic minorities to ethnic majority policy: Multiculturalism and the shift to assimilationism in the Netherlands”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no. 5 (2007): 713–740
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870701491770>

¹²⁰ Han Entzinger, 2006

¹²¹ Martin van Bruinessen, 2014: 167

The previously mentioned BVD Report noted that the schools are ideologically and politically motivated, teaching religion and Islamic topics in such a way that would make terrorist activities attractive to the children, and fundamentalist groups would take advantage of them.¹²² Also, some scholars have argued that the Islamic schools would lead to a future in which Muslim students would not acculturate themselves to Dutch liberal democratic norms and values. This is because they experience inequality, isolation, social exclusion, and separation rather than full participation and integration into Dutch society while attending Islamic schools.¹²³

Moreover, the Dutch state has taken a decisive approach to prevent radicalisation, especially among young migrants. Particularly after 9/11, the Head of the General Intelligence and Security Services (AIVD), Erik Akerboom, stated that recruitment for jihad was already taking place in the Netherlands, adding that the AIVD was collaborating with neighbouring countries and municipalities to stop this.¹²⁴ Whereas the prevention of radicalisation previously concentrated on the recruitment of foreign fighters in Iraq and Afghanistan, new policies were required during the Syrian crisis, when many European nationals were recruited to join ISIS or other fighting organisations. For example, the Netherlands has adapted the Integrated Approach to Jihadism Action Programme for those who travelled to Syria, while public debates have focused on social isolation and the role of Islamic education centres or organisations as places where recruitment and radicalisation take place.¹²⁵

In this process, established Muslim-migrant organisations that have long been subsidised by both the Netherlands and the countries of origin have come under heavy surveillance by the Dutch authorities, putting migrants' perceived dual loyalties repeatedly under the spotlight. For instance, Turkish religious or lobbyist organisations have been investigated and were accused of creating "parallel communities" with their strong co-ethnic organisations.¹²⁶ Such statements have become more common, particularly after the 2017 diplomatic incident described above. This negative perception of the Turkish-Dutch community has increased, especially after this incident, and gone as far as calls to suspend the protestors' dual

¹²² General Intelligence and Security Service of the Netherlands (AIVD), 2018

¹²³ Muslih Muslih, "Islamic schooling, migrant Muslims and the problem of integration in The Netherlands", *British Journal of Religious Education* 43, no. 2 (2021): 196-205
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2019.1628004>;
Willem Huijnk, "De religieuze beleving van moslims in Nederland Diversiteit en verandering in beeld" (The Hague: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau [SCP], 2018)

¹²⁴ Erik S.M. Akerboom, *Counter-terrorism in the Netherlands* (The Hague: General Intelligence and Security Service of the Netherlands (AIVD), 11 November 2003),
<https://english.aivd.nl/publications/publications/2003/11/11/counter-terrorism-in-the-netherlands>

¹²⁵ European Parliament, *EU and Member States' policies and laws on persons suspected of terrorism-related crimes* (Brussels, December 2012),
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/596832/IPOL_STU\(2017\)596832_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/596832/IPOL_STU(2017)596832_EN.pdf)

¹²⁶ "Asscher: onderzoek Turkse organisaties terecht", *Nederlandse Omroep Stichting (NOS)* (online), 14 November 2014, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2003811-asscher-onderzoek-turkse-organisaties-terecht>

nationality status, which would effectively mean stripping them of their Dutch citizenship.

As noted earlier, the four ruling parties (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), the Christian Democratic Alliance, Democrats '66, and the CU) stated in their 2017 Coalition Agreement they would put a halt to foreign financing of mosques from “unfree” countries.¹²⁷ The main argument was that foreign financing comes from undemocratic states, promoting undemocratic ideas among the Muslim population in the Netherlands, thereby trying to penetrate the social fabric and create parallel societies in the country.¹²⁸ However, the legislative process was repeatedly delayed. This led to frustration in the parliament, as VVD and CU MPs stated in 2020: “If there is no law, we will make one ourselves”.¹²⁹ The delay was caused by a variety of factors, including the potential detrimental effects on diplomatic relations between the Netherlands and the financing countries such as the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey.¹³⁰

Nonetheless, the issue of undemocratic teachings in Islamic schools and Salafist mosques remains a matter of concern for the public, as the media has greatly contributed to the negative image of mosques and imams by associating them with foreign financing and the radicalisation of youth.¹³¹ For example, in 2018, Elsevier Weekblad, one of the Netherlands' most popular news magazines with rather conservative right-wing views, reported about several mosques with “suspicions of radical teachings”.¹³² Recently, there also seem to have been anti-jihadist campaigns from within the Muslim community itself, as in the case of an Amsterdam-based Moroccan-Dutch vlogger. Apparently, the vlogger was looking to convert frustrations into “positive” thoughts and make the youth less susceptible to extremism, which is similar to the reactions of the Muslims who organised themselves on social media

¹²⁷ Remko Theulings, “Nog steeds geen wet tegen buitenlandse financiering van moskeeën: ChristenUnie en VVD zijn het zat en maken de wet desnoods zelf”, *EenVandaag* (online), 11 November 2020, <https://eenvandaag.avrotros.nl/item/nog-steeds-geen-wet-voor-buitenlandse-financiering-van-moskeeen-christenunie-en-vvd-zijn-het-zat-en/>

¹²⁸ Wendelmoet Boersema, “Bente Becker (VVD): Verbied buitenlandse geldstromen naar moskeeën als er sprake is van ‘problematisch gedrag’”, *Trouw* (online), 13 January 2021, <https://www.trouw.nl/politiek/bente-becker-vvd-verbied-buitenlandse-geldstromen-naar-moskeeen-als-er-sprake-is-van-problematisch-gedrag~bfb73587/>; “Kamer wil verbod buitenlandse financiering moskeeën”, *RTL-Nieuws* (online), 14 January 2021, <https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/nederland/artikel/5208530/meerderheid-tweede-kamer-voor-verbod-buitenlandse-financiering>

¹²⁹ Remko Theulings, 2020

¹³⁰ *ibid*

¹³¹ Semiha Sözeri, Hülya Kosar Altinyelken and Monique Volman, “Training Imams in the Netherlands: The Failure of a Post-secular Endeavour”, *British Journal of Religious Education* 41, no. 4 (2018): 435-445

¹³² Fleur Verbeek, “De meest omstreden moskeeën van Nederland”, *EW* (online) 29 April 2018, <https://www.ewmagazine.nl/nederland/achtergrond/2018/04/de-meest-omstreden-moskeeen-van-nederland-610070/>

after the death of employees at Charlie Hebdo magazine with the hashtag #notmyIslam.¹³³

5.1

Responses to Turkey's Diaspora Policy in the Netherlands

As the biggest Muslim minority group in the Netherlands, the Dutch-Turkish community and their ties with Turkish governments have continually been made into issues by Dutch politicians and the public since the early 2000s. Both the AKP's Islamic and nationalist image and the political support for the AKP in the Netherlands have been considered problematic in terms of the domestic affairs of the Netherlands.¹³⁴

The concern is not without basis. Although the AKP leadership engages in transnational repression, it has also been trying to create a loyal citizenry outside the borders of Turkey. According to the study of Goksu and Leerkes (2022)¹³⁵, there are a great number of young people with a Turkish background who are strict followers of Erdoğan and ready to take action in response to what is going on in the Turkish political landscape. For instance, in 2016, some Turkish-Dutch followers of the Gülen movement, which has been accused of organising a coup in Turkey, faced threats and arson attacks from other Turks in the Netherlands right after the state-led Turkish news agency published the list of Gülenist organisations in the Netherlands.¹³⁶

Two years later, in June 2018, the Turkish-Dutch community in the Netherlands erupted in jubilation after President Erdoğan's victory in Turkey's Parliamentary elections, much like they do when their national football team wins a match. A few days later, the Turkish army's military operation in northern Syria – with the stated goal of creating a buffer zone for Syrian refugees in Turkey – sparked tensions between Turkish and Kurdish residents in Rotterdam. On 16 October, things got out of hand and the riot police had to step in. These events raised questions as to why these Dutch citizens are so focused on Turkey and taking to the streets to demonstrate their

¹³³ Andreas Kouwenhoven, "Hoe de overheid heimelijk moslims wilde beïnvloeden", *NRC* (online), 13 June 2021, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2021/06/13/hoe-de-overheid-heimelijk-moslims-wilde-beinvloeden-a4047170>

¹³⁴ Yörüük Bahçeli, 2018

¹³⁵ Fatih Goksu and Arjeen Leerkes, "Political participation as transformative reactive mobilization: A qualitative study of voter preferences among Turkish origin residents in the Netherlands", *Comparative Migration Studies (CMS)* 10, no. 47 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-022-00318-9>

¹³⁶ "Turkish news agency publishes list of 'pro-Gülen' Dutch groups", *Dutch News* (online), 30 August 2016, <https://www.dutchnews.nl/news/2016/08/turkish-news-agency-publishes-list-of-pro-gulen-dutch-groups/>

support for a nation that their parents or grandparents left behind more than half a century ago. According to Leo de Kleijn, the party chairman of the Socialist Party (SP) Rotterdam, such levels of engagement with “home country” politics is not simply a matter of loving your father’s (or grandfather’s) country.¹³⁷ For some Turkish citizens abroad, it is that they have an image of Erdoğan being their long-awaited leader, the protector of Turks and Muslims everywhere, including the Netherlands.¹³⁸

In addition, the far-right Grey Wolves have also been accused of being used as a “weapon” against Ankara’s adversaries in Europe, such as Kurdish activists accused of supporting the PKK or adherents of Fetullah Gülen, who Erdoğan blames for the failed coup against him in July 2016.¹³⁹ According to some media outlets, Erdoğan has embraced the main causes of the Grey Wolves and given hundreds of jobs to members of the group¹⁴⁰, but there is no definitive evidence yet showing a connection between the activities of the AKP and the Grey Wolves in Europe. The Grey Wolves were banned in France; Austria banned the “salute” symbol of the Grey Wolves, while the United States and Germany are considering banning the organisation, as they are believed to be the MHP’s militant wing. On 12 November 2020, the European Parliament voted on a motion to include the Turkish Grey Wolves with Europe’s terrorist and extremist groups. In the same month, members of the Dutch Senate (Eerste Kamer) also presented a motion to the government to outlaw the Grey Wolves and pressure the EU for an EU-wide ban as well, even if the group were no longer as violent as they used to be, according to some media outlets.¹⁴¹ Also, the Dutch House of Representatives (Tweede Kamer) voted nearly unanimously to investigate the potential of making the Grey Wolves illegal in the Netherlands. The Turkish-Dutch political party DENK, whose founders are suspected of having strong links to the AKP, was the sole party to vote against the resolution.¹⁴² In March 2021, the cabinet decided against a ban. All these activities and claims carry the risk of providing favourable arguments for right-wing politicians, particularly for the far-right parties in the Netherlands such as Geert Wilders’ PVV (Party for Freedom) and Thierry Baudet’s FvD (Forum for Democracy). These parties assert that the biggest problem in the Netherlands is

¹³⁷ Leo de Kleijn, “Turks nationalisme kan nooit de toekomst van Nederland zijn”, *BNNVARA* (online), 21 July 2016, <https://joop.bnnvara.nl/opinies/turks-nationalisme-nooit-toekomst-nederland>

¹³⁸ *ibid*

¹³⁹ Nicholas Morgan, “Grey Wolves ban shows Europe waking up to Turkish influence networks”, *Ahwal* (online), 21 November 2020, <https://ahvalnews.com/grey-wolves/grey-wolves-ban-shows-europe-waking-turkish-influence-networks>

¹⁴⁰ “Will the Grey Wolves – Erdoğan’s long arm in the world – end up on EU and US terrorist list?”, *The Times of India* (online), 20 September 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/middle-east/will-the-grey-wolves-erdogans-long-arm-in-the-world-end-up-on-eu-and-us-terrorist-list/articleshow/86357785.cms>

¹⁴¹ “Dutch Lawmakers Call for EU Ban on Turkish Nationalist Group Grey Wolves”, *Duvar English* (online) 20 November 2020, <https://www.duvarenglish.com/dutch-lawmakers-call-for-eu-ban-on-turkish-nationalist-group-grey-wolves-news-55138>

¹⁴² “Nederland wil een verbod op organisatie Grijsz Wolven”, *NPO Radio1* (online), 28 November 2020, <https://www.nporadio1.nl/fragmenten/nieuwsweekend/6a99506d-0ef5-4a4f-b2ed-1269ba0b8177/2020-11-28-verbod-op-grijze-wolven>

Islamisation, and that Islam is a threat to Dutch identity and freedom.¹⁴³ However, this anti-Islam discourse is not new. Concerns over migration and multiculturalism have already been directed particularly at those with Turkish and Moroccan origins.¹⁴⁴ This is despite the fact that, according to a study from 2009, of the more than 857,000 Muslims in the Netherlands, it is estimated that 20,000 to 30,000 people are attracted to radical Islamic ideologies, and 2,500 are susceptible to violent ideologies, which represents only 0.3 per cent of the Dutch Muslim population at that time.¹⁴⁵ It is rather worrying to see that the concerns over Islamist radicalisation have put all Muslims with migration backgrounds in the spotlight, even though they represent the overwhelming majority of the law-abiding Dutch Muslim population.

In this context, in the Netherlands, where the majority of the population is concerned about Islam and Muslims, any political party affiliated with Islamic ideologies is viewed with suspicion. The National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCCS) has recently raised concerns over Erdoğan's support for some jihadist organisations linked to Turkish and Dutch institutions.¹⁴⁶ Dutch officials claim that there is a possible link between the Turkish President's "anti-Western rhetoric" and the 2019 terrorist attack on the tram in Utrecht by a Dutch resident with a Turkish background. This is because the day before the attack, Erdoğan talked about the mosque attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, and placed it "in the context of the war between Muslims and Christians".¹⁴⁷

In addition, Geert Wilders, whose party received the highest share of votes in the most recent Dutch elections in 2023, has been fuelling this debate. He has repeatedly targeted the Turkish-Dutch community and Erdoğan, especially after the incidents in Rotterdam in 2017 in the run-up to elections in Turkey and the Netherlands. Wilders called Erdoğan a "terrorist", called for the expulsion of the Turkish ambassador to the Netherlands, and after the protest questioned the loyalty of Dutch citizens with Turkish backgrounds to the Netherlands, stating that, "If you don't like it here, go back to your own country."¹⁴⁸ According to Wilders, the Netherlands should not

¹⁴³ Prayoga Agam, *The representation of Islam: A critical discourse analysis on Geert Wilder's speech* (Malang, Indonesia: Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Undergraduate Thesis, 2021), <http://etheses.uin-malang.ac.id/29588/>

¹⁴⁴ Willem Schinkel, "The Nationalization of Desire: Transnational Marriage in Dutch Culturist Integration Discourse", *Focaal European Journal of Anthropology* 59 (2011): 99-106

¹⁴⁵ Tinka Veldhuis and Edwin Bakker, "Muslims in the Netherlands: Tensions and Violent Conflict", in *Ethno-Religious Conflict in Europe. Typologies of Radicalisation in Europe's Muslim Communities*, ed. Michael Emerson, 81-109 (Brussels: Center for European Policy Studies [CEPS], 2003)

¹⁴⁶ Stockholm Centre for Freedom (SCF), "Dutch Security Body Concerned about Erdoğan's Role in Rise of Extremism in Netherlands", 16 February 2021, <https://stockholmcf.org/dutch-security-body-concerned-about-erdogans-role-in-rise-of-extremism-in-netherlands/>

¹⁴⁷ "Influence of Erdoğan's rhetoric in NL under investigation", *NL Times* (online) 2021, 15 February 2021, <https://nltimes.nl/2021/02/15/influence-erdogans-rhetoric-nl-investigation>

¹⁴⁸ "Dutch far-right politician under investigation for calling Turkish president a terrorist", *Al Monitor* (online), 16 February 2021, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/02/turkey-investigation-geert-wilders-erdogan-terrorist-dutch.html>

maintain close ties with Turkey, and it should be tougher on migration and integration rules.

Wilders' anti-Muslim discourse – and his concerns over the increasing influence of the Turkish and Moroccan governments on Dutch internal affairs – is the most blatant example of securitisation rhetoric, reflecting a virulent anti-immigration worldview and systematically portraying migration as an existential threat to Dutch civilisation. Indeed, along with the Syrian war, the Netherlands started to frame migration-related activities and changes as security risks on a broader scale. Arguments have included the severity of the refugee crises for the Netherlands and the need to halt the intake of migrants. This is frequently marked by hyperbole emphasising the Netherlands' limited ability to house refugees and the socio-economic consequences of immigration.¹⁴⁹ The discourses on exceptionality have grown more securitised, with calls for extreme measures from almost all political parties.¹⁵⁰

This growing anti-immigrant discourse has also led to the alienation of many Dutch citizens with migration backgrounds from affiliating with Dutch mainstream parties and the emergence of new political parties such as DENK. As mentioned earlier, recent studies show that the morally conservative parts of the well-organised Turkish-Dutch Muslim community account for DENK's electoral success.¹⁵¹ The collaboration between Moroccan migrants and Turkish migrants is attention-grabbing, as the two largest migrant groups in the Netherlands have come together for a common purpose politically. Immediately after this success, the lobbyist organisation of the AKP in Europe – the Union of European Turkish Democrats (UETD) – changed its name to the Union of International Democrats (UID) by claiming that they represent the rights of *all* the migrants and not only Turkish ones.¹⁵² Moreover, for the 2019 European Parliamentary elections, the Turkish and Moroccan community in the Netherlands supported the candidate nominated by DENK.

In this context, we also see increasing concerns about Erdoğan's power and influence in the Netherlands in the last years. In 2019, a letter sent from the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Internal Affairs to the Dutch Parliament mentioned that the Turkish government was using Diyanet as a tool to gather intelligence on Turkish opposition figures in the Netherlands in order to create social tensions. This letter is not surprising, as in 2016 the Turkish consulate in Rotterdam openly called upon Turks to

¹⁴⁹ Joanne van Selm, *Migration in the Netherlands: Rhetoric and Perceived Reality Challenge Dutch Tolerance* (Washington, DC : Migration Policy Institute [MPI], 01 May 2019), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/migration-netherlands-rhetoric-and-perceived-reality-challenge-dutch-tolerance>

¹⁵⁰ Ibid

¹⁵¹ Floris Vermeulen, Eelco Hartevelde, Anja van Heelsum and Aad van der Veen, 2020

¹⁵² This was observed by one of the authors of this report during the field study in Rotterdam while the author was participating in an UID event.

report on people who insulted Turkey or President Erdoğan.¹⁵³ As Öztürk and Sözeri (2018)¹⁵⁴ argue, diaspora organisations such as Diyanet have been used to legitimise the AKP's policies, particularly among religious communities, as these organisations have the power to influence politics on a global level. Diyanet in the Netherlands has also facilitated activities such as allowing the propaganda of the Dutch political party DENK to be used in the mosques it controls. In 2020, the ISN itself was under the spotlight, especially following the report by the Parliamentary Inquiry Committee on Unwanted Influence from Unfree Countries¹⁵⁵, which concluded that the Diyanet is trying to exert its influence over the Turkish-Dutch community through fear, intimidation, and threats; promoting Turkish nationalism with Turkish nationalism undergirded by religious foundation and perpetuating their vision of Islam in the Netherlands through the Diyanet mosques. In the same year, a report from the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry into Undesirable Influence of Unfree Countries mainly focused on Diyanet and saw it as a major threat to the integration of people with a Turkish background.¹⁵⁶ Another report came out in February 2021 stating that Salafism among the Turkish-Dutch community was gaining prominence because of the influence of Erdoğan and Turkey.¹⁵⁷ The NCCS mentioned in this report that Erdoğan is pursuing a deliberate Islamisation agenda in collaboration with Salafist and, at times, jihadist organisations, which influence Turkish-Dutch institutions in the Netherlands through the strong ties with many pro-Erdoğan Turkish-Dutch citizens.¹⁵⁸ The report has been cited by several politicians in the Dutch Parliament asking for more investigations of Salafism and the Turkish-Dutch community.¹⁵⁹

Despite attempts by Erdoğan to appeal to Muslim diasporas (Turkish and non-Turkish alike) and to position Turkey as a global Sunni, the growing discomfort in the host society and the increasing restrictions might increase the pressure on the members of diaspora communities. In one interview, Lily Sprangers, the manager at the Leiden Asia Centre, mentions that there is a growing realisation among ardent supporters of Erdoğan in the Turkish-Dutch community that their support does not bring much benefit to them in the Netherlands – to the contrary, it leads to their

¹⁵³ Floris Vermeulen, Eelco Hartevelde, Anja van Heelsum and Aad van der Veen, 2020

¹⁵⁴ Ahmet Erdi Öztürk and Semiha Sözeri, 2018

¹⁵⁵ Tweede Kamer [Dutch House of Representatives], *(On)zichtbare invloed. Verslag parlementaire ondervragingscommissie naar ongewenste beïnvloeding uit onvrije landen* (The Hague: 25 June 2020), https://www.tweedekamer.nl/sites/default/files/atoms/files/eindverslag_pocob.pdf.

¹⁵⁶ Christopher Houtkamp and Kars de Bruijne, *Whose Long Arm? Challenges to Understanding Turkish Diaspora Politics*, Policy Brief (The Hague: Clingendael, February 2021) https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/PB_UNDERSTANDING_TURKISH_DIASPORA_POLITICS_Febr2021.pdf

¹⁵⁷ Arnout Brouwers, "Zorgen over islamistische koers Erdoğan: Kamer eist inzage in rapport over invloed op Turkse Nederlanders", *deVolkskrant* (online), 05 February 2021 <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/zorgen-over-islamistische-koers-erdoğan-kamer-eist-inzage-in-rapport-over-invloed-op-turkse-nederlanders-b2dbdf24/>

¹⁵⁸ "NCTV: Erdoğan speelt grote rol bij opkomst salafisme in Nederland", *Nu.nl* (online), 15 February 2021, <https://www.nu.nl/buitenland/6116481/nctv-erdoğan-speelt-grote-rol-bij-opkomst-salafisme-in-nederland.html>

¹⁵⁹ *ibid*

isolation.¹⁶⁰ However, further research is required about perceptions of Erdoğan by various segments of Dutch society, be they native Dutch citizens of different generations or communities with migration backgrounds from Turkey.

¹⁶⁰ Lily Sprangers, “Turkse Nederlanders stemden ‘ja’ uit betrokkenheid, nationalisme en luiheid”, *RTL Nieuws* (online), 03 May 2017, <https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/buitenland/artikel/119321/turkse-nederlanders-stemden-ja-uit-betrokkenheid-nationalisme-en-luiheid>

6.

Conclusion

Ever since the AKP came into power, the country has replaced the overall negligence of the 1970s – as well as the intermittent and unsuccessful policies of the 1980s and 1990s – with policies of active engagement with its citizens abroad. Hence, even if Turkey is a newcomer to diaspora policies, the Turkish state’s discourses, actions, and institutions that are directed towards Turkish nationals abroad have been a matter of controversy in countries that have large populations of citizens with Turkish backgrounds.

There is a global trend in diasporic engagements: More and more countries of origin are viewing their diaspora populations abroad as potential resources and themselves as the guardians of their nationals abroad.¹⁶¹ However, for Turkey, its diaspora has, in the last years, become mainly a political asset that it uses to serve Turkey’s interests. In the Netherlands, too, this engagement not only generates a core group of Dutch-Turkish citizens who are ideologically attached to the AKP – and, more specifically, the leadership of the party – it might also lead to a deep fragmentation between the Dutch and the “Turkish community” in the Netherlands. The debates on the integration of Dutch citizens with a Turkish background have been massively fuelled by the increasing levels of support between various Turkish governments and members of the Dutch-Turkish community, as well as by the negative attitudes of strong far-right parties towards migration and Islam in the Netherlands. This debate certainly misses the fact that what is portrayed as the “Turkish community” is itself highly fragmented along ideological, ethnic, and religious lines. These differences play a significant role in shaping relationships between immigrants and the descendants of immigrants from Turkey, as well as their relations with Turkey and the Turkish state, especially in the highly polarised political landscape of the last years.

While Islam is heavily politicised by Dutch far-right politicians and the Muslim communities are increasingly portrayed as radicalised, Turkish President Erdoğan has intentionally made himself a shining figure and gained the support of many Turkish citizens abroad. He has done this by taking advantage of the tensions inside Europe over Islam and claiming himself to be the defender of all Muslims. While the right-wing discourse has increased his popularity among migrants, his own discourse

¹⁶¹ Alan Gamlen, 2014.

makes the diversity of positions and everyday concerns of Turkish immigrants and their descendants living in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe much more difficult to be seen. As such, they are left between a rock and a hard place.

Abbreviations

AIVD	<i>General Intelligence and Security Services of the Netherlands</i>
AKP	<i>Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)</i>
BBP	<i>Great Unity Party (Büyük Birlik Partisi)</i>
CBS	<i>Statistics Netherlands</i>
CHP	<i>Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi)</i>
CU	<i>Christian Union Party, the Christian Democratic Alliance</i>
DEM Parti	<i>Pro-Kurdish and left-wing People's Democratic Party (Halkların Eşitlik ve Demokrasi Partisi)</i>
DENK party	<i>Political Movement Denk (Politieke Beweging Denk)</i>
DİTİB	<i>Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Türk İslam Birliği)</i>
Diyanet	<i>Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı)</i>
EU	<i>European Union</i>
FvD	<i>Forum for Democracy (Forum voor Democratie)</i>
FVGM	<i>Federation of Associations and Communities of Muslims (Federatie van de Verenigingen en Gemeenschappen van Moslims)</i>
HAK-DER	<i>Federation of Alevi Associations in the Netherlands (Hollanda Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu)</i>
HAVO	<i>Higher Secondary Education in the Netherlands</i>
HDP	<i>People's Democracy Party (Halkların Demokrasi Partisi)</i>
HTDF	<i>Federation of Turkish Associations in the Netherlands (Hollanda Türk Dernekleri Federasyonu)</i>
HTİB	<i>Idealist Turkish Workers Association (Hollanda Türkiyeli İşçiler Birliği)</i>
ISN	<i>Netherlands Religious Foundation (Islamitische Stichting Nederland/Hollanda Diyanet Vakfı)</i>
MG	<i>Nationalist Outlook Movement (Milli Görüş)</i>
MHP	<i>Turkish Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi)</i>
NCCS	<i>National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid)</i>
PKK	<i>Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê)</i>
PvdA	<i>Labour Party (Partij van de Arbeid)</i>
PvdD	<i>Party for the Animals (Partij voor de Dieren)</i>
PVV	<i>Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid)</i>
SP	<i>Socialist Party (Socialistische Partij)</i>
TİCF	<i>Turkish Islamic Cultural Foundation of the Netherlands(Türk İslam Kültür Dernekleri Federasyonu)</i>
UETD	<i>Union of European Turkish Democrats</i>
UID	<i>Union of International Democrats</i>
VMO	<i>Pre-University Education / Preparatory Scientific Education in the Netherlands (Voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs)</i>

VVD *People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie)*

YSK *Supreme Election Council of Turkey (T.C. Yüksek Seçim Kurulu)*

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General note: Unless stated otherwise, all electronic sources were retrieved at the time of writing in 2021. Figures might have been updated in the meantime.

The Centre for Applied Turkey Studies (CATS) at Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) in Berlin is funded by Stiftung Mercator and the Federal Foreign Office. CATS is the curator of CATS Network, an international network of think tanks and research institutions working on Turkey.

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SWP Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik
German Institute for International and Security Affairs
Ludwigkirchplatz 3–4, 10719 Berlin
www.swp-berlin.org
www.cats-network.eu
ISSN 2941-4466