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# *Special Issue*

## Making of the Türkiye-EU Readmission Agreement and Visa Liberalization Deal: Internal Negotiations within the Turkish Executive

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*This article examines the intragovernmental negotiations among Turkish executive agencies that shaped Türkiye's position in its negotiations with the EU on the Readmission Agreement and Visa Liberalization Dialogue (RA-VLD). The RA agreement required Türkiye to take back third-country migrants who had entered the EU through Türkiye, while the VLD agreement notably lacked a solid EU guarantee of visa liberalization for Turkish citizens as an incentive. Initially, Turkish bureaucrats and political leaders had criticized such proposals, arguing that they relegated the country to the status of a "border zone" between Europe and the Greater Middle East. However, this pessimism gradually gave way to a more optimistic approach between mid-2012 and the end of 2013. When the agreement was finally signed on December 16, 2013, the Turkish Foreign Minister hailed it as a diplomatic breakthrough that would grant Turkish citizens the long-sought-after visa-free travel within the EU. But how did Türkiye's position shift so decisively? What explains this puzzle? We attempt to unravel this puzzle by examining the intragovernmental negotiations*

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[10.1162/NGTN.a.37](https://doi.org/10.1162/NGTN.a.37)

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*Negotiation Journal* Volume 41 2025 432

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*within the Turkish executive branch concerning migration and visa diplomacy. We argue that changes in migration and visa policies can largely be explained by the negotiation dynamics among various government agencies involved in the process. By analyzing the process as a loosely demarcated set of phases, we trace the roles of hard-line and soft-line agencies, policy entrepreneurship, horizontal and vertical shifts in decision-making authority, expanding interagency negotiation techniques, and soft-liners' informal collaboration with external actors. Taking Türkiye as a "critical case," this study employs rigorous document analysis along with first-time interviews with key bureaucrats involved in interagency bargaining during the period. It contributes to negotiation studies by exploring the relatively underexamined area of interagency negotiations. Finally, the article calls for more elaborate analysis of the impact of the recent wave of populist authoritarian governments on intragovernmental bargaining dynamics, including their effects on transparency, the quality of the decisions made, and groupthink dynamics.*

**Keywords:** intragovernmental negotiation, interagency bargaining, foreign policy process, Türkiye–EU migration and visa negotiations, policy entrepreneurship

## Introduction

This article examines the intragovernmental (interagency) negotiations among Turkish executive agencies that shaped Türkiye's official position in its negotiations with the European Union (EU) on the twin deals of "Readmission Agreement and Visa Liberalization Dialogue" (RA-VLD). The RA-VLD deal led to heated debates within Türkiye. The RA would oblige Türkiye to take back the illegal Turkish and third-country migrants who entered the EU through Türkiye, which appeared to be a costly obligation for a transit country that faced a large number of such migrants every year. Furthermore, Türkiye would not be able to send back most of these irregular migrants to their country of origin as these countries were mired in political instability, including civil wars. There was another important reason for the critics of the deal: the signed agreement allowed for RA while it lacked a solid EU guarantee of visa liberalization for Turkish citizens. Interestingly, despite these strong arguments against the deal, it was successfully concluded on 16 December 2013.

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The traditional Turkish state institutions had generally been skeptical about the EU's sincerity for the country's accession into the Union. An associate member since 1963, Türkiye applied for full membership in 1987, established a Customs Union with the EU in 1995, became an officially recognized candidate in 1999, and began the accession negotiations in 2005. The long and bumpy historical background aside, the political blockages on the accession negotiations from 2006 onward fed Turkish public skepticism about the country's eventual membership in the EU. In this unfavorable juncture, it was no surprise to see that the Turkish bureaucracy and political leaders would overwhelmingly suspect that Türkiye's signing of a comprehensive RA without ensuring visa-free travel for Turkish citizens within the EU would relegate Türkiye to the position of a "border zone" between Europe and the Middle East and Africa (Kirişçi 2008; İçduygu and Sert 2014).

Yet, the unfolding of the RA-VLD deal from 2009 to 2013 proved to be very puzzling. The Türkiye–EU migration policy talks gradually evolved from a mostly zero-sum assessment to a permissive and then to a positive-sum approach toward the deal. When the deal was signed in December 2013, Turkish Foreign Minister (FM) Ahmet Davutoğlu touted it as a diplomatic breakthrough that would offer Turkish citizens the long-sought-after visa-free travel within the EU. This shift in Turkish policy position was unexpected; "the readiness to sign a readmission agreement [was] puzzling" (Bürgin 2011: 883). How did the Turkish position change so swiftly? What explains this puzzle? This article attempts to decipher the puzzle by examining the developments during the period with a particular focus on how state agencies reached a consensus on this highly controversial matter. We argue that the change in the migration policy could be explained largely by the negotiation dynamics among various government agencies involved in the process.

Thus, this article aims to contribute to negotiation studies by exploring the relatively underexamined area of intragovernmental (interagency) negotiations (but see Allison 1971; Fisher 1989; Zartman 1989; Tucker 1996) that shape foreign policy stances in "external negotiations." This article focuses on the Turkish interagency negotiation process as part of Türkiye's "migration diplomacy" (Adamson and Tsourapas 2019) for several reasons. For one, Türkiye is known as a country with a "strong state" tradition that typically attaches utmost importance to defending its political sovereignty (Heper 1992; Krasner 1999); and yet, it adopted a highly compromising position in its RA-VLD negotiations with the EU in the early 2010s. Here, we use "strong state" to mean a state that places "too great an emphasis on the long-run interests of Community at the expense of sectional interests" rather than a "state having the ability to successfully penetrate society and extract resources from it"

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(Heper 1992: 194, note 1). Türkiye inherited a strong state legacy from the Ottoman Empire, which functioned mostly in a parliamentary framework with moderate to weak checks and balances from the 1940s until the passage of the 2017 constitutional referendum. The referendum instituted an executive presidential system with no meaningful checks and balances, paving the way for an authoritarian and personalized version of a strong state (Özdamar and Yanik 2024). What explains Türkiye's significant divergence from the state's expected position would be theoretically valuable to analyze.

Second, Türkiye has been at the center of the regional migration negotiations on multiple fronts (for characterizing the contemporary state as a "migration state," see Hollifield 2004). Türkiye can be considered a "critical case" (Ekstein 1975) in migration diplomacy. The Turkish case can provide us with crucial knowledge in the realm of negotiation, especially much needed insights on intragovernmental negotiations. We are well aware that a single case study is not enough for a full-fledged negotiation framework to be developed but a critical case study is highly valuable for analysts to develop a sense of what to look for in other cases and future studies (Ekstein 1975; George and Bennett 2005).

The article utilizes vigorous document analysis; a small number of the documents reviewed are available publicly. Its strength, however, lies in the interviews with unidentified Turkish policymakers who participated in the Türkiye–EU RA-VLD negotiations in the later 2000s and the first part of the 2010s. These interviews are supplemented by reports by experts and civil society actors. The Turkish migration diplomacy, especially with the EU, has indeed been heavily studied (see Kirişçi 2008; İçduygu and Sert 2014; Benvenuti 2017; Makovsky 2019; Saatçioğlu 2019; Bal 2023). However, how these external negotiation positions are arrived at as a product of interagency negotiations remains—for the most part—a mystery (for very partial exceptions, see Kirişçi 2008 and Bürgin 2011). Considering that the Turkish state is not known for a culture of transparent policymaking, this article represents a rare account of how intragovernmental negotiations unfold in the Turkish foreign policymaking domain. That is why using detailed accounts by the policymakers involved in the interagency negotiations is highly valuable for theory development and especially for the practice of intragovernmental negotiations.

This article proceeds as follows. The first section offers a conceptual framework that can be used to account for intragovernmental negotiations. The second section follows with a background on Türkiye–EU relations and more specifically on the complex relations in the field of migration and visa policy. The third section identifies migration and visa policy actors, their general policy outlook, and their initial positions on

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the prospective RA-VLD deal. The fourth section dwells on the details of the intragovernmental negotiations within the Turkish executive with the purpose of determining Türkiye's negotiation position during talks with the EU from mid-2012 to the end of 2013. The fifth section offers a general assessment of the analysis and presents several theoretical and practical implications of the analysis for the subfield of intragovernmental negotiations. The final section presents conclusions.

## Conceptual Framework

Several key analytical concepts from the negotiation literature regarding intragovernmental policymaking are critical for a systematic understanding of the puzzling change in Turkish migration policy toward the EU in the early 2010s. These concepts include the emergence of new policy ideas, horizontal and/or vertical shifts in decision-making authority, policy entrepreneurship, issue linkage and other bargaining techniques for consensus building, informal coordination with the other side, and gray zone tactics.

We map out an analytical framework for intragovernmental negotiations that draws heavily on the approach of [Tucker \(1996\)](#) to such negotiations. We aim to unpack the process along a timeline. We begin with how the agencies position themselves on the policy issue at the start of the negotiations—as a soft-line, hard-line, or swing agency ([Tucker 1996](#)). We then assess if their positions changed during the interagency negotiations and if so, how and why they changed. We then examine whether the parties have employed coalition formation, logrolling, splitting differences, or side payments ([Tucker 1996](#)) to advance their positions, and whether they have used the techniques that seem to have become more visible in recent decades, such as issue linkage, diplomatic entrepreneurship, constructive ambiguity, and informal side deals.

We approach the interagency negotiations process as a loosely demarcated set of phases. Even though we concur that “phases tend to be grey around the edge” and “the work of each phase continues underneath its successor” ([Zartman 1989](#): 239, citing [Zartman and Berman 1982](#): 42 and 87), we recognize these caveats but find the phases approach helpful, particularly for analytical purposes.<sup>2</sup> Below are the five phases that we have identified.

### *Phase 1: Policy Ideas*

It makes sense to expect new foreign policy ideas to emanate mostly from state actors, especially actors with a certain level of international exposure. Such actors could come forward with a solution to an existing or foreseen problem or a replication of a successful foreign policy practiced elsewhere ([Goldstein and Keohane 1993](#)). These state actors

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are more open to taking the risk of trying out new policy approaches and have a more positive-sum attitude toward other states (Adamson and Tsourapas 2019). They typically spend a lot of time and energy to convince the state actors with conservative, inward-looking, and zero-sum views to adopt new policies.

### ***Phase 2: Policy Entrepreneurship***

Many policy ideas appear on the political stage but only a few of them move forward and have a chance of implementation. For a policy proposal to gain general acceptance, a government agency and/or a policy entrepreneur that develops ownership and advocacy for the proposal is crucial (see Bürgin 2011).

### ***Phase 3: Horizontal and/or Vertical Shifts in Decision-Making Authority***

As the idea of a policy gains momentum on the diplomatic agenda, there is a certain configuration and locus of policymaking power among the relevant policy actors. However, these actors' political power may change over time, leading to a "horizontal shift" of decision-making power between different agencies or actors. Another possibility of change is a "vertical shift" of the level of hierarchy at which the policy question is being considered. This typically happens when top bureaucrats or ministers choose to deal directly with the policy issue themselves. Vertical shifts generally speed up the interagency negotiation process (Tucker 1996).

### ***Phase 4: Issue Linkage and Other Consensus-building Techniques***

Soft agencies employ various tactics to convince hard-line agencies and actors of the benefits of the new policy or agreement. They employ both material and nonmaterial carrots and sticks. Material inducements include side payments to the resisting agencies, by making foreign funds available for the remit of their activities (Memişoğlu 2014). A non-material technique often used is "issue linkage," which could simply be linking two or more issues in bargaining. A popular example of this technique is to link the policy idea to a larger ideational aspiration or a pleasant historical memory with which most policy actors associate easily. Another one is to appeal to universal values such as international cooperation, peaceful resolution of conflicts, and international law, instead of fixating primarily on material interests. In this case, the actors are encouraged to act according to "the logic of appropriateness" rather than "the logic of consequences" (Müller 2004). Finally, another tactic is to resort to "constructive ambiguity," deliberately inserting ambiguity in a statement to allow for interpretation variation among the negotiating parties to prevent a breakdown of the deal (see Best 2008).

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### ***Phase 5: Informal Collaboration with the Other Side, Including Gray Area Deals***

Most negotiations are simultaneous processes at two or more levels (Putnam 1988; Patterson 1997). Soft-line actors, typically the chief negotiators, often informally coordinate their steps with their counterparts to develop, revise, package, and window-dress their policy positions in a way that will be acceptable to both sides' internal tables. They might alert each other to the sensitive "domestic" factors that may help or hinder the legitimacy and success of the negotiations (Tucker 1996). Their informal collaboration may also provide opportunities for the soft-line actors to take critical steps to manipulate and even deceive their hard-line partners in the interagency negotiations.

### **Background**

Facing a large flow of irregular migration, particularly from its eastern borders, the EU attempted to complete readmission agreements with neighboring countries starting from the 2000s (Trauner and Kruse 2008; Düvell, Collyer and Molodikova 2014). Based on the conditionality principle, readmission agreements were designed as incentive-based policy instruments coupled with visa facilitation/liberalization. In return for signing readmission agreements that contain the rules for managing the return of irregular migrants, the third countries were granted visa facilitation at the initial stage, providing their citizens facilitated procedures to obtain Schengen visas such as faster application processes, standardized application forms, and lower visa fees. Subsequently, visa liberalization dialogues were conducted based on visa liberalization road maps that contained benchmarks on border control, migration management, fundamental rights, public order, and document security. Once the benchmarks were fulfilled, the third country would be awarded visa liberalization, allowing their citizens with biometric passports to travel for short stays in the Schengen Area without a visa.

Based on the conclusions of the EU–Western Balkans Thessaloniki Summit of 2003, the EU launched visa liberalization dialogues with five Western Balkan countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. As a first step, these countries signed readmission agreements in return for visa facilitation agreements, resulting in the granting of visa-free travel to the citizens of Montenegro, Serbia, and North Macedonia in December 2009, and Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina in December 2010.

Türkiye has been one of the major transit countries through which a high volume of irregular migration has been flowing into the EU, originating from several source countries, including Syria and Iraq. In the

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year 2010, more than 47,000 irregular migrants entered the EU from the Turkish–Greek border alone, accounting for almost half of all the illegal entries to the EU (Frontex 2011). In particular, the Syrian civil war that erupted in March 2011 had serious consequences for the migration map of the region as millions of Syrians fled from the humanitarian crisis in their country. These migrants opt not to stay in Türkiye as Türkiye has been implementing the Geneva Convention on Refugees of 1951 while maintaining a geographical limitation clause that permits it not to grant refugee status for migrants from non-European source countries.

Thus, the EU had great motivation to conclude an RA that would require Türkiye to take back irregular migrants of third countries who have used Türkiye as a transit country on their way to EU countries. The RA has also been brought by the EU as a prerequisite to negotiate Chapter 24 on Justice, Freedom and Security.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, Türkiye was asked to pursue RA negotiations with the EU at a steady pace with a view to concluding them. However, an RA has been a particular cause of concern for Türkiye because of the agreement that it had to readmit the migrants who had transited from Türkiye. Unless it concluded RAs with the countries of origin, Türkiye would end up becoming a “dumping ground” for irregular migrants (Kirişçi 2008; İçduygu and Sert 2014). Without any burden sharing Türkiye would face high financial and social costs to provide shelter for the returned migrants. Besides, at a time when negotiations on Chapter 24 were blocked, there was a lack of any prospect for Turkish membership under the existing political circumstances.<sup>4</sup>

Türkiye reluctantly agreed to start the RA negotiations with the EU in 2005. But the Turkish side withdrew from the RA negotiations after the EU’s decision to suspend accession negotiations in December 2006 on eight chapters due to Türkiye’s position on the “Cyprus issue” (Interviewee C).<sup>5</sup> In November 2009 the EU offered incentives on visa and mobility issues that led Türkiye to accept resuming the RA negotiations in 2010 (Interviewee B). After seven rounds of negotiations, a final agreement was reached in January 2011. Yet, for the formal approval of the RA, Türkiye demanded to connect the RA and VLD processes as in the Western Balkans’ experiences. Türkiye would agree to initial it but sign the RA only when the EU took steps for the visa-free travel of Turkish citizens (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2011).

The EU offered Türkiye its standard approach of a visa facilitation-readmission agreement-visa liberalization package. Knowing how highly motivated the EU was to conclude a readmission agreement, Türkiye asked for differential treatment by skipping the visa facilitation agreement, since visa facilitation was perceived as an incentive for third countries, but not for a future member state (Interviewee C). Besides, Türkiye claimed that its process should differ from those of the Western Balkan countries

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due to its *sui generis* position vis-à-vis the EU. For one, an RA would have huge implications for Türkiye, which would have to readmit many more migrants, a number that could not be compared with the figures of the Western Balkan countries. Second, visa facilitation would also be an insult since Türkiye had a “privileged” status vis-à-vis other countries as an accession-negotiating country. Third, the Türkiye-EU Association Law<sup>6</sup> has already provided significant rights to freedom of movement for Turkish citizens. In particular, the progressive interpretations of the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) jurisprudence on the relevant provisions have paved the way for visa-free travel of Turkish citizens under certain conditions. Therefore, Turkish policymakers thought that visa facilitation was not an appropriate issue for discussion between Türkiye and the EU.

Even though member states were reluctant to accept Türkiye’s request, the European Commission, which is the executive body of the EU in charge of negotiating international deals, persuaded the member states to go beyond visa facilitation (Bürgin 2011). Türkiye agreed to sign the RA in June 2012 after the European Council gave the mandate to the European Commission to negotiate visa liberalization with Türkiye. Accordingly, the European Commission presented the VLD Road Map containing 72 requirements for visa-free travel with regard to border control, migration management, fundamental rights, public order, and document security. Among those 72 benchmarks there were tricky issues, such as the enforcement date of the RA vs. that of visa liberalization, international obligations related to the Cyprus issue, and requirements on fundamental rights and freedoms, which were subject to intense debate and formed the crux of the negotiations (Ministry for EU Affairs 2013).

Türkiye stated that it would sign the RA only after the parties agreed on a fair and applicable VLD Road Map free of political considerations. It expressed its opposition to the stipulation that the RA would commit the Turkish government long before visa-free travel for Turkish citizens was ensured, and to the condition that visa liberalization would be possible only through the fulfillment of many other commitments by Türkiye (Interviewee A). At a time of great Turkish skepticism toward the EU, signing the RA without a strong guarantee of visa liberalization created serious doubts among Turkish bureaucrats and policymakers. Closing the deal required an intense interagency negotiation process, particularly to get the hard-line agencies on board.

## **Prior to Intragovernmental Negotiations: Actors and their Initial Policy Positions**

There were four ministries involved in the preparation of Türkiye’s position on the RA-VLD negotiations with the EU Commission, namely, the

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Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Ministry for EU Affairs (MEU), the Ministry of Interior (MI), and the Ministry of Justice (MJ). The four ministers met under the Reform Monitoring Group (RMG), an ad hoc committee in which migration and visa issues were discussed thoroughly.

The MFA is one of the most respected public institutions of the country, founded on strongly established traditions of Ottoman diplomacy. As per Turkish legislation, the MFA is entitled to carry out international negotiations. On any topic of foreign policymaking, the opinions of other ministries are considered, yet the final position is shaped by the relevant unit at the MFA. Eventually, the FM and his cabinet are the competent authority for the final say on a foreign policy issue and an international negotiation position.

With regard to the RA-VLD deal, the MFA's initial position was shaped in a complicated manner, since units with diverse views were involved in the process. Türkiye's Permanent Representation to the EU (PermRep) told Ankara in July 2009 that the Western Balkan countries' RA-VLD agreements with the EU were noteworthy and that Türkiye could follow the same path and initiate the process (Interviewee E). Accordingly, the Directorate General of the EU (DGEU) responsible for coordinating the accession process supported the idea on the grounds that both the readmission agreement and the visa liberalization process would contribute highly to Türkiye's EU vocation (Interviewee C). However, the DG for Consulate (DGC) in charge of migration, asylum, and visa issues had serious reservations about the consequences of the RA (Interviewee C). The DGC was also quite sensitive on the implications of the deal that could have consequences on the Cyprus issue. In addition, the DGC argued that Türkiye would risk the acquired rights of Turkish citizens stemming from the Türkiye–EU Association Law by accepting the VLD deal (Interviewee C). Even though the DGC also emerged as one of the hard-line agencies suspicious of the negotiation process, its power to resist any settlement was restricted by the minister's position.

Unsurprisingly, the final position of the ministry was shaped by FM Ahmet Davutoğlu, who took office in May 2009. As a professor of international relations, Davutoğlu had a strong background in foreign policy, while as a novice politician he was quite ambitious to reap the opportunities at hand for a bright career in politics. Davutoğlu was in favor of the RA-VLD deal from the outset considering the political gains that could be made from the visa liberalization. Despite the opposition from the DGC, Davutoğlu was convinced that the deal would be a groundbreaker (Interviewee A). Based on the raw information received through the correspondence of the Permanent Representation, Davutoğlu first announced Türkiye's interest for connecting the RA and the VLD in

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the Türkiye–EU Intergovernmental Conference on 21 December 2009 ([Interviewee A](#)).

The MI was another main pillar of the bureaucratic establishment involved in the RA-VLD deal. The MI had been the competent authority in charge of the issues discussed in the readmission agreement negotiations, including policies on migration, asylum, international protection, temporary protection, protection of victims of human trafficking, and foreigners' entry into, stay in, exit, and removal from the country. Matters regarding visa liberalization were also partially within the scope of the ministry's responsibilities. Even though the issues at stake were in the remit of the MI, the final position on the RA-VLD deal as an international agreement was to be shaped by the MFA.

Two main units of the MI that took part in the interagency negotiation process were the Directorate General for Security (DGS) and the Immigration Bureau (IB). Both units had serious reservations about the deal on the grounds that Türkiye would become a dumping ground for irregular migrants through the implementation of the RA ([Interviewee B](#)). While the DGS retained its hard-line position all through the negotiations, the IB had a strong institutional stake that made it shift its position ([Interviewee B](#)). As part of the legal harmonization process, a new law in April 2013 expanded the tiny IB into a full-fledged Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM). The DGMM acted as a swing agency open to cooperating with soft-line agencies seeking a negotiated RA-VLD deal.

The third primary actor involved in the RA-VLD process was the MEU, originally established in July 2000 as a secretariat general under the Turkish Prime Ministry. The institution led the legal harmonization process for EU accession. Following the start of the accession negotiations in 2005, the EUSG was restructured as a full-fledged ministry with the establishment of new units. As the forerunner of the EU process in the country, the MEU has been one of the closest working partners of the EU institutions.

From the outset, the MEU had been a supporter of the RA-VLD, principally arguing that the Western Balkan cases had proven to be a success, which would lead to a similar outcome for Türkiye. Moreover, by concluding the RA, which was an opening benchmark of Chapter 24, accession negotiations would be advanced. The timing of the MEU's restructuring had coincided with the first-time pronouncement by Türkiye of the linkage of the RA and the VLD in December 2009 ([Interviewee A](#)). Based on the preliminary studies conducted by the newly founded EU Law Department, the leadership at the ministry was taken on board to go for the deal. Since the MEU was a relatively compact institution, the policymaking process led by the minister had been

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quite effective in designing its position and proactive in taking the lead vis-à-vis other ministries. As a close aide of Prime Minister (PM) Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, EU Minister Egemen Bağış had been an influential figure for supporting the successful completion of the RA-VLD deal.

Rather than seek an agreement at the cost of substantial concessions, the MEU played a facilitator role between hard-line domestic actors and their EU counterparts. As a soft-line agency, the MEU also reinforced its position by establishing alliances with external actors. For instance, in its argumentations, the MEU made effective use of the studies and shuttle diplomacy conducted by the European Stability Initiative, a European think tank supporting visa-free travel for the citizens of neighboring countries to the Schengen Area (Interviewee A).

A fourth ministerial agency involved, albeit at a later stage than the other ministries, was the MJ. The MJ joined the negotiations as the Road Map contained issues related to judicial matters. The ministry representatives from the Directorate General of External Affairs and the EU generally adopted conservative, hard-line approaches to EU demands, yet their influence was limited since the focus of the negotiations was on admission and visa issues, which were not directly in the remit of the MJ.

Another Turkish governmental actor involved in the RA-VLD process at the highest political level was the RMG, an ad hoc interministerial coordination committee set up in September 2003 composed of the Ministers of the MFA, the MI, the MEU, and the MJ. The RMG followed the developments in the EU accession process and ensured effective implementation of the reforms. Since the secretariat of the RMG was held by the MEU, the RA-VLD deal was brought to the RMG's agenda in a constructive, positive spirit. Beginning in February 2010 the RA-VLD negotiations were discussed in the RMG meetings. The hard-line MI could have brought its reservations to the highest political level, yet the two interior ministers in office during the period were not very much involved with the deal's technical matters, and were also politically low-profile, non-consequential figures. With his higher credibility with PM Erdoğan and his technical grasp of the items on the agenda, FM Davutoğlu had been able to eliminate any possible opposition to the deal by dominating the RMG meetings.

In the next section, which focuses on the interagency negotiation process, the opposing parties to the deal—the DGS of the MI and the DGC of the MFA—are classified as hard-line agencies, while the facilitators of the deal—PermRep in Brussels, the DGEU of the MFA, and the MEU—are categorized as soft-line agencies. However, such characterizations are not absolute. For instance, soft-line agencies agreed with the government's position on the Cyprus issue, which had represented a red

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line in Turkish foreign policy. Yet, their struggle was to make a deal with the EU under the given constraints.

## The Intragovernmental Negotiation Process

The European Commission presented the VLD Road Map containing 72 requirements for visa-free travel in July 2012. Although this was a standard process with defined performance criteria, the road maps of Western Balkan countries contained around 40 criteria, while Türkiye was expected to meet 72 requirements (Erdenir 2024). In her letter to Minister Davutoglu in January 2013, European Commissioner for Home Affairs Malmström stated that since the Road Map was a Commission document, endorsed by the Council and representing EU's position on the Readmission Agreement and Visa Liberalization Dialogue, she was “not requesting Turkey to endorse or to approve it” (see ESI 2013: 22). However, Türkiye was asked to implement it, just as any other third country had implemented RA-VLD to qualify for visa-free travel. Since Türkiye's adherence to the requirements of the agreement was evaluated by the European Commission, it was a process steered by the EU.

The Turkish interagency negotiations took place mainly between three ministries: the MFA, the MI, and the MEU. Later the MJ joined the negotiations, as the Road Map contained issues related to judicial matters. The meetings were chaired by the MFA officials as the ministry has the authority to conduct international negotiations. The reservations of the agencies on the benchmarks were noted in the meetings and consequently through official correspondence submitted to the MFA.

The first reaction of the Turkish agencies to the Road Map in July 2012 was unsurprisingly negative—they had around 40 objections to the criteria laid down in it (Interviewee D). Soft-line agencies claimed that since the Road Map was the Commission's document it naturally reflected the EU's position. But the hard-line agencies argued that since Türkiye was expected to meet the requirements for visa exemption, the document required extensive revision. Their objections focused on the timing of visa liberalization relative to the timing of the RA, burden sharing, Türkiye's becoming a party to international conventions, performance indicators used in the Commission's evaluation, democratization requirements, and benchmarks related to the Cyprus issue.

The Road Map required Türkiye to lift the geographical limitation set forth in the 1951 Geneva Convention, which allows Türkiye to limit its obligations under the Convention to refugees originating from member states of the European Council. Hard-line agencies (especially the DGS of the MI and the DGC of the MFA) fiercely opposed this benchmark, since—they argued—citizens of many non-European countries

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who needed to lodge asylum requests and seek refugee status protection would do so in Türkiye. Thus, Türkiye would become a target country for irregular migration. Türkiye proposed to consider lifting the geographical limitation to the Geneva Convention only at the time of its accession to the EU (Interviewee B).

Another problem was the Commission's criteria for assessing Türkiye's implementation of the benchmarks. The hard-line agencies claimed that the criteria were rather subjective, such as "the number of operations carried out by Turkish law enforcement agencies against criminal organizations dealing with trafficking of human beings and smuggling of migrants" or "the number of readmission applications rejected by Türkiye" (Interviewee B).

There were also controversial benchmarks related to fundamental rights and freedom of expression. The criteria to "ensure that freedom of movement of citizens of Turkey is not subject to unjustified restrictions, including measures of a discriminatory nature, based on any grounds" was objected to by the hard-liners, as Turkish citizens' right of free movement within Türkiye was a constitutionally guaranteed right and was applied without discrimination. Türkiye was also asked to revise its "legal framework of organized crime and terrorism, as well as its interpretation by the courts and by the security forces to ensure the right to liberty and security, the right to a fair trial and freedom of expression, of assembly and association in practice." The benchmark, which was quite ambiguous and extensive in scope, was not required from Western Balkan countries (Erdenir 2024). In particular, the MJ officials objected on the grounds that since the benchmark had no relevance to visa-free travel, it should have been discussed under the negotiations on Chapter 23 on Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, which had been politically blocked (Interviewee D).

Since the EU insisted that the Road Map was solely the Commission's document, the Commission did not agree to the Turkish sides' demands for revision and preserved the text of the Road Map of July 2012 until the end of negotiations. Soft-line agencies MEU and MFA's DGEU acted as facilitators to overcome the deadlock that arose with a one-size-fits-all solution in May 2013. They proposed that Türkiye be allowed to note its reservations within the Road Map under the related requirement. EU and Turkish positions would be compiled under a single document that would be called the "Annotated Road Map." There was no precedent for such an annotated text in EU legal practice (Interviewee C and Interviewee D). In total, 37 reservations were noted by Türkiye. The European Commission officials were open to the drafting of an annotated text as long as the EU's Road Map was preserved. The Turkish and EU officials agreed that the Annotated Road Map would be annexed to

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the agreed minutes, which would be signed by the parties on the day that they signed the RA. The minutes would explicitly state that “the two sides agreed that the VLD would be conducted on the basis of the annotated Road Map” (Ministry for EU Affairs 2013). Even though Türkiye’s reservations would be noted as a unilateral statement with the aim of excluding or modifying the legal effect of certain provisions, the practical application was unknown. In any case, hard-line agencies were kept on board.

Yet, two matters were still outstanding: the timing of the enforcement of the proposed agreement and its Cyprus-related stipulations. Perhaps the most contentious issue was the Road Map’s implications for the Cyprus issue. The requirement to implement the RA vis-a-vis all member states was problematic, since the “all” emphasis was meant to remind Türkiye that the RA should cover the Republic of Cyprus, along with 27 other EU member states (Interviewee C and Interviewee D).

Since the Cyprus issue could be a deal-breaker, the soft-line agencies assured the hard-line agencies that Türkiye would make an official statement when the RA was signed, emphasizing that Türkiye would not implement the RA as to the Republic of Cyprus. Yet the European Commission objected to this offer, arguing that the process could be jeopardized if the member states knew that a member state was being excluded from the deal. The soft-line agencies and the European Commission used a bit of sleight of hand by agreeing that Türkiye would physically hand in the statement to the European Commission’s DG Home Affairs official after the signature ceremony in Ankara rather than officially announcing it (Interviewee G).<sup>7</sup> As the statement never went public, a crisis was avoided. The situation was like Türkiye’s unilateral statement excluding the Republic of Cyprus from the implementation of the EU-Türkiye Association Agreement after it gained membership to the EU in 2004, which had serious political consequences. Similarly, Türkiye’s unilateral statement would have no legal effect on the evaluation of the VLD Road Map, which would be based on the European Commission’s own assessment. Yet, the opposition of the hard-liners on matters related to Cyprus was avoided.

One more major issue remained unsettled: Would the RA be enforced before visa liberalization? Since Türkiye wanted to ensure visa-free travel for its citizens by coupling visa liberalization with the RA, its position from the outset was that the RA for third-country nationals should be effective simultaneously with the granting of visa exemption for Turkish citizens. Yet, the EU’s position was that visa requirements for Turkish citizens would be lifted only when all the benchmarks of the VLD Road Map—including the implementation of the readmission agreement for third-country nationals—had been met. This could have

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been a deal-breaker since the European Commission was quite firm in its position, referring to precedential cases in which “the requirement of full implementation of the RA before visa-free travel was not a matter of politics, but a matter of practical functionality of the system” (Interviewee F).

Turkish soft-line agencies worked with DG Home Affairs to come up with an agreeable solution. The European Commission’s proposal was to sign agreed minutes for the first meeting of the VLD during the signature of the RA, noting Türkiye’s reservations on the issue. Article 24 of the RA gave the contracting parties the right to suspend the agreement. Accordingly, it would be noted in the agreed minutes that unless the EU started the legal process for lifting the visa requirement for Turkish citizens “within a reasonable time,” Türkiye would consider denouncing and terminating the RA (Ministry for EU Affairs 2013). The proposal would be a concession, as Türkiye had held previously to its “simultaneous enforcement” position but would now agree that the RA would be implemented first and the legal process on visa-free travel would be initiated afterward and depend on the performance of Türkiye. Unsurprisingly, the hard-line agencies in Türkiye opposed the proposal (Interviewee A and Interviewee F).

The expression “within a reasonable period of time” was particularly problematic due to its ambiguity. Hard-line agencies argued that a certain time limit should be specified. Since the European Commission would report every six months on the progress made by Türkiye in fulfilling the requirements set out in the Road Map, the minimum time could correspond to one reporting period; i.e., six months from full enforcement of the RA. To strike a balance, the soft-line agencies offered to replace the “reasonable period of time” expression with “six months” (one reporting period) but DG Home Affairs officials objected since there was no precedent for such a statement and it would be perceived as an instruction to the EU that would create political pressure on member states. Turkish soft-liners and the DG Home officials decided to make a backdoor deal. The “six months” proposal would be communicated by the PermRep to the European Commission by written correspondence and the DG Home would not reply, which would be presented to the hard-line agencies as covert consent by the European Commission (Interviewee F and Interviewee G). Thus, one of the deal-breaker issues would be resolved through diplomatic window dressing that may or may not be legally binding. Since Türkiye would be accepting a deviation from “simultaneous enforcement,” FM Davutoğlu had to intervene to neutralize the opposition of hard-line agencies (Interviewee A).

The interagency process demonstrates that the soft-line agencies came up with creative solutions through political manipulation; yet they

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also benefited from factual externalities that strengthened their arguments for approving the RA-VLD deal. The debate on the RA-VLD deal was closely connected with the Türkiye-EU Association Law, which had raised the possibility of visa-free travel for certain categories of travelers, particularly through progressive interpretations of the CJEU jurisprudence. CJEU's *Soysal* judgment of February 2009 had confirmed the right of certain categories of Turkish service providers to enter certain EU member states without a visa (CJEU 2009). The judgment, which came at a time when discussion on the RA-VLD deal had taken off, had provided a strong case for those who argued that the deal would put at risk Turkish citizens' acquired rights stemming from the Türkiye-EU Association Law. However, in September 2013, the CJEU's *Demirkan* Decision reversed the progressive line of interpretations on Turkish citizens' freedom of movement rights by ending the possibility of visa exemption for those traveling to the Schengen Area for tourism, medical treatment, education, business, and other purposes (CJEU 2013). The decision, which came at a critical time in the final phase of the negotiations, gave an edge to the soft-line agencies since it became apparent that visa-free travel would not be achieved through court rulings.

As part of its involvement in the Syrian civil war that started in 2011, Türkiye had an open-door policy, providing a haven for Syrians from the first day of the war. Türkiye granted temporary protection for 14,000 Syrians by the end of 2012, a number that increased 16-fold by the end of 2013, reaching 224,000 (Ministry of Interior 2014). The unregistered number was much higher. At a time when hard-liners were wary about the third-country nationals that could be returned through the RA, the scale of the Syrian flow was quite striking. In fact, it was estimated that the number of third-country migrants returned through the RA would be roughly 5,000 per year (ESI 2013:16). Soft-line agencies strongly argued that readmitting 5,000 third-country nationals a year would be a negligible figure when compared with the increasing number of Syrians, yet it would pave the way for visa liberalization.

Soft-line agencies also emphasized the significance of the Road Map's requirements in improving Türkiye's asylum system and integrated border management. The Law on Foreigners and International Protection, enacted in April 2013, was an important step for the modernization of the system as well as a benchmark to indicate the country's commitment to the introduction of international standards and norms into its asylum system. As Türkiye strengthened its asylum system and established an integrated border management system, the number of irregular migrants transiting Türkiye would decline, which would further reduce the number of returned third-country nationals. At the end of the day, it was Türkiye's responsibility to take care of its borders. Moreover, the establishment of

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the DGMM through the law served as a side payment, reducing the level of the MI's opposition to the deal ([Interviewee B](#)).

Owing in great measure to the creative, manipulative, dubious methods used by the soft-line agencies to keep the hard-liners on board, negotiations with the EU were concluded successfully; on 16 December 2013 the RA was signed and the VLD was initiated.

### **Untangling the RA-VLD Migration Agreement Puzzle**

As noted above, we opted to trace the RA-VLD process by viewing it as a set of overlapping phases. Delving into the intricacies of the case, we noticed that the interagency negotiation process did not follow a perfectly linear path; rather it progressed in a broadly linear trajectory—as we had expected. In this section, we interpret the case material by analyzing the phase-by-phase flow within our conceptual framework to offer a solution to the RA-VLD puzzle.

Türkiye's Permanent Representation to the EU first raised for Ankara the idea of approaching the EU for a migration deal that contained mainly readmission and visa liberalization, like the ones between the Western Balkan countries and the EU during the period. The MEU, as a soft-line agency, took the initiative by supporting the idea and framing such an agreement as an extension of Türkiye's long-term pro-Western diplomatic identity, shared values, and common interests. The ministry thus invoked the logic of appropriateness rather than the logic of consequences ([Interviewee A](#); [Interviewee D](#); [Tucker 1996](#)).

When Davutoğlu became the FM, the foreign ministry's skepticism gave way to cautious optimism. Politically ambitious and relatively autonomous, FM Davutoğlu began to play the role of a policy entrepreneur in migration and visa diplomacy. In May 2009, he became the main ideologue and implementor of Turkish foreign policy. FM Davutoğlu brought the visa liberalization issue to the table with the EU leadership in December 2009. Several years later, in 2013, a “negotiation turn” took place in Türkiye's migration policy, as the Turkish state abandoned its hard bargaining diplomatic identity ([Wolff 2014](#)).

It seems that a twin process of change took place at the time: a horizontal shift of gravity (from the MEU to the MFA, though not all departments were active supporters), and a vertical shift of gravity (toward FM Davutoğlu) within the policymaking apparatus ([Interviewee A](#) and [Interviewee C](#)). Davutoğlu also made use of the RMG meetings by neutralizing the hard-line ministries. Hence, he occupied a powerful position within Turkish foreign policymaking and Turkish politics in general.

The argument that bureaucratic politics (and interagency negotiations) is often a by-product of presidential (or prime ministerial in this case) inattention seems to have some validity ([Art 1973](#)). Indeed, Prime

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Minister Erdoğan did not seem to take strong interest in the migration negotiations with the EU and delegated decision-making power to FM Davutoğlu. There was no clear, formally approved governmental guidance on the migration policy negotiation with the EU by the highest executive authority at the time, the prime minister (see [Tucker 1996](#)). Combined with the horizontal and vertical shifts of gravity toward the chief negotiator, this provided Davutoğlu with a high degree of flexibility and allowed for a large “zone of possible agreement” ([Sebenius 2024](#)) between the negotiation teams.

The chief negotiator and the soft-line agencies had another crucial advantage: they often had open communication channels with relevant technocrats and EU Commission leaders, which facilitated cross-the-table coordination of activities and diplomatic tactics. This socialization and facilitation were made possible in large part because the personnel of these ministries and the Commission had been involved in the membership negotiation process during the 2000s and knew quite well each other’s way of doing business, policy concerns, and aspirations.

FM Davutoğlu (in reality, as the chief negotiator) and the soft-line actors framed the issue as a stepping stone for Türkiye’s European vocation, utilizing the rhetoric of the logic of appropriateness rather than the logic of consequences and the realization of long-term interests rather than short-term ones ([Müller 2004](#)). As these grand values and aspirations were invoked, it has become much more difficult for the Eurosceptic bureaucratic and political actors, such as the MI, to obstruct the negotiation process. For instance, RA-VLD agreement was seen as an opportunity to open new chapters in the accession negotiations in lieu of advancing along the lines of the membership negotiations. Soft-line agencies and actors regarded the deal as a vital part of a “grand bargain” ([Sebenius 2024](#)) between the EU and Türkiye.

They noticed that FM Davutoğlu developed personal ownership of the issue and dominated the interagency debates. He was convinced that a deal with the EU could boost his own and his party’s electoral fortunes and he could achieve something of historic significance, as the issue of visa-free travel in the EU for Turks had been an emotional issue since the early 1980s. Davutoğlu was seen as the next prime minister following Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s expected move to the presidency. Therefore, he was the most dominant political figure in the cabinet after Erdoğan, and no minister or bureaucrat would question his broad aspirations—indeed, a sign of democratic corrosion in Türkiye.

Even though most of the hard-line agencies remained unconvinced, they could not unleash obstructionist tactics to paralyze the interagency negotiations. The Turkish soft-line actors fabricated a context of “constructive ambiguity” to assuage the concerns of the hard-line actors. The

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soft-liners occasionally inserted the hard-liners' concerns into the working documents (with dubious legal enforceability) to disarm the hard-liners in the negotiations. For instance, although the Annotated Road Map was an idea of the Turkish soft-line diplomats to incorporate the hard-line agencies' reservations, there was no precedent for such a text in EU legal practice. In fact, in the consequent visa liberalization negotiations between Turkish and European officials post-December 2013, reference was never made to the Annotated Road Map. In April 2014, during the first follow-up meeting on the Road Map, the DG Home official heading the EU delegation explicitly stated that the Annotated Road Map was merely a document containing Türkiye's reservations and was not binding, and the only reference document would be the Road Map that was prepared by the EU (Interviewee D). The Annotated Road Map was never published on the European Commission's website, nor mentioned by Commission officials thereafter (European Commission 2013). The method applied to ease the concerns of the hard-line agencies turned out to be a gray-zone tactic.

Gray-zone tactics enabled soft-line agencies to bypass hard-line agencies by introducing vague interpretations. However, these tactics reduced interagency transparency, undermining mutual trust and long-term institutional coherence. Moreover, ambiguous terms (e.g., "within a reasonable time") and nonbinding documents (such as the Annotated Roadmap and the statement on Cyprus) brought the risk of blame shifting when expectations were not met. This weakened bureaucratic accountability, as no single actor could be held fully responsible for implementation failures or unfulfilled promises. Meanwhile, the use of diplomatic sleight of hand (the handover of the Cyprus statement; informal "silent approval" on deadlines) prioritized informal work-arounds over transparent procedures. In a bureaucracy already prone to hierarchical opacity and centralization, this reliance on ambiguous, informal tactics normalized non-transparent, personality-driven policymaking.

These practices amounted to a form of constructive ambiguity, which facilitated the temporary bridging of sharp interagency and international divergences. Yet this ambiguity came at a significant cost to institutional trust, policy transparency, and the credibility of long-term cooperation. Domestically, it entrenched opaque and personalized decision-making processes; externally, it intensified skepticism and strained the trust-based mechanisms underpinning EU-Türkiye engagement. These risks highlight a critical dilemma: while constructive ambiguity can serve as a pragmatic tool for overcoming short-term bureaucratic and diplomatic impasses, it must be carefully delimited and ultimately clarified. Otherwise, it risks functioning less as a diplomatic instrument and more as a latent trigger for future breakdown. The trajectory of the RA-VLD agreement illustrates this concern. Although ambiguity facilitated the

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conclusion of the deal in 2013, unresolved issues—particularly concerning Cyprus and visa liberalization benchmarks—resurfaced after 2016, demonstrating the long-term liabilities of such an approach.

Another instrument to soften hard-line agencies was through side payments. Hard-line agencies and actors (the MI, the MJ, and some within the MFA) felt compelled to revise their initial positions. A few hard-line actors became convinced that the cost of failing to reach a deal would leave them worse off than the status quo and leaned toward accepting a settlement. The agencies that would be responsible for the implementation of the RA-VLD agreement felt they were under heavy financial and administrative burdens. Given the sustained pressures from migratory dynamics, they voiced their concerns regarding the limitations of their agency capacities and the urgent need for organizational reforms. Thus, over time, the hard-line agencies' priority shifted from being overwhelmed by the sheer size of the burden to benefiting from the renewed political interest in boosting their financial resources to strengthen their organizational capacity and scale up their agency. For example, it was important to neutralize their pessimism and gain the support of the MI by expanding its capacity through setting up a new unit within the ministry—the DGMM—with the duty of implementing readmission procedures as well as fulfilling other migration-related duties. This new agency could develop its capacity through projects financed by the EU funds.

We observe that Chief Negotiator Davutoğlu negotiated with EU Commissioner Malmström with a lot of diplomatic flexibility. The EU side benefited from its overall power asymmetry with Türkiye. FM Davutoğlu's leading position within the intragovernmental negotiations, and his political ambition to reach a historic deal and become the leader who opened the doors of Europe for Turkish citizens, led to a soft-line negotiation stand vis-à-vis the Commission's Chief Negotiator Malmström.

When these observations are brought together, we can untangle why the Turkish state backtracked from its initial position of insisting on the intimate link and tit for tat between RA and visa-free travel for Turkish citizens. The surrounding regional/global conjuncture was important for the impulse to initiate the deal, but the key changes that drove the shift in the Turkish position were mostly related to the nature and personalities of the Turkish domestic political scene and the negotiation techniques used for consensus building.

## Conclusion

Our analysis points to the crucial importance of bargaining among various state agencies and political leaders in shaping the state's negotiation position in its foreign diplomatic endeavors. International negotiations

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cannot be understood fully without a serious analysis of the domestic intragovernmental negotiations leading up to them. Therefore, it is time for negotiation studies to recognize the vital role of intragovernmental bargaining and ensure that it is no longer overlooked in the field of negotiation theory and practice.

We observe that the intragovernmental negotiation process is often intimately linked to the external negotiation process (Putnam 1988). There are often (informal) flows of information and ideas between the state and the external actor (in our case the EU Commission) (Patterson 1997). This is one reason why interagency negotiations cannot follow a neatly linear path; the actors must revisit their positions, considering fresh inputs provided by external stakeholders. Yet, a flexible phase-by-phase approach to interagency negotiation is still highly useful to ensure that the analysis remains anchored primarily in the negotiations among the domestic agencies prior to the start of the external engagement.

As intragovernmental negotiations have become more open to external influences in recent decades through hyperconnectivity, the soft-liners' toolbox for persuading hard-liners seems to expand, especially into the informal and often gray zone. Our case study shows ample use of such techniques to assuage the hard-liners within their own government—with the collaboration of the other side—and overcome potentially deal-breaking deadlocks. Unfortunately, the negotiation literature focuses more on the legal tools of deals, but in a period of declining support for legalism, negotiation scholars cannot ignore the use of informal and legally dubious practices.

We demonstrate that three major deadlocks that challenged interagency negotiations were overcome by resorting to such informal and even shady practices to create contexts of constructive ambiguity to obfuscate the disagreements: excluding Cyprus from the application of the RA, a “six-months period” deadline for visa liberalization, and the legal value of the Annotated Road Map. As discussed above, all three issues involved using techniques that left the outcome as a matter of interpretation, allowing the negotiating teams to pacify the hard-liners on the Turkish side. As these kinds of negotiation practices seem to have proliferated in recent decades, they must be subjected to more rigorous conceptual and empirical scrutiny.

We also note that the policy entrepreneur, if there is one around, could be highly influential in changing intragovernmental negotiation dynamics, especially if they are politically powerful. Indeed, in our case, FM Davutoğlu played a pivotal role in pushing the RA-VLD deal through the Turkish state apparatus using positive-sum rhetoric and an ambitious vision of future Türkiye–EU relations. However, what followed this episode showed that basing an agreement's fate mainly upon an individual

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policymaker's driving power is likely to lead to policy blunders. Below, we offer a short postscript on developments after the adoption of the RA-VLD Agreement that indicate how this occurs.

FM Davutoğlu's political achievements and increasing popularity in the Justice and Development Party paved his way to become Türkiye's 26th prime minister in August 2014. Meanwhile, because of the increasing pressure of irregular migration flowing from Türkiye, Türkiye and the EU agreed on a new deal called the "EU–Turkey Statement" on 18 March 2016, with the aim of relieving the refugee crisis. In return, the visa liberalization process would be accelerated—to the end of June 2016 at the latest—with a view to lifting the visa requirements for Turkish citizens. This was a deal closed by PM Davutoğlu with a small group within the MFA without consulting the other relevant agencies in the Turkish bureaucracy and without properly informing President Erdoğan (Interviewee G). Even though the deal succeeded in curbing illegal migration into Europe transiting through Türkiye and significant steps were taken for visa liberalization, Prime Minister Davutoğlu found himself at odds with President Erdoğan and resigned in May 2016, leaving the VLD process unowned. Especially after 2016, Türkiye–EU relations deteriorated and Türkiye never implemented the third-country provisions of the RA, announcing in 2019 that it had unilaterally suspended the agreement. Since then, the hope for visa-free travel of Turkish citizens to Schengen countries has faded away.

This update compels us to stress that the recent populist authoritarian wave in many countries has impacted their intragovernmental negotiation processes. The recent literature indicates that there are detrimental effects of populist authoritarian governments on their foreign policymaking, including de-institutionalization of foreign ministries and hyper-personalization of the policymaking process (see Özdamar and Yanik 2024). Negotiation scholars must give more attention to these influences on intragovernmental dynamics, including their effects on transparency, the quality of the decisions made, and groupthink dynamics.

## NOTES

1. The views presented in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official opinion of the Directorate for European Union Affairs, Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
2. This article focuses specifically on interagency negotiations, where the locus of our analysis is preferably within the domestic realm. External stimuli are taken into account by and large by the soft-line agencies, with significant impact on the flow of the negotiations within the executive. Extending the analysis further on the basis of a two- or even three-level game model may be a promising research endeavor but would be beyond the remit of this article.

3. Türkiye's EU accession negotiations were launched in October 2005. The negotiations are carried out based on chapters that stand for specific topics of the EU legislation.
4. Almost half of the negotiation chapters are blocked on political grounds. The negotiation process has been de facto stalled since 2016.
5. Türkiye does not recognize the Republic of Cyprus, which became a member of the EU in 2004. After the 2004 enlargement of the EU, Türkiye signed a protocol extending the Türkiye–EU Association Agreement to new members. However, it annexed a unilateral declaration reiterating that Türkiye did not recognize the Republic of Cyprus.
6. Türkiye–EU Association Law corresponds to an aggregate body of legal instruments including the Ankara Agreement in 1964, the Additional Protocol of 1973, the decisions of the Türkiye–EU Association Council, and the Case Law of the CJEU on the interpretation of the relevant provisions.
7. The Permanent Representative of Türkiye to the EU gave the statement to the European Commission's Director General of Home Affairs during the return flight from Ankara to Brussels after the signing ceremony.

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## INTERVIEW CODING

- A: Confidential interview, Ministry of European Union Affairs official, November 2024, Ankara
- B: Confidential interview, Ministry of Interior official, November 2024, Ankara
- C: Confidential interview, Ministry of Foreign Affairs official, November 2024, Ankara
- D: Confidential interview, Ministry of European Union Affairs official, December 2024, Ankara
- E: Confidential interview, Permanent Representation to the EU official (former), December 2024, Ankara
- F: Confidential interview, Ministry of European Union Affairs official (former), December 2024, Ankara
- G: Confidential interview, Permanent Representation to the EU official (former), January 2025, Istanbul