

# Euroscepticism during COVID-19: The Case of Turkish Media

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**Abstract:** *This paper analyses de-legitimisation and Eurosceptic attitudes in Turkey as reflected in newspapers during the COVID-19 pandemic between 15 March 2020 and 30 May 2021. Easton's (1975) specific support about concrete policy outcomes and Scharpf's (1998) output-oriented legitimisation theories are utilised in testing the hypothesis on de-legitimisation of EU-ropes in both pro and against government media in relation to EU-ropes's policies towards the "fight" against COVID-19 since Euroscepticism influences the political discourse in general regardless of political or ideological position. In the paper, EU-ropes is used, instead of European Union (EU) and Europe as two different terminologies, since the analysed newspapers utilise EU and Europe interchangeably. Five newspapers are included in the analysis for this study: Hürriyet, Sabah, Karar, Gazete Pencere and BirGün based on their political and ideological stances. In the research, online archives of the newspapers are utilised, and in each newspaper the op-eds are excluded from the analysis. The main focus is given to the news – headlines on Europe and the EU. Keywords that are looked for in newspapers are EU, Europe, vaccine, BioNTech, Sinovac, Coronavirus, COVID-19, and the pandemic. It has been observed that, regardless of political ideologies and the position of newspaper at the left-right political spectrum, Euroscepticism became a common attitude.*

**Keywords:** *Euroscepticism, COVID-19, Turkey, Europe, de-legitimisation.*

## Introduction

Turkey's relations with the EU are a long-winded story. On the one hand Turkey's candidacy is still on the table and on the other hand both actors are sceptical of each other. The Justice and Development Party (JDP) government was pro-European in its policies, at the beginning of the 2000s. However, in time, the Turkish foreign policy's shift of axis from West to East has been debated widely. The government's rhetoric became more Eurosceptic and opposition had a more European stance especially in the 2010s. Relations with EU-ropes, membership to the EU and the western orientation of Turkish foreign policy were a constant focus in public discourse and the legitimisation of Turkey's link with EU-ropes has been a dividing issue. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic and the vaccine policies have become a part of the political discourse while merits of cooperation with EU-ropes were questioned. The "fight" against COVID-19 and the rhetoric in this "fight" have been highly politicised. The media is polarised in Turkey, either pro or against government, and they have had different takes on the "fight" against COVID-19 in the country. Media at the pro pole praised the government

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policies while having a more sceptical attitude towards EU-ropes and its “fight” against COVID-19 highlighting the lack of solidarity and inadequacy of the health services in EU-ropes. On the other hand, the possibility of gaining access to multiple sources of vaccines from China and Russia was complimented. At the opposite side, although the government policies were heavily criticised, EU-ropes and its policies were approached warily. In this paper, as detailed in the section about Euro-scepticism in Turkey, Euro-scepticism is utilised as a pragmatic tool in the politics. The EU-ropes became a heated debate topic in Turkish domestic politics, thus although the policies of the EU or EU member states do not directly affect Turkey’s COVID-19 policies, the performance of the EU-ropes countries in their fight against COVID became a tool in legitimisation or de-legitimisation of EU-ropes. Here, the aim is to compare the rhetoric utilised in pro and against government newspapers and test the following hypothesis: De-legitimisation of EU-ropes can be observed in both pro and against government media in relation to EU-ropes’ policies towards the “fight” against COVID-19, given that Euro-scepticism generally influences the political discourse regardless of political or ideological position. Also, in this study EU-ropes is used, instead of EU and Europe as two different terminologies, since the analysed newspapers utilise EU and Europe interchangeably.

Five newspapers are included in the analysis for this study: *Hürriyet*, *Sabah*, *Karar*, *Gazete Pencere* and *BirGün*. These papers are selected based on their political attitude towards the government and their ideological positions. *Hürriyet* was one of the well-established mainstream newspapers until it was sold to a pro-government business group in 2018. *Sabah*, established in the mid-1980s, was bought by a pro-government company in 2008, and since then it has been one of the biggest pro-government newspapers in the country while mainstream writers and journalist either left or have been sacked. *Karar* started to be published in 2016 and has a conservative, nationalist – opposition political position. *Gazete Pencere*, established in 2019, is one of the new media examples since it is only published online (as PDF) and sent to subscribers’ e-mails. While it brings together writers with different ideological positions, mainstream would be the most suitable word to label its political stance. Finally, *BirGün* is a left wing daily, founded in 2004. Its political orientation is likened to European left’s position. The time frame for the analysis is set as 15 March 2020 – 30 May 2021. The WHO categorised COVID-19 as a pandemic in March 2020 and vaccination started in January 2021 in Turkey. First the Sinovac was applied to elderly citizens and by the end of May 2021 both Sinovac and BioNTech were available for all the citizens over the age of 50. In this period, the debate on the vaccination, the choice of vaccines, the success and failure of the vaccination campaign was controversial. May 2021 was also the last month in which the final full lockdown was enforced in Turkey. By the end of May 2021, gradual normalisation started in the country. Thus, the paper intends to put special focus on the period starting with COVID-19 being officially declared a pandemic and ending with COVID-19 measures being loosened and the normalisation process kicked off. In this paper, news on solidarity, health system and vaccines are examined, more specifically EU-ropes and COVID-19. The analysis carried for the purpose of this paper will support formulating specific conclusions on the impact of COVID-19 on how EU-ropes has been portrayed in the Turkish media and de-legitimised.

### **Euroscepticism**

The legitimisation aspect in Euroscepticism literature has been concentrated in two main categories: specific/utilitarian output-oriented and diffuse/affective input-oriented legitimisation. Thomassen (2009) argues that for input-oriented legitimisation to occur, the politics should be based on the will of the people and reflect authentic preferences of the members of the community, usually provided through majority rule in democracies. Here, the politics need to share cultural, ethnic, sometimes religious, and ethnic commonalities. Thus, Scharpf (1998) argues, the EU needs to focus on output-oriented legitimisation since it lacks these commonalities. Output-oriented legitimisation is rather seen as utilitarian and specific since it is concerned with problem solving and specific interests (Scharpf, 1998). Niedermayer and Westle (1995) notice that the terms “specific” and “utilitarian” are used synonymously in the literature, as well as the terms “diffuse” and “affective”. Utilitarian attitudes are one of the dimensions that Boomgaarden et al. specifies in categorizing components of the overall notion of EU attitudes (2011, p. 258). They argue that multidimensionality of EU attitudes bears important implications for the legitimacy of European integration and this legitimacy expressed by citizens is not static over time. Also, the support may be at different levels for different types of policy areas. Therefore, defining Euroscepticism as lack of support for the EU would not be sufficient.

Another definition of Euroscepticism is Boomgaarden et al.’s categorisation; performance, identity, affection, utilitarianism and strengthening. Performance is related to the evaluation of functioning of European institutions; identity means identification with the EU and European history, affection requires feeling close towards the EU, utilitarian is closely related to benefiting from the EU and strengthening its support for policy transfer to the EU (Boomgaarden et al., 2011). We see utilitarian Euroscepticism in Sorensen’s research along with sovereignty based, democratic and social Euroscepticism.

Specific and diffuse modes of support were differentiated by Easton. He also suggested that Eurosceptic attitudes differ according to the object which they are addressing (the community, regime, and the authorities) (Easton, 1975). Specific support is about concrete policy outcomes or the performance of a policy while diffuse support is related to the representation of the object (Boomgaarden et al., 2011), the European Union in Europe’s case. Lindberg and Scheingold’s (1970) differentiation between utilitarian and affective perspectives are similar to Easton’s (1975) categorisation. They define utilitarian as the support based on interests in the costs and benefits of membership in the EU, and thus it is policy oriented such as the “specific”. Affective resembles the “diffuse” and it is based on emotional response to ideals included in the notion of European unity.

As the legitimacy of a political system comes partly from the general support for it, we focus on these different modes of support and in particular the output oriented/specific one and looking at the perception of the functioning of the EU, i.e., how efficient one finds European institutions/policies (Opp, 2005).

After the Maastricht Treaty, when the European Union created a new political order, Euroscepticism has been discussed more and became a natural part of European studies. Also, in the post-Treaty Europe, the distinction between European and

domestic policy was blurred while the future of the European cooperation remained questioned (Usherwood and Startin, 2012). Taggart defined Euroscepticism as “the idea of contingent or qualified opposition as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration” (Taggart 1998, p. 365). He also distinguishes between hard Euroscepticism (rejection of the entire project) and soft Euroscepticism (contingent opposition to integration, opposition to specific policies or national interest opposition). Differentiating between economic, political, and cultural Euroscepticism has been another way to define the term. Economic conditions impact the political attitudes and political Euroscepticism is often related to deciding in favour of less supranational control. Cultural Euroscepticism is very much related to the same desire due to the strong attachment to exclusive national identity (Schoene, 2019). The studies have shown that as citizens’ perceptions of cultural threats increase, they become less supportive of European integration (Krouwel and Abts, 2007). This type of Euroscepticism was more observed after the “migrant” crisis of 2015.

Euroscepticism is not the only terminology used to explain the opposition to the EU. For example, Euro distrust, Euro cynicism and Euro alienation are defined by Krouwel and Abts (2007). Euro distrust is the result of perceived failure of the EU to meet the demands of its citizens. Euro cynicism is taking this feeling a step further. It is the disbelief in the functioning of the EU institutions. Euro alienation is defined as the profound rejection of the EU (Krouwel and Abts, 2007). Kopecky and Mudde’s (2002) categorisation includes Euro enthusiasts (supporting the ideas of European integration and the general practice of integration), Euro rejects (rejecting both the ideas and practice), Euro sceptics (support the idea of a united Europe, but disagree with the practice of integration) and Euro pragmatists (against the idea of integration, but support the practice) (Vasilopoulou, 2009).

As the literature on Euroscepticism shows, it is constantly adapting itself to the EU Zeitgeist and it is affected by international political tone (Vasilopoulou, 2013). It has been argued that Euroscepticism involves both “mass attitudes towards the current workings of the EU and the project of European integration” (Serrichio, Tsakatika and Quaglia, 2013). McLaren suggests that negative attitudes towards the EU at the mass level reflect negative attitudes towards integration efforts (McLaren 2006, p. 21). In Vasilopoulou’s work, three types of Euroscepticism are defined: rejecting, conditional and compromising. In the first type, the Eurosceptics are against any type of cooperation. In the conditional one, they are not against the principle of cooperation but against the practice of the EU framework and the future deepening. The third type, compromising means that people are accepting both the principle and practice of the EU, but not the future integration (Vasilopoulou, 2009). In shaping these attitudes, media is seen as an important tool in increasing or decreasing the Euroscepticism “depending on the pervasiveness of the news and individual level characteristics including the level of political sophistication” (de Vreese 2007, p. 274). Perloff argues that the relationship between the media and the people is not one dimensional since media can influence the people through news framing and agenda setting (Perloff, 2003). It has been seen that when people receive more constructive messages about the EU, the Euroscepticism is less observed (Schuck and de Vreese, 2006). In the last decade, we have observed an increase in populism including an anti-European rhetoric in the political sphere all around Europe. Similar to political parties such as UKIP (UK), National Rally (France),

Golden Dawn (Greece), several political parties - i.e., Ataka (Bulgaria), UPR (Poland), L'SNS (Slovakia) in Central and Eastern European countries have increasing nationalist rhetoric (Gherghina et al, 2017), aspect highly reflected in the media too. Thus, the negative messages about the EU were much more widespread in the media than in the previous decade. As Krouwel and Abts (2007) argue, populism not only mobilises negative stances such as distrust and cynicism, but also transforms and funnels attitudes towards more negative rejective positions.

For this paper, Easton's specific support about concrete policy outcomes, Scharpf's output oriented legitimisation are utilised in understanding the Euroscepticism in Turkish media and how the EU was delegitimised during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Euroscepticism in Turkey**

The year 2004 was the turning point regarding the public support for the EU in Turkey. Since then, the support level decreased constantly (Şenyuva, 2019) and although the negotiations for full membership started in 2005, we have seen the first below 50% support in the same year's Eurobarometer surveys. Not only this decrease, but a general anti-Western attitude have also been widely seen in the country. As Yılmaz (2011) argues, West-scepticism has left its mark on almost all ideologies of the left and the right. There have been several reasons for Eurosceptic attitudes in Turkey such as nationalism, perceived negative discrimination by the EU towards Turkey, EU's minimal financial support to Turkey as opposed to other candidate countries, national values, and territorial integrity (Çiçek, 2012). EU's reluctance to admit Turkey as a future member increased Turkey's self-confidence (Aydın-Düzgüt and Şenyuva, 2021). In the literature we see several references to Sevres and Tanzimat syndromes (Yılmaz, 2006) related to the perceived existential threat to the unity of the state and sovereignty. The Treaty of Sèvres, signed in 1920, is kept alive mainly through the education system and popular discourse which enforces the distrust of the Turkish people towards Europe. As Ergül-Jorgensen and Aydoğan-Ünal argue, its impact on Turkish psychology is profound and can be observed in the "anxiety of seeing the western countries as the potential dividers and/or imperialistic powers" (Ergül-Jorgensen and Aydoğan-Ünal, 2017, p. 65). Aydın-Düzgüt (2018) contends that othering of Europe and the Sèvres Syndrome become the official discourse of Turkey during the JDP government with a strong reference to the Ottoman past. Similarly, Çınar (2018) argues that JDP is a native political movement with the aim of "making Turkey great again" and its supporters have internalised the principles of populism (Aytaç and Elçi 2019, p. 90).

The trust issue (Eylemer and Taş, 2007) in Turkey-EU relations, together with a strong Turkish national identity, prevents individuals from supporting Turkey's membership to the Union (Kentmen, 2008). Nevertheless, it has been always a priority for the political parties in Turkey to achieve EU membership. Dikici Bilgin's study on political parties and anti-western attitudes document that "the way [the political parties] conceptualise being an EU member and their perceptions regarding the potential benefits and costs of accession vary with their ideological orientation" (Bilgin 2016, p. 15). Macmillan argued that the Kemalist Republican People's Party (RPP)'s Euroscepticism is different than the JDP's Euroscepticism since JDP discourse framed

Europe as an “inferior other” meaning that being part of Europe is not the main target, but Europe simply is a “neighbour among others, from which it can learn much but to which it also has much to teach” (Macmillan 2013, p. 118).

Party politics, Euro-scepticism and public opinion have been studied more regularly in the 2000s. When we look at the literature before the 2000s, it has been contested that neither public opinion nor its impact on parties and policy choices were studied in depth. In the 1990s, Esmer and Erder’s studies were the only data collecting studies having a focus on European Union. In the 2000s, other researchers such as Çarkoğlu, Erzan, Kirişçi and Kalaycıoğlu joined these pioneers. Çarkoğlu finds that all major parties except for the pro-Islamist Felicity Party, a clear majority supports Turkey joining the EU in 2003 (Çarkoğlu, 2003) and he argues that in 2006 “public opinion support for the EU membership have matured and gained a partisan flavour and as people become less convinced of the benefits and likelihood of membership the levels of support decrease” (Çarkoğlu, 2006, p. 155). Another research highlighting the Euro-scepticism’s power to bring people from different political orientations is Güneş-Ayata’s paper on changing political attitudes on the EU in Turkey (Güneş-Ayata, 2003). She gives the example of a full-page Euro-sceptic declaration in the form of an advertisement addressed to the “Turkish nation that founded the Turkish Republic” signed by the people who had been fighting each other two decades ago at the left and right of the political spectrum. Yılmaz (2011) points to the neo-nationalist (ulusalcı) thought in Turkey and argues that West-scepticism (Euro-scepticism and anti-Americanism) has found an autonomous and authentic articulation in neo-nationalism emphasizing secularism and Turkish identity. Taraktaş (2008) studies the neo-nationalist discourse and demonstrates that the uncertainty of accession efforts affects public opinion and party positioning.

One can also find studies on the issue utilizing Gramsci’s common sense (Yaka, 2016), Occidentalism (Büyükbay 2014), religion, culture, morality, norms, and westernisation. Euro-scepticism from a public opinion perspective is one of the topics that has been studied in EU-Turkey relations extensively. Both the university research centres and think tanks conduct surveys as part of longitudinal studies. In this paper, Euro-scepticism is studied from an output-oriented perspective and policy outcomes in the COVID-19 pandemic as portrayed in Turkish newspapers, bearing in mind media’s impact on shaping views on Europe as well as (de)legitimizing EU-ropo. This paper aims to contribute to the literature by analysing Turkish newspapers’ perspectives during the COVID-19 in relation to their political stance in the framework of Euro-scepticism literature and question the impact of political and/or ideological positions of the newspapers on the news they deliver.

### **Methodology**

Our hypothesis is de-legitimation of EU-ropo can be observed in both pro and against government media in relation to EU-ropo’s policies towards the fight against COVID-19, given that Euro-scepticism generally influences the political discourse regardless of political or ideological position. To test this, we focus on the discourse of five newspapers published in Turkey having either pro or against government political stance. The time frame for the analysis is set as 15 March 2020 – 30 May 2021. In the

analysis, online archives of the newspapers are utilised, and in each newspaper the op-eds are excluded from the analysis. The main focus is given to the news – headlines on Europe and the EU. Keywords that are looked for in the research are EU, Europe, vaccine, BioNTech, Sinovac, Coronavirus, COVID-19 and pandemic.

In this paper, five newspapers are selected based on their political positioning – pro-government vs. opposition. In the analysis, right-left political spectrum is not utilised since the opposition to the government policies are not defined according to left-wing or right-wing ideologies. Main opposition political actors, regardless of their position in right-left political spectrum, aim at reinstating the parliamentary system, rule of law and democracy, and overthrow the government and change the presidential government system which is perceived as a unique system to Turkey. A year after the referendum in 2017, the prime minister office was abolished, the questioning powers of the parliament were limited, as well as power to hold confidence votes was curtailed. Concentration of executive and legislative powers in the presidential office has been criticised by the opposition political parties since then, and the emphasis on the principle of separation of powers became the common point among the right and left political parties such as Republican People's Party (RPP) – centre left, İYİ Party (Good Party) – centre-right party established by Meral Akşener split from nationalist party NAP, People's Democratic Party (PDP) – Kurdish left party, Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA) – centre right party established by former minister of economics and foreign affairs of JDP government Ali Babacan, Future Party – right wing conservative party established by former Prime Minister of JDP government Ahmet Davutoğlu, Democrat Party (DP) – centre right, Felicity Party (FP) – right wing Islamic conservative party, Workers' Party of Turkey (WPT) – the one and only far left party in the country. Since the transition from the parliamentary system, the concentration of powers in the president's office brought rival political parties together in their political struggle. Thus, the political differences between the left, centre-left, centre-right parties lost their prominence in the political atmosphere in the country.

This polarisation also affected media entities, which positioned themselves as pro or against government in line with the political parties' stances. Sabah and Hürriyet, two of the daily newspapers analysed in this paper, are selected due to their support for and close connections with the government party, JDP, and the President of the Republic. Sabah was considered one of the biggest mainstream daily newspapers in Turkey since its establishment in 1985. In 2007, after its ownership was passed to Savings Deposit Insurance Fund, was sold to the Turkuvaz Media Group whose vice president of the executive board is the older brother of Berat Albayrak, former economy minister and son-in-law of the President. Hürriyet was established in 1948. Considered as one of the biggest mainstream newspapers in the country, it was sold to Demirören Holding, which owns also Milliyet – one of the oldest and mainstream dailies in the country and is active in industry, energy, education construction sectors in Turkey and Azerbaijan.

The other three newspapers, Gazete Pencere, Karar and BirGün are representing the opposition political stances. Gazete Pencere was established in 2019 and declared that its aim is to bring an innovative perspective and a new look for Turkish media. The subscribers receive their newspaper copy as PDF either through e-mail or SMS. It claimed to be one of the independent outlets in media bringing together rather centre-

right, liberal oriented writers and commentators. Karar was established in 2015 and considered to have a conservative and nationalist political stance close to conservative political actors who split up from the government party, JDP, while sensitivity to nationalist issues is highly visible i.e., Uyghurs in China. Finally, BirGün, a left wing daily, founded in 2004, claims to be one of the few independent newspapers in the country since there is no parent company subsidizing it economically.

Regarding specific news focusing on the COVID-19 and Europe, the number of the news analysed are as follows: 23 news in BirGün, 86 news in Gazete Pencere, 69 news in Hürriyet, 15 news in Karar and 37 news in Sabah. In Gazete Pencere, a specific section of the newspaper was dedicated to COVID-19, thus there were more news on the issue compared to other newspapers. The analysis focused on the news published in these newspapers. Opinion pieces, commentaries published in the weekend editions were not included. The archives of the newspapers, which are available online, have been utilised for the analysis. BirGün and Gazete Pencere are published as PDFs online and can be accessed by subscribers. Archives of Hürriyet and Sabah are free online, but they do not have PDF versions of the printed issues. Karar's archive provides the first pages of the newspaper. Each newspaper was accessed online separately for all the days between 15 March 2020 and 30 May 2021 and news related to COVID-19 and EU, Europe and EU member states were read individually.

To analyse de-legitimation, three discursive strategies have been employed: nomination, predication and argumentation (Wodak, 2009). In nomination, we ask the question of how the actors are named and referred to linguistically; in predication, we are looking for characteristics, qualities and features attributed to the actors; and in argumentation, we search for the arguments used to justify the position (Zapettini, 2019). We started by examining how Turkey and EU-ropes are referred, followed by the adjectives used to define Turkey's and EU-ropes' fight against pandemic and finally the reasons of the de-legitimation were analysed i.e., the number of deaths, cases, issues regarding the decision-making process. As a conclusion, the paper summarises how these depict an output/specific Euroscepticism in Turkish media.

### **How was Europe portrayed in the media?**

In all five newspapers, the analysis demonstrates that regardless of the political position of them, the way EU-ropes and Turkey are referred to are very similar. It is observed that when the news is related to institutional matters "EU" is utilised, however when member states of the EU and their specific policies in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic are the topic generally the word "Europe" is used in the titles while specific country names and leaders' names are emphasised in the main texts. Thus, we can argue that there is a distinction between the EU and Europe for these newspapers, albeit not crystal clear. It is also noteworthy that, except for BirGün, all the other journals emphasised the Turkish background of Uğur Şahin and Özlem Türeci's (the couple who developed BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine). This demonstrates that Turkishness and focus on national identities are meaningful in bringing together pro and against government political stances at the centre and right of the political spectrum although the degree of the emphasis on Turkishness differs from pro-government newspapers to opposition ones which will be discussed further in the

argumentation phase of the analysis. Although there is no distinction made between Turkey and EU-rope as us vs. them, the news from Europe is given in separate sections from the domestic news, again except BirGün. It needs to be mentioned that news on COVID-19 and EU-rope are very limited in BirGün given that the main focal points of the newspaper are represented by the lack of social justice and increasing inequalities among social classes in Turkey. BirGün also differs from other newspapers in its distinct way of defining Europe as continental Europe. In the other four newspapers we cannot observe this distinction and, when “Europe” is utilised, continental European countries and the United Kingdom (UK) are subject of news, while in BirGün the UK is not included in “EU-rope” news.

When we analysed the characteristics attributed to EU-rope’s fight with COVID-19, we observed similarities among the analysed newspapers. One of the first and most commonly used adjectives in the news in Sabah, Hürriyet, Gazete Pencere and Karar are “fearsome”, “terrifying”, “fearful”, “scary” and “frightening” i.e., “terrifying numbers in Europe” (Karar, 1/11/2020, Sabah, 21/12/2020); “scary report in the UK about herd immunity” (Gazete Pencere, 17/03/2020), “frightening picture/table regarding the case and death numbers in the UK” (Gazete Pencere, various days), “Merkel and minister presidents are scared in the face of new mutations of the virus” (Özcan, Hürriyet, 20/01/2021). In relation to fear, we also saw the rising number of cases and deaths being characterised as “nightmare” in specific states such as Italy but also in general Europe (Gazete Pencere, 12/04/2020, 18/10/2020, Sabah, 15/03/2020, 18/09/2020). In the face of the “bad” and “deteriorated” situation in Europe and European countries, they are pictured as in “panic”, “concerned”, “worried”, “anxious” and in a state of “alarm” in all newspapers reviewed. Some examples of these news are presented in *Table 1*:

**Table 1. Selected examples of EU-rope’s portrayal in the “fight” against COVID-19**

Date	Newspaper	Headline	Content
22 March 2020	Sabah	Panic statements came one after another! EU leaders fail in the face of coronavirus	Mismanagement in Europe, the failure of the health system, the increasing number of death and the lack of morgues
18 September 2020	Sabah	France is having a nightmare! Coronavirus record broken in the country	The highest number of daily cases since the beginning of the epidemic
19 March 2020	Sabah	Germany playing with fire	Flights from China, the source of the coronavirus, and Iran, the most affected countries, continued and possible coronavirus patients are arriving from Italy.
30 April 2021	Sabah	Coronavirus bans continue in Europe	Germany – Emergency brake policies including curfew France – curfews Sweden – Alcohol restrictions

22 November 2020	Hürriyet	Europe is worse than it was in Spring! 1 death every 17 seconds	Increasing death rate
31 July 2020	Hürriyet	The epidemic has affected badly! The economy suffered a record contraction	The European Union (EU) economy shrank by 11.9% in the second quarter of 2020
20 January 2021	Hürriyet	How long will we stay closed?	Lockdowns in Germany, new mutation in the UK
15 January 2021	Hürriyet	UK hospitals run out of space	No spaces left in the hospitals; the patients are sent to hotels
31 January 2021	Gazete Pencere	Europe closes borders	New mutations spreading in Europe
12 April 2020	Gazete Pencere	Corona nightmare growing	Increasing numbers in Italy, Spain, UK
11 February 2021	Gazete Pencere	Worry over new mutations in UK	2 new forms of COVID-19
13 January 2021	Gazete Pencere	'Herd immunity' led to disaster	Sweden and UK
1 November 2020	Karar	Spanish mutation locked Europe home	New record numbers in France, Germany, new restrictions
21 January 2020	Karar	Europe wears dirty masks	Chinese producing masks in East Turkistan forcing Uyghurs to work

*Source: Author's own compilation*

Although all these five newspapers resemble each other in their use of words, adjectives, and attribution of features in portraying EU-rope, their definitions and adjectives utilised regarding Turkey's policies and the situation in Turkey differ. In Hürriyet and Sabah, Turkey's policies are characterised as "better" policies than the European ones while a special emphasis is given to the foreigners feeling "safe" and "comfortable" in Turkey (Hürriyet, 22/01/2021 and Sabah, 22/03/2020). These types of news cannot be found in opposition papers. Gazete Pencere, BirGün and Karar, fiercely criticise Turkey's policies in the struggle against COVID-19 pandemic from various angles. For example, Gazete Pencere utilises the same adjectives for EU-rope as for Turkey when it comes to numbers of cases and deaths, while Karar specifically focusses on vaccines coming from China. The Government is criticised because of their preference of "Chinese vaccines", due to the Uyghurs' treatment in China, and European vaccines are associated with "hope". BirGün, in line with its political position focuses on death of health workers, lack of social justice, increasing gap between haves and have-nots, increasing number of COVID-19 cases and lack of intensive care units and label the government policies as "unsuccessful". Lack of transparency in the number of COVID-19 cases and related deaths in Turkey is another common criticism of the analysed opposition newspapers. Trust in data for Europe is especially emphasised by Gazete Pencere and in relation to the decreasing numbers in Europe, the opposition newspapers praise the European countries' policies in their struggle while drawing attention to the need for reliable data for successful policies. The emphasis on data

and transparency is one of the main discrepancies in pro-government and opposition newspapers' take on EU-ropo. However, it needs to be noted that this praise of the newspapers, *Gazete Pencere*, *Karar* and *BirGün*, cannot be just perceived as an attempt to legitimise EU-ropo but rather it should be seen as a de-legitimizing effort of the government in Turkey. When we comb through the other argumentations utilised by these newspapers in giving their news on EU-ropo's policies in COVID-19 we clearly observe that various reasons besides the increasing cases of COVID-19 and COVID-19 related deaths are used to demonstrate the failures in EU-ropo.

Between 15 March 2020 and 31 May 2021, it is observed that the argumentation employed in the analysed newspapers can be categorised under six main themes: i) economic problems in EU-ropo, ii) the difficulties in vaccination, iii) the challenges that health systems face, iv) border issues, v) social unrest and vi) welfare state criticisms. Under the theme on economic problems, students queuing in front of charity organisations due to the economic problems faced in France (*Sabah*, 05/02/2021), economic difficulties in Germany and the negative impact of COVID-19 pandemic which is expected to affect the banks in Europe in the coming years, economic constrictions in the UK (*Hürriyet*, 15/01/2021), the risk of company closures in Italy and economic and organisations troubles in Europe are some of the main line of reasoning in the failure of European countries in the COVID-19 pandemic. At the EU level, the lack of solidarity was one of the main highlights of all the papers in review. The disagreements on financial assistance, euro-bonds, recovery plans and a delayed response of the EU to the needs of the member states have been the main titles reflecting the (de)legitimacy of EU-ropo.

The second theme on vaccines includes issues regarding the vaccination's pace in Europe, delayed approval for the vaccines on the continent, but also the rivalries in COVID-19 vaccine and distribution of vaccines at a global level. China-Europe vaccine rivalry is especially highlighted by *Karar*. Due to its nationalist political stance, Turkey's purchase of SinoVac, Chinese produced vaccine has been heavily criticised by this newspaper. In *Hürriyet*, we see news on disagreements over vaccine passports and the different attitudes of Southern and Northern European countries in their support for these passports are at the fore. In *Hürriyet* and *Gazete Pencere*, slow vaccination processes in Europe and the EU are underlined. A very interesting commonality between *Gazete Pencere* and *BirGün* is their emphasis on the negative impact of EU-ropo's protectionism in the distribution of vaccines for the global fight against the pandemic. In *Gazete Pencere* news criticizing "EU member states' restrictions on export of vaccines" (*Gazete Pencere*, 31/01/2021) are published while *BirGün* focuses on the news on Astra Zeneca's attempt to decrease the supply to EU due to its excessive purchase of the vaccines (*BirGün*, 29/01/2021). The same piece of news highlights the vaccine rivalries between the UK and EU i.e., Astra Zeneca and Pfizer BioNTech.

The third most common argumentation observed in the newspapers is the inadequacy of the health systems in European states. In *Sabah*, news on looting in hospitals in Europe, coffins in the streets (22/03/2020), lack of mortuaries in France and selling of spaces in these limited number of mortuaries (10/04/2020) are some of the examples of exaggerated slandering of Europe in Turkish media in relation to COVID-19 pandemic. *Gazete Pencere*'s news on the lack of intensive care units in the UK and Portugal, lack of doctors and health workers in Italy and Portugal, medical

equipment aid from Turkey to the UK create the perception of medically inadequate Europe. *Hürriyet* underlines the medical equipment aid from Turkey to European countries such as Austria and the UK. This news finds a place in *Sabah* too. *BirGün*'s take on the same issue is different from the other newspapers. On the one hand it also highlights the inadequacies in European countries regarding medical equipment, on the other hand it accuses the Turkish government to hold the aid and not sending it on time (05/04/2020).

Closure of borders and confiscations of masks on the way to Italy and Spain from China by France are also underlined by *BirGün*. The newspapers link this to the decreasing trust among the European states. Trust in the EU and in the member states' governments have been addressed by all the newspapers not only in relation to borders but also in relation to the issues mentioned already i.e., slowness in responding to the pandemic, distribution of vaccines, the different priorities of the Northern and Southern European countries and lack of solidarity, delayed and slow-paced decision making in providing recovery packages and approval of the vaccines. Another issue in relation to the closure of borders was the EU's reluctance to open borders to Turkey. Especially pro-government newspapers argued Turkey is in a better position in the fight against COVID-19 and criticised EU-ropes decision not to open borders to Turkey.

The last two argumentations studied are related to the social unrest in the European societies as a response to the COVID-19 measures and more remarkably to criticism over lack of welfare services. In *Sabah*, *Karar*, and *Gazete Pencer*e we observed an emphasis put on the state of emergency from Spain and France, on the protests concerning the ongoing restrictions on social life, and a curfew (*Sabah*, 30/10/2020, *Gazete Pencer*e, 13/10/2020, *Karar*, 18/08/2020). In *Gazete Pencer*e and *Sabah*, the military's involvement in dispersing protests is also underlined (*Sabah*, 22/03/2020, *Gazete Pencer*e, 27/06/2021). The final argumentation, insufficient welfare services in Europe is remarkable in both *Hürriyet* – one of the most pro-government newspapers in Turkey – and *BirGün* – one of the most politically and ideologically critical newspapers. We see *Gazete Pencer*e's news on nursing homes and abandoned elderly citizens (*Gazete Pencer*e, 25/03/2020), but their emphasis is not on the welfare systems and the services. In the news in *Hürriyet*, the social assistance is considered low in Germany and is suggested to be increased to 600€ (Varlı, 25/01/2021), while according to *BirGün*, even the Danish welfare system (04/01/2021) is insufficient in a pandemic.

Although these five newspapers share most of their argumentations in delegitimizing EU-rope, they do have different stances on Turkey's policies in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. In *Sabah* and *Hürriyet*, we observe a comparison between Turkey and EU-rope and the accent on the better position of Turkey. Examples include Turkey taking measures in advance to stop the spread of virus in contradiction to Europe's delayed response, travel bans implemented before the European states, Turkey being the health centre of three continents due to exemplary policies against COVID-19 (Altuncu, *Hürriyet*, 05/07/2020), the infrastructure, personnel and early and intensive care facilities in Turkey. In these two newspapers, one can also easily spot frequent puff pieces which suggest that the Europeans are eating Turkish sea bream to strengthen their immune systems (*Hürriyet*, 05/03/2021). Other mentions to national items refer to the BioNTech vaccines that are said be carried in the dry ice, used also to transport *Maraş* ice-cream from Turkey (Koç, *Hürriyet*, 22/01/2021). One can also

see reference to IMF and how it praised Turkey for its support to its citizens without disturbing the fiscal discipline (Hürriyet, 01/05/2021). In the opposition newspapers, we constantly see criticism over Turkish government's policies during the pandemic from social, economic, and health perspectives. In both Karar and Gazete Pencere, we identified news highlighting European leaders and politicians' waiting for their round to be vaccinated. This has been one of the hot topics in Turkey since the government party members were vaccinated before almost anybody else in the country, this issue being heavily criticised by the opposition parties and representing another indication of political corruption in the country.

### **Conclusions**

Initially our hypothesis was de-legitimation of EU-rope can be observed in both pro and against government media in relation to EU-rope's policies towards the fight against COVID-19 since Euroscepticism influences the political discourse in general regardless of political or ideological position. In light of the analysis carried out, we can see that although there are differences in pro and against government media's take on Turkish national policies regarding COVID-19, both have common argumentation points regarding EU-rope's policies in the face of pandemic. Thus, our analysis supports our hypothesis.

In this paper, we opted to utilise an output-oriented legitimisation and specific support in understanding the Euroscepticism in media and how EU-rope was delegitimised during COVID-19 pandemic. The six main themes that the argumentations evolved around in the time frame of the analysis are all related to outputs and policy outcomes such as economic policies, policies adopted for vaccination, the health services in European countries, open border policies, social and welfare policies in general and the ability of EU-rope to keep public order. In each policy area, EU-rope's lack of accomplishments is highlighted both by pro and against government media. It has been observed that the pro government newspapers Sabah and Hürriyet and against government newspapers Gazete Pencere and Karar have been all using similar characterisations in labelling EU-rope's fight against COVID-19 pandemic concentrating on negative features i.e., bad, scary, worried, anxious, thus portraying the situation in Europe as exceptionally horrid. The lack of health workers, the economic crisis, the different attitudes among member states and lack of solidarity in the Union have been highlighted in all the newspapers. This shows us that regardless of political ideologies and the position of newspaper at the left-right political spectrum, Euroscepticism became a common attitude of Turkish media.

In the literature on Euroscepticism in Turkey, trust issues, historical reflexes, nationalist feelings, and populist politics have been some of the identified reasons of increasing Eurosceptic attitudes. In this paper we have noticed that output/policy-based Euroscepticism is also observed lately, and media has been a very convenient platform to express negative attitudes towards EU-rope. In the argumentations previously shared, we depicted a clear criticism on the institutions and lack of ability to hold tight on values such as solidarity which is supposed to be provided by the European institutions. Thus, as Easton's classification suggests, we can argue that the analysis demonstrated a lack of support in both pro and government media outlets concentrated on concrete

policy outcomes in EU-rope, meaning that there is a lack of specific support for EU-rope in Turkey.

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