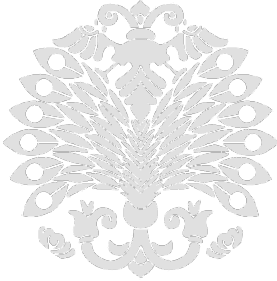


Çıkar Grupları ve AB-Türkiye İlişkileri: Sendika Konfederasyonları Üzerine Eleştirel Bir Söylem Analizi

Interest Groups and EU-Turkey Relations: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Trade Unions

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the perspectives of Turkish trade union confederations TÜRK-İŞ, HAK-İŞ, DİSK and TİSK about Turkey's EU accession. Employing Critical Discourse Analysis, it uncovers how these narratives mirror the intricate interplay of economic, political, and social elements in EU-Turkey relations. Analysing speeches and documents, the research spots common and differing viewpoints. The findings reveal a universal desire for just EU integration, but with distinct emphases on sovereignty, economy, and social justice. This work sheds light on Turkey's unique position in EU affairs and the influence of various interest group narratives on international policy-making.

Anahtar Kelimeler: EU-Turkey Relations, Critical Discourse Analysis, Interest Groups, Trade Union Confederations

Öz

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin Avrupa Birliği'ne (AB) üyelik sürecinde, işçi konfederasyonları (TÜRK-İŞ, HAK-İŞ, DİSK TİSK) gibi önemli Türk çıkar gruplarının bakış açılarını ve anlatılarını eleştirel söylem analizi üzerinden incelemektedir. Çalışma, Eleştirel Söylem Analizi (ESA) metodolojisi çerçevesinde, AB-Türkiye ilişkilerindeki ekonomik, siyasi ve sosyal faktörlerin nasıl etkide bulunduğunu değerlendirmektedir. Açık kaynaklarda yayımlanan konuşmalar, resmî belgeler ve diğer belgelerin analizi ile, bu grupların söylemlerinde ortak temalar ve farklılıklar belirlenmiş, bu grupların kamusal görüşleri ile politika oluşturmada nasıl etkili olduklarına dair içgörüler ortaya konmuştur. Bulgular, AB üyeliği sürecinde adil ve eşit bir muamele arayışının ortak bir temayı vurguladığını, ancak ulusal egemenlik, ekonomik pragmatizm, sosyal adalet ve çevresel sürdürülebilirlik gibi konularda farklı vurgular yapıldığını göstermektedir. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin AB'ye üyeliği sürecine dair derinlemesine bir analiz sunarak, uluslararası ilişkilerin ve politika yapımının dinamiklerini şekillendirmede çeşitli çıkar gruplarının söylemlerinin önemini vurgulamaktadır.

Keywords: AB-Türkiye İlişkileri, Eleştirel Söylem Analizi, Çıkar Grupları, Sendika Konfederasyonları

Introduction

The complex relationship between the European Union (EU) and Turkey has been a subject of extensive analysis, marked by a series of political, economic, and social negotiations (Müftüler-Baç, 2016). Within this intricate landscape, the role of interest groups, specifically labor unions and employers' associations, emerges as a critical factor in shaping the contours of this relationship. These groups represent a diverse array of socio-economic interests that reflect the multifaceted nature of Turkish society and its integration into the European framework.

Prominent labor confederations such as Türkiye İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (TÜRK-İŞ), Hak İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (HAK-İŞ) Türkiye İşveren Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (TISK) and Türkiye Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (DİSK), stand at the forefront of this discourse. These entities are not mere spectators but active participants, advocating for policies and reforms that resonate with their constituents' interests. Their narratives, rooted in the socio-economic realities of Turkey, provide valuable insights into the domestic implications of EU integration policies.

This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to dissect the public communications and official statements of these key interest groups. The objective is twofold: firstly, to uncover the rhetorical strategies employed by these groups in their discourse on EU-Turkey relations; and secondly, to understand how these narratives influence and are influenced by the broader socio-political dynamics of EU accession talks. The research analyses speeches and documents to identify common and differing viewpoints. The findings indicate a universal desire for fair EU integration, with distinct emphasis on sovereignty, economy, and social justice. This study highlights Turkey's unique position in EU affairs and the influence of different interest group narratives on international politics.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to the nuanced understanding of EU-Turkey relations. As Turkey continues its protracted journey towards EU membership, the perspectives of its internal interest groups gain paramount importance. Analyzing these perspectives not only enhances our comprehension of the domestic dimensions of EU accession but also provides insights into the broader dialogue between Turkey and the EU. Such an understanding is crucial for policymakers, academics, and stakeholders in both regions, as they navigate through the complex terrain of international relations in an increasingly interconnected world.

Literature Review

EU Accession Processes and the Role of Interest Groups

The process of EU accession has been a focal point in European studies, with scholars examining the political, economic, and social dimensions of integration (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2004). A significant body of literature has focused on the role of interest groups in shaping national and EU policies, highlighting their influence in lobbying, policy formulation, and public opinion shaping within the accession process (Börzel & Risse, 2003). These studies underscore the importance of interest groups as active agents, capable of influencing both domestic and EU-level policymaking. In the context of Turkey, the role of interest groups becomes even more crucial, given the country's prolonged and complex accession negotiations (Aydın-Düzgüt & Tocci, 2015).

Critical Discourse Analysis in Political and Sociological Studies

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has emerged as a potent methodological tool in political and sociological studies, offering insights into how discourse shapes and is shaped by power dynamics within societal structures (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). This approach has been instrumental in revealing the underlying ideologies and power relations embedded in political language and communication (Van Dijk, 2001). CDA's application in EU studies, particularly in analyzing the discourse surrounding EU integration and enlargement, has provided valuable insights into the complexities of political communication and policy discourse (Krzyżanowski, 2009).

Gaps in the Literature: The Turkish Context

Despite the extensive research on EU accession and the use of CDA in political studies, there exists a gap in the literature concerning the specific context of Turkey's EU accession process. While there have been studies on Turkey's political and economic negotiations with the EU, the focus has often been on broader political dynamics and governmental actions rather than specifically on the discourses of Turkish interest groups and their impact on the accession process. For instance, Noutcheva & Aydın-Düzgüt (2012), discuss the influence of political groups in Turkish society on rule-of-law reforms, a key aspect of EU accession criteria, but do not delve into the detailed analysis of interest group discourses. Moreover, the application of CDA in

analyzing the discourse of Turkish interest groups, particularly labor unions and employers' associations, remains underexplored. This gap points to the need for a focused study that not only applies CDA to the Turkish context but also delves into the specific narratives of these interest groups within the broader framework of EU-Turkey relations.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis: Theoretical Underpinnings

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a powerful lens through which to examine the nuanced interplay between language and power in societal structures. Rooted in the works of scholars like Fairclough and Wodak, CDA posits that discourse is both constitutive of and constituted by social practices (Fairclough, 1992; Wodak, 2001). This perspective emphasizes that language, in its various forms, is not merely a tool for communication but an instrument of power and control. CDA involves a meticulous analysis of textual data to uncover the ideologies and power relations that underlie the surface level of language (Van Dijk, 1993). It focuses on the ways in which societal power dynamics are manifested and reproduced through discourse.

Relevance of CDA in Political Discourse and Power Dynamics

In political discourse, CDA is particularly relevant for understanding the dynamics of power, ideology, and hegemony. Political discourse is a site where power relations are both established and contested, and as Chilton (2004) suggested, CDA provides the tools to uncover the strategies through which these processes occur. In the context of EU accession, this approach is invaluable for deciphering the complex narratives and rhetorical strategies employed by various stakeholders, including interest groups. CDA enables a deeper understanding of how these groups use language to shape policy discourse, influence public opinion, and negotiate their position within the larger EU framework (Krzyżanowski, 2009).

Discourse and Socio-Political Contexts

CDA recognizes that discourse is intricately connected to its socio-political context. The discourse surrounding EU accession is not created in a vacuum but is deeply embedded in the historical, cultural, and political contexts of the countries involved (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). For instance, the discourses of Turkish interest groups on EU accession are shaped by Turkey's unique historical relationship with Europe, its internal political dynamics, and the socio-economic interests of its diverse population. In return, these discourses influence the shaping of societal attitudes and policies related to EU integration. By employing CDA, researchers can unravel how these groups construct meanings, identities, and relationships, and how they negotiate power within the specific context of EU-Turkey relations (Fairclough, 1995).

This theoretical framework positions CDA not only as a method for textual analysis but also as a tool for understanding broader societal processes. It acknowledges the reciprocal relationship between discourse and socio-political context, where each continually shapes and reshapes the other. In the context of this study, CDA serves as a pivotal approach in exploring how Turkish interest groups articulate their positions on EU accession and the implications of these positions for broader EU-Turkey relations.

Methodology

Qualitative Research Approach and Rationale for Using CDA

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, specifically employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its primary methodological tool. According to Fairclough & Wodak (1997), the choice of CDA is informed by its ability to uncover the complex relationship between language and power in societal and political contexts. This approach is particularly suitable for analyzing the nuanced ways in which interest groups in Turkey articulate their positions on EU accession. CDA allows for an in-depth exploration of the rhetorical strategies employed by these groups, revealing the underlying ideologies and power dynamics within their discourses (Van Dijk, 1993).

Data Collection Methods

The data for this study comprise public communications, speeches, and official documents from the selected Turkish interest groups. These sources include press releases, policy statements, public addresses, and published reports from the period between 2000 and 2023. This timeframe is chosen to capture the evolving nature of Turkey's EU accession discourse, reflecting changes in political dynamics and societal attitudes over two decades.

The collection process involves a comprehensive search for materials that directly address EU-related themes. This includes communications that articulate the groups' positions on EU accession, Turkey's relationship with the EU, or commentary on EU

policies and practices. The materials are sourced from official websites, digital archives, and public records, ensuring a representative and authentic collection of data.

Criteria for Selecting Specific Interest Groups

The interest groups selected for this study -TÜRK-İŞ, HAK-İŞ, TISK, and DİSK- are chosen based on their prominence and influence in Turkish society and politics. These groups represent a broad spectrum of socio-economic interests, from labor rights to business and employer concerns. The selection criteria also consider the groups' active engagement in EU-related discourse and their role in shaping public opinion and policy in Turkey.

Analytical Process within the Framework of CDA

The analytical process involves several stages within the CDA framework. Initially, the discourse topics are identified, focusing on thematic content related to EU accession. This includes examining narratives on economic relations, labor rights, democratic reforms, and socio-political implications of EU policies.

Subsequently, the study analyzes the discursive strategies used by the interest groups. These strategies encompass the linguistic and rhetorical techniques employed to construct meanings, influence perceptions, and negotiate power relations. Attention is given to metaphorical language, framing, argumentation patterns, and narrative structures that reveal the groups' positioning on EU accession.

The final stage involves a detailed linguistic analysis. This includes examining the use of specific terminology, phraseology, and syntax, which contribute to the construction of meaning within the discourse. Special attention is paid to how language is used to articulate identities, relationships, and power dynamics, particularly in the context of EU-Turkey relations. For instance, the use of inclusive vs. exclusive language, passive vs. active voice, and emotional vs. rational appeals are scrutinized to understand how these groups position themselves and others in their narratives.

Throughout the analysis, reflexivity is maintained to acknowledge the researcher's position and potential biases. The interpretations are grounded in the data, ensuring that the analysis remains objective and faithful to the source material.

This methodological approach, underpinned by CDA, provides a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of the discourse of Turkish interest groups on EU accession. It allows for an in-depth understanding of how these groups use language as a tool to influence, persuade, and negotiate within the complex landscape of EU-Turkey relations.

Analysis of Discourses

TÜRK-İŞ: Focus on workers' rights, EU interactions, and perceived challenges in EU accession.

TÜRK-İŞ's views on Turkey's EU accession reveal a critical standpoint regarding the perceived imbalances in the EU's interactions with Turkey. This analysis delves into how TÜRK-İŞ shapes the discourse around Turkey's potential EU membership, emphasizing both the rights and challenges, with a specific focus on workers' rights and visa policies.

Turkey's Genuine Efforts for EU Integration

In a speech delivered by Ergun Atalay, the General President of TÜRK-İŞ, during a consultation meeting at the TOBB General Center, Turkey's dedicated efforts towards EU integration were underscored. (TÜRK-İŞ, 2014)

"We are making efforts to be accepted into the European Union, we desire it, but make no mistake, they will not admit us into the European Union; they won't, there's no more to it. We should change our laws and regulations as if we are going to enter the European Union, let them do as they please, by that time there won't be a European Union anyway."

In this discourse, Ergun Atalay of TÜRK-İŞ offers a nuanced perspective on Turkey's pursuit of European Union membership. The narrative establishes a clear distinction between 'us' (Turkey or TÜRK-İŞ), portrayed as earnestly committed to EU integration, and 'them' (the European Union), perceived as an exclusive entity unlikely to admit Turkey. This portrayal not only highlights a perceived power asymmetry but also fosters a sense of internal unity in the face of external resistance. Atalay's language reinforces the belief in Turkey's eventual exclusion from the EU, reflecting a pragmatic acknowledgment of the EU's decision-making dynamics. Despite anticipating rejection, the discourse advocates for ongoing reforms in Turkey's legal framework and regulations, demonstrating a commitment to progress and enhancement irrespective of EU membership. The concluding remark, contemplating the possible dissolution of the EU, introduces a subtle skepticism about the EU's future, thereby diminishing its

perceived importance. This narrative approach effectively shapes a resilient and pragmatic identity for Turkey, recognizing geopolitical challenges while emphasizing an intrinsic drive for internal development and reform.

Critique of EU Visa Policies

In his public statements, Atalay frequently criticizes the European Union's visa policies concerning Turkish citizens, characterizing them as politically driven and unfair. This narrative is carefully crafted to depict Turkey as a dependable bulwark against regional instability and mass migration, thus deserving of more equitable treatment in visa discussions. Atalay draws a sharp contrast between Turkey's contributions to regional security and the swift NATO accession of countries that, in his perspective, do not encounter similar obstacles (Al-Ain, 2023).

The following excerpt is taken from a statement by Atalay, as reported on Al-Ain. The translated version of original discourse is as follows:

“Countries that burn holy books and support terrorism are quickly trying to enter NATO, while unfair obstacles have been placed in front of Turkey for EU membership for years. Some countries violate the agreements they signed with Turkey, which they see as a security shield against immigrants. Millions of our kin live in Europe. But our citizens are kept waiting in visa queues or are unable to obtain visas. A significant portion of the Turkish population believes that EU countries are making the visa process difficult for political reasons.”

In this discussion, Atalay offers a critical perspective on the visa policies of the European Union and the wider geopolitical situation. The narrative distinctly separates "us" from "them," portraying Turkey as suffering from what is seen as the EU's and other global players' unfair practices. Atalay points out the quick NATO inclusion of countries allegedly backing terrorism, in stark contrast to Turkey's extended and seemingly unjust journey towards EU membership. This comparison aims to highlight the double standards and biases in international politics.

The discourse also covers instances where some nations have broken agreements with Turkey, despite its role as a guard against immigration. This highlights feelings of betrayal and injustice, suggesting that Turkey's contributions to immigration control are neither recognized nor valued appropriately.

Additionally, the narrative focuses on the struggles of Turkish citizens in Europe, especially regarding visa issues. Atalay emphasizes the obstacles faced by Turks in getting visas, suggesting this is a deliberate strategy by EU nations. This underlines the narrative of unfair treatment and appeals to a sense of shared identity among Turks, both in Turkey and abroad.

Atalay's emotionally charged language and depiction of Turkey as a victim of political schemes are designed to stir public emotion and promote national solidarity. By bringing these perceived injustices to light, the speaker questions the integrity and fairness of the EU's policies and the larger international relations framework.

This discourse uses a narrative of victimization and injustice to question the EU's visa policies and what is perceived as double standards in international relations. Its aim is to unite public opinion and reinforce a collective Turkish identity against external challenges.

Resistance Against Unfair Obstacles:

Through discourses expressed in media outlets such as Sabah, Atalay articulates a victimization narrative where Turkey is subject to 'unfair obstacles' in its path to EU membership. (Sabah, 2023)

“For years, Turkey has faced unfair obstacles to EU membership. Some countries violate the agreements they have signed with Turkey, which they see as a security shield against migrants.”

The discourse above portrays Turkey as a victim facing 'unfair obstacles' in its EU accession, emphasizing a sense of injustice and appealing to public sympathy. A clear dichotomy is established between Turkey ('us') and the EU ('them'), fostering in-group solidarity and highlighting perceived unfairness by the out-group. The discourse points to violations of agreements with Turkey, reinforcing the narrative of betrayal and positioning Turkey as a responsible yet unreciprocated actor in immigration matters. This discourse reflects on the power dynamics between Turkey and the EU, emphasizing a perceived power imbalance and unfair treatment. This analysis reveals Atalay's strategic use of discourse to highlight victimization and injustice in Turkey's EU accession process, influencing public perception and international relations.

By highlighting the prolonged nature of the accession process, TÜRK-İŞ positions itself as an advocate for the acceleration of Turkey's EU membership, underlining respect for human rights and democracy as core justifications (Sabah,2023)

“Some countries are violating the agreements they signed with Turkey, which they see as a security shield against migrants. Millions of our compatriots live in Europe. But our citizens are kept waiting in visa queues or cannot get visas. A significant part of the Turkish public thinks that EU countries are making the visa process more difficult for political reasons. If we want to protect and improve workers' rights and freedoms, we must make democracy and respect for human beings, regardless of their nationality, prevail in the world.”

TÜRK-İŞ, in its discourse, firmly establishes itself as a proponent for expediting Turkey's membership in the European Union. By emphasizing the importance of 'respect for human rights and democracy,' the organization aligns itself with universally recognized values, positioning itself in harmony with globally accepted principles. However, the narrative also underscores the extended duration of the accession process, conveying a sense of injustice and delay. This approach appears to be a strategic move to instill a sense of urgency and to call upon the moral and ethical responsibilities of the EU. The discourse effectively links the issue of EU accession and visa policies to broader themes such as workers' rights and universal values, including respect for humanity and democracy. This expansion of the argument's scope connects local concerns to global values, enhancing its appeal.

This narrative fits into a larger discussion about Turkey's role in Europe and the world. It challenges the EU to adhere to its own standards and principles, potentially swaying public opinion and influencing policy both within Turkey and in EU member states.

A thorough analysis of TÜRK-İŞ's discourse on Turkey's EU accession, as expressed by Ergun Atalay and reflected in various media statements, unveils a complex narrative strategy. This narrative is marked by themes of victimization, injustice, and a critical perspective on the EU's policies, especially concerning visa issues and the overall accession process. TÜRK-İŞ advocates vigorously for Turkey's EU membership, stressing the necessity of upholding human rights and democratic principles as key reasons for this integration. The discourse of TÜRK-İŞ on Turkey's EU accession is a sophisticated mix of critique, advocacy, and pragmatic optimism. It mirrors the organization's influence in shaping public opinion and policy debates, both within Turkey and internationally. The narrative developed by TÜRK-İŞ and its leaders, particularly Atalay, plays a significant role in the ongoing conversation about Turkey's position in Europe and the global community, urging the EU to ensure its actions are consistent with its declared values and principles.

HAK-İŞ: Emphasis on socio-political issues, critique of EU policies, and advocacy for workers, ambition for the EU accession

HAK-İŞ, known as the Confederation of Real Trade Unions in Turkey, offers a distinct viewpoint on Turkey's interactions with the European Union and various global matters. Grasping the context in which HAK-İŞ functions is essential for a comprehensive understanding. While its primary focus lies in advocating for workers' rights, HAK-İŞ's discourse frequently encompasses a wider range of socio-political issues. This approach underscores its importance as a major societal player in Turkey, highlighting its influence beyond labor and into broader aspects of social and political life. This expanded focus reflects the organization's commitment to addressing the multifaceted concerns of its members and their roles within the larger Turkish society and its international relationships.

Critique of the European Union's Role and Actions:

In its 2020 statement, HAK-İŞ adopts a critical perspective towards the European Union, drawing attention to what it perceives as inconsistencies and shortcomings, especially in global humanitarian issues. The choice of words such as "lacking" and "remains silent" indicates a sense of disillusionment with the EU's adherence to its core values of peace and justice. This language not only expresses disappointment but also challenges the EU's moral and ethical standing. Through this discourse, HAK-İŞ positions itself as a voice of moral conscience, implicitly calling for the EU to align its actions more closely with its professed principles. (HAK-İŞ, 2020)

“The European Union project is lacking in many ways today...remains silent on the events in Jerusalem, the humanitarian tragedy experienced by the Syrian people”

HAK-İŞ's discourse is marked by deliberate linguistic choices that convey a critical viewpoint. Terms such as "lacking" and "remains silent" go beyond mere description to serve as evaluative judgments of the EU's actions, or rather, its inactions. This language reflects a sense of disillusionment with the EU, implying that it has not lived up to its foundational values of peace and justice. Through this discourse, HAK-İŞ positions itself as a moral authority, drawing a stark contrast between its active engagement with

global issues and the EU's perceived passivity. This strategic positioning not only serves as a critique of the EU but also enhances HAK-İŞ's stature in the international sphere.

Furthermore, HAK-İŞ broadens its discourse to encompass global humanitarian concerns, such as the situations in Jerusalem and Syria. This broader focus challenges the EU's moral and ethical authority, casting doubt on its commitment to global peace and justice. Such a critique carries significant implications for Turkey's EU accession process. It suggests that HAK-İŞ perceives the EU through a moral and ethical prism, not merely in economic or political terms. This critical perspective of the union could resonate with the wider public in Turkey, potentially shaping the Turkish perception of the EU and influencing the overall sentiment towards EU membership.

Turkey's EU Membership and Fight Against Terrorism

The discourse presented by HAK-İŞ is framed within the context of Turkey's prolonged effort to join the European Union, alongside its ongoing battle against various terrorist groups. In this setting, HAK-İŞ expresses clear disappointment with the European Union. The focus on the EU's lack of support in Turkey's anti-terrorism efforts, coupled with allegations of the EU's alignment with terrorist organizations, casts doubt on the EU's dedication to true partnership and solidarity. This narrative creates a stark 'us versus them' dichotomy, depicting Turkey as a solitary combatant in the fight against terrorism, while portraying the EU as a non-supportive ally. This perspective from HAK-İŞ, set in 2020, reflects deep-seated concerns about the nature of EU-Turkey relations, particularly in security and cooperative engagement. (HAK-İŞ, 2020)

"Turkey, as a candidate country for EU membership, has not found support in its tough fight against terrorist organizations... We expect the European Union to...accelerate Turkey's membership process..."

HAK-İŞ's discourse clearly expresses disappointment with the European Union, using phrases like "has not found support" and urging the EU to "accelerate Turkey's membership process." These expressions reflect unmet expectations and a perceived lack of support and solidarity from the EU. The language used creates an 'us versus them' dynamic, positioning Turkey as a dedicated participant in counter-terrorism efforts, while portraying the EU as a less supportive partner. This contrast highlights a perceived imbalance in commitment and responsibility between Turkey and the EU, particularly in matters of terrorism and security, which are crucial to regional and global safety.

By critiquing the EU for insufficient support in Turkey's anti-terrorism initiatives, HAK-İŞ not only questions the EU's stance but also its broader commitment to security. This narrative could significantly influence public and political perceptions within Turkey, potentially affecting ongoing negotiations and the general attitude towards EU membership. It implies that HAK-İŞ considers the EU's support in security issues as a vital component of the membership process.

In their statement, HAK-İŞ uses directive language, imposing a sense of obligation on the EU and reflecting a critical view of the slow pace of Turkey's EU accession. This choice of words indicates frustration with delays and strategically positions HAK-İŞ as a proponent of expedited membership, aligning with national interests and possibly rallying support for this goal. The language underscores an overarching narrative of urgency and expectation in EU-Turkey relations.

Ambition for the EU:

The 9th Ordinary General Assembly meeting held in 1999 was a congress where HAK-İŞ's views on the European Union changed and some important principles were determined for the EU policy. Some of these principles can be listed as follows:

- HAK-İŞ wants Turkey to become a full member of the European Union and supports the efforts in this direction.
- HAK-İŞ emphasises that both Turkey and the European Union have a mutual responsibility in this process.
- HAK-İŞ does not want the European Union to apply double standards against Turkey, and considers it a requirement of mutual responsibility that Turkey should especially comply with the "Copenhagen Criteria".
- HAK-İŞ demands and wants the EU Helsinki Summit to be convened in December 1999 to adopt a membership decision that will pave the way for Turkey's full membership" (Cicioğlu, 2013, p.37).

Overall, HAK-İŞ's statement on Turkey's EU membership and its stance against terrorism weaves a complex narrative that combines issues of security, solidarity, and international relations and ambition to Turkey's EU membership. The union's discourse not only conveys disappointment with the EU's support level but also challenges the EU's dedication to partnership

and collective security. This approach is instrumental in shaping public opinion and could influence policy discussions concerning Turkey's EU accession and its wider geopolitical position.

TISK: Economic perspectives, advocacy for EU collaboration, and emphasis on sustainable development.

TISK, representing the Confederation of Turkish Employers' Unions, recognizes the significant role of the European Union in economic affairs, especially in relation to Turkey's economic challenges and potential recovery.

The Role of the European Union in Economic Recovery:

TISK recognizes the European Union as playing a pivotal role in tackling economic challenges. This viewpoint subtly endorses Turkey's deeper integration with the EU, implying that the policies of the EU could be key to Turkey's economic recovery and stability. (TISK, 2022)

"A significant part of the solution lies in the policies of the European Union."

As a representative body for Turkish employers, TISK's discourse on Turkey's EU accession primarily revolves around the economic implications. Set against a backdrop of both economic challenges and opportunities, TISK portrays the European Union as a key player in economic affairs. Their statement, "A significant part of the solution lies in the policies of the European Union," assigns substantial responsibility and influence to the EU regarding economic recovery. This viewpoint indicates that TISK perceives the EU not merely as a political framework but as an essential economic ally, whose policies are seen as having a tangible impact on Turkey's economy.

By highlighting the role of the EU in economic issues, TISK advocates for Turkey's closer integration with the EU. This stance is in line with the interests of Turkish employers, who likely view EU integration as advantageous for business, trade, and overall economic stability. TISK's approach suggests a recognition of the benefits that EU integration could bring to Turkey's economic landscape, aligning with broader strategic interests in fostering economic growth and stability.

Advocacy for EU-Turkey Cooperation:

TISK's approach aligns seamlessly with the European Union's focus on sustainability and the green economy. By placing a strong emphasis on the green transition, TISK is actively positioning Turkey as a cooperative and progressive participant in worldwide environmental efforts. This alignment with the priorities of the EU not only elevates Turkey's involvement in environmental issues but also strengthens its argument for EU membership. It showcases Turkey's dedication to the shared values and goals in sustainability, an aspect that is increasingly pivotal in the context of EU relations and integration. (TISK, 2022)

There are significant opportunities for both the European Union and Turkey, and that synergies can be achieved through cooperation.

TISK's portrayal of Turkey's potential accession to the EU casts it in an optimistic light, emphasizing the opportunities and collaborative benefits that could arise from such a union. This perspective goes beyond the conventional view of EU membership as merely fulfilling criteria or adapting to standards; it underscores the reciprocal advantages that could accrue to both Turkey and the EU. Representing employers, TISK occupies a strategic position in the economic dialogue surrounding EU accession, recognizing the significant economic implications and opportunities that integration with the EU might entail.

Furthermore, this viewpoint suggests a dynamic approach to EU integration. It positions Turkey not as a passive aspirant to EU membership but as an active, contributing partner in a mutually beneficial relationship. This proactive stance could have far-reaching effects on EU-Turkey relations, signaling Turkey's readiness to be a constructive participant in the EU framework.

Additionally, TISK's positive depiction of EU-Turkey cooperation has the potential to shape public opinion and influence policy decisions. By championing the concept of mutual benefits, TISK is actively contributing to a more collaborative and hopeful narrative surrounding Turkey's EU accession, fostering a perception of the accession process as a cooperative venture with shared rewards.

Focus on Green Economy and Sustainable Development:

TISK aligns with the EU's focus on sustainability and the green economy. By emphasizing the green transition, TISK positions Turkey as a proactive partner in global environmental efforts, aligning with EU priorities and strengthening the case for Turkey's EU accession. (TISK, 2022)

There's emphasis on specific market actions for a green economy, focusing on green transition, education, and adapting to the jobs transformed by the green transition.

TİSK's focus on initiatives for a green economy, particularly in areas like green transition, education, and job adaptation, aligns strategically with current global environmental trends and the priorities of the European Union. This approach signals a recognition of the increasing relevance of environmental sustainability in both economic and political discussions. By emphasizing the green transition, TİSK is positioning Turkey not merely as a participant but as an active contributor in global environmental initiatives. Such positioning is vital as it aligns Turkey with the EU's sustainability focus, portraying the country as not only adaptable but also as a valuable contributor to shared global objectives.

Furthermore, TİSK's alignment with the EU's sustainability agenda bolsters Turkey's case for EU accession. It showcases a commitment to values and priorities that are integral to the EU integration process. The emphasis on adapting jobs and education to align with the green transition demonstrates an understanding of the interdependence between economic development and environmental sustainability. This perspective aligns with current global economic trends, underscoring the necessity for economies to develop in ways that are environmentally sustainable.

Overall, TİSK's discourse adds a contemporary and progressive layer to the narrative surrounding Turkey's EU accession. By focusing on the green economy and sustainable development, TİSK introduces a forward-thinking dimension to Turkey's aspirations for EU membership, potentially resonating with both domestic and EU stakeholders.

Emphasis on European Coordination and Cooperation:

TİSK's discourse highlights the critical need for robust coordination and cooperation within the European Union, particularly in the context of the single market and in addressing economic challenges such as high inflation. This perspective demonstrates a keen awareness of the intricate complexities and interdependencies that characterize the EU's economic framework. By emphasizing these aspects, TİSK acknowledges the importance of collaborative efforts and unified strategies in navigating the economic landscape of the EU. (TİSK, 2022)

“There's a need for good European coordination, cooperation on the European Union's single market, and governments to provide resources, especially in a high inflation environment.”

In advocating for improved coordination and cooperation, TİSK subtly implies that Turkey's integration into the EU would be beneficial for both parties. This viewpoint presents Turkey's potential EU membership as a reciprocal relationship, advantageous to both sides, rather than being solely in Turkey's favor. The emphasis on the necessity for government resources, particularly in a high-inflation context, reflects a realistic approach to the prevailing economic challenges. TİSK's narrative is in line with wider concerns about economic stability and growth within the EU.

Furthermore, TİSK establishes itself as a progressive and responsible entity, promoting strategies that cater to Turkey's needs while also considering the wider requirements of the EU. This stance could bolster Turkey's argument for joining the EU, showcasing a dedication to shared economic objectives and difficulties. Additionally, TİSK's focus on coordination and cooperation influences the perception of Turkey's economic relationship with the EU. It portrays Turkey as prepared to actively participate in the EU's economic frameworks and contribute to overcoming common challenges.

TİSK's emphasis on European coordination and cooperation, as analyzed through a critical discourse framework, reflects a strategic and forward-looking approach to Turkey's potential integration into the EU. By highlighting the mutual benefits and the importance of addressing shared economic challenges, TİSK positions Turkey as a constructive and valuable partner within the European framework. This perspective not only aligns with Turkey's aspirations for EU membership but also resonates with broader EU priorities, potentially shaping perceptions and decisions regarding Turkey's path to EU accession. The discourse underscores TİSK's role as a key stakeholder in shaping Turkey's EU narrative, advocating for a partnership that benefits both Turkey and the European Union, especially in challenging economic times.

DİSK: Stance on socio-economic equality, labor rights, and support for EU integration.

The Confederation of Progressive Workers' Unions (DİSK) has a complex role in shaping the discourse on Turkey's EU accession process. It navigates between advocating for workers' rights within the EU framework and addressing the socioeconomic disparities that might be affected by EU policies.

Workers' Rights & Income Inequality Concerns:

In discussions with the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB), DİSK General Secretary Arzu Çerkezoğlu emphasized international solidarity against rising right-wing and xenophobic ideologies, positioning DİSK within a broader European labor movement. (Izmir Bel, 2023)

“According to data published by Eurostat, when compared with European Union (EU) countries, Turkey has the highest Gini coefficient. Turkey has the highest level of income inequality compared to EU countries.”

DİSK's engagement with the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) signals a commitment to international solidarity against the backdrop of increasing right-wing and xenophobic ideologies. This positioning within the broader European labor movement highlights DİSK's awareness of the transnational dimensions of workers' rights and socio-political issues. It shows their intention to collaborate with like-minded organizations beyond national borders.

Furthermore, DİSK strategically employs research on income inequality to advance its narrative. By utilizing the Gini coefficient as a metric for comparison, DİSK creates a powerful argument. The assertion that Turkey has the highest income inequality in Europe, as substantiated by Eurostat data, serves as a compelling rhetorical device. This juxtaposition against EU countries not only reveals the magnitude of the problem but also implies that EU-guided reforms are necessary to address these socio-economic challenges.

The inclusion of objective data from Eurostat enhances the credibility of DİSK's discourse, lending empirical support to their claims. This data-driven approach strengthens the argument and positions DİSK as a well-informed and evidence-based advocate for change.

DİSK's discourse on workers' rights and income inequality in the context of Turkey's EU accession is characterized by a strategic blend of international solidarity, comparative data analysis, and empirical evidence. It seeks to draw attention to pressing socio-economic issues and make a compelling case for EU-guided reforms. This narrative approach reflects DİSK's commitment to advocating for workers' rights and addressing income inequality on both national and international fronts, positioning them as a significant voice within the broader labor movement.

Support of EU membership

DİSK's stance on collaboration is clear. The confederation has openly expressed concerns about the Turkish government's approach to EU relations, particularly regarding the protection of human rights. However, in parallel, DİSK actively promotes engaging in constructive dialogues with European institutions. This balanced approach reflects DİSK's commitment to addressing concerns while maintaining a channel for productive discussions with European partners. (DİSK, 2009)

“The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) supports Turkey's EU membership as long as Turkey not only fulfills the conditions of membership and the requirements of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights on paper but also in reality. The transformation of Turkish society with all rights and freedoms should be completed at the end of the challenging negotiation processes.”

DİSK has consistently criticized the Turkish government's approach to EU relations, particularly regarding human rights. This critical stance reflects their commitment to upholding fundamental rights and freedoms and their expectation that Turkey should adhere to EU standards in both principle and practice.

Simultaneously, DİSK's encouragement of constructive dialogues with European institutions demonstrates a nuanced approach. This willingness to engage in dialogue suggests that they see value in pursuing a cooperative path towards EU membership. By advocating for dialogue, DİSK positions itself as an entity that seeks to bridge the gap between Turkey and the EU, facilitating a constructive and progressive relationship.

Furthermore, the endorsement of Turkey's EU membership by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) adds another layer of support. The condition that Turkey not only fulfills membership criteria on paper but also in reality underscores the significance of tangible progress in terms of human rights and freedoms. This condition aligns with DİSK's emphasis on socio-economic equality and social justice.

DİSK's discourse, rooted in championing workers' rights and socio-economic equality, plays a crucial role in shaping Turkey-EU relations. It advocates for EU membership as a means to advance social justice and align with European social standards. The union's dialogues and analyses contribute to a narrative that underscores the potential benefits of EU membership in promoting a more equitable and just society in Turkey. This narrative reflects DİSK's active engagement in shaping the discourse around Turkey's EU accession process, positioning them as a significant advocate for social change and European integration.

Comparative Analysis

Overview of Discourses from Key Interest Groups

The discourses of TÜRK-İŞ, HAK-İŞ, TİSK, and DİSK provide distinct lenses through which the multifaceted nature of EU-Turkey relations can be examined. Each group's perspective offers insight into the broader socio-economic and political dynamics at play, illustrating the complexity of these interactions.

Shared Themes and Divergent Perspectives

A common theme across all groups is a call for fairness and equity within the EU-Turkey relationship. TÜRK-İŞ's critical stance on EU visa policies (Al-Ain, 2023) and HAK-İŞ's disappointment with the EU's insufficient support in counter-terrorism (HAK-İŞ, 2020) both underscore a narrative of injustice. Similarly, DİSK, focusing on income inequality and workers' rights (Izmir Bel, 2023), echoes this demand for social justice, aligning it with the broader context of EU integration.

In contrast, notable divergences are evident. TÜRK-İŞ and HAK-İŞ articulate narratives rooted in victimization and resistance, emphasizing national sovereignty and self-determination. Conversely, TİSK adopts a more economically pragmatic viewpoint, considering EU integration as a pathway for Turkey's economic recovery and growth (TİSK, 2022). DİSK, while sharing concerns about social justice, distinctly integrates this with a broader perspective on the European labor movement, advocating EU membership as a means to address Turkey's socio-economic disparities and align with European standards (DİSK, 2009).

Implications for EU-Turkey Relations

The varied narratives from these interest groups have significant implications for the future of EU-Turkey relations. The recurring theme of seeking equitable treatment suggests a collective perception of an imbalanced relationship, potentially shaping Turkey's approach in future negotiations towards more assertive and equitable demands.

The divergences highlight the complex internal dynamics in Turkey regarding EU accession. While TÜRK-İŞ and HAK-İŞ exhibit skepticism and focus on national concerns, TİSK and DİSK present narratives more in line with integration and cooperation. This diversity reflects the range of interests and priorities within Turkish society, underlining the challenge of developing a cohesive national stance on EU integration.

Reflecting Wider Socio-economic and Political Trends

These narratives mirror broader socio-economic and political trends both in Turkey and within the EU context. TÜRK-İŞ and HAK-İŞ's emphasis on sovereignty and resistance aligns with a global rise in nationalist sentiments (Sabah, 2023; HAK-İŞ, 2020), while the integration-focused narratives of TİSK and DİSK reflect trends towards economic interdependence and transnational collaboration (TİSK, 2022; DİSK, 2009).

Furthermore, the diverse viewpoints highlight Turkey's internal debate regarding its European identity and future direction, showcasing the struggle to balance national interests with the opportunities and demands of deeper EU integration. This internal debate is not isolated to Turkey but is reflective of wider discussions within the EU about enlargement, national identity, and the balance between maintaining national sovereignty and embracing supranational governance structures.

Concluding Insights

The comparative analysis of the discourses from these Turkish interest groups underscores the critical importance of understanding a range of perspectives to fully appreciate the complex dynamics of EU-Turkey relations. Each group, through its unique focus, sheds light on different aspects of the EU-Turkey dialogue. This collective narrative is not just an amalgamation of sector-specific concerns; rather, it represents broader national and international discourses. It demonstrates how domestic considerations and global trends converge, influencing how various stakeholders perceive and approach the process of EU accession. This intersectionality is vital for grasping the multifaceted nature of EU-Turkey relations, where economic, social, and political factors are deeply interwoven. Understanding these diverse narratives is key to navigating the future of this relationship,

as they offer insights into the potential pathways and challenges ahead in Turkey's journey towards EU integration.

Discussion

Interpretation of Findings in Relation to Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The findings of this study, interpreted through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), underscore the significance of language in shaping socio-political realities in the context of EU-Turkey relations. The narratives of the key Turkish interest groups, as analyzed, reveal the intricate interplay of discourse in reflecting and influencing socio-economic and political dynamics. This aligns with the theoretical underpinnings of CDA, which emphasize the role of discourse in constructing social power and dominance (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Van Dijk, 1993).

The literature review highlighted the critical role of interest groups in shaping policies and public opinion, particularly in the context of EU accession (Beyers et al., 2008; Bouwen, 2002). The discourses of TÜRK-İŞ, HAK-İŞ, TİSK, and DİSK corroborate this, showcasing how these groups articulate their positions and concerns, thereby influencing the broader narrative of Turkey's EU accession process.

Implications for Understanding EU-Turkey Relations and Accession Process

The divergent and sometimes conflicting narratives of the interest groups have profound implications for understanding the dynamics of EU-Turkey relations. These narratives reflect a complex landscape where economic interests, national identity, and political sovereignty intersect with the EU's enlargement policies and standards. The discourse analysis highlights the tensions between pursuing national interests and aligning with EU expectations, a central theme in Turkey's EU accession journey.

The study's findings also offer insights into the specific challenges Turkey faces in its EU integration process. The emphasis on fairness, equity, and recognition of Turkey's contributions in narratives, especially from TÜRK-İŞ and HAK-İŞ, points to a perceived need for a more balanced and respectful approach from the EU. Conversely, TİSK's and DİSK's more cooperative and integration-focused discourses suggest pathways for constructive engagement with the EU.

Role of Labor Unions and Employers' Associations in Shaping Public Opinion and Policy

The active engagement of labor unions and employers' associations in the EU accession discourse illustrates their significant role in shaping public opinion and policy. Their narratives not only reflect the concerns and aspirations of their respective constituencies but also influence broader societal debates on Turkey's EU journey. Labor unions like TÜRK-İŞ and HAK-İŞ emphasize workers' rights and social justice, thereby advocating for policies that prioritize these aspects in the accession talks. Their discourse often challenges the EU's approaches, calling for more equitable treatment and acknowledgment of Turkey's contributions, especially in security and migration matters.

Employers' associations, represented by TİSK, bring a different perspective, focusing on economic recovery, sustainability, and the benefits of EU integration for business and trade. Their advocacy for EU-Turkey cooperation, especially in the context of the green economy, signals a forward-looking approach that aligns with global trends and EU priorities.

The interplay of these diverse narratives from labor and employers' groups contributes to a dynamic public discourse on EU accession, informing and influencing policy decisions both within Turkey and in the EU. This highlights the importance of including a wide range of voices in the decision-making process, ensuring that policies are not only economically sound but also socially just and reflective of the diverse interests within society.

Broader Socio-Political Implications

The findings of this study have broader socio-political implications for both Turkey and the EU. The diverse narratives reflect the complexities of national identity, sovereignty, and the challenges of aligning domestic priorities with international standards and expectations. The discourse analysis reveals an ongoing negotiation of Turkey's place within the European context, balancing between its unique political, cultural, and economic characteristics and the EU's norms and values.

For the EU, these narratives provide insights into the perceptions and expectations of a key candidate country. Understanding these perspectives is crucial for the EU to navigate its enlargement policy effectively, ensuring that the accession process is inclusive, respectful of diversity, and responsive to the concerns of all stakeholders.

Conclusion

Summary of Key Findings and Their Significance

This study's exploration of the discourses of major Turkish interest groups, particularly labor unions and employers' associations, in the context of EU-Turkey relations, has yielded several key findings. Firstly, the narratives of these groups are diverse and multifaceted, reflecting the complex interplay of economic, political, and social considerations in the context of EU accession. Secondly, the discourse analysis reveals a common theme of seeking fair and equitable treatment in the EU accession process, albeit with varying focuses and priorities among different groups. Thirdly, the study highlights the significant role these interest groups play in shaping public opinion and policy-making in Turkey, influencing both domestic and EU-level discussions on accession.

These findings are significant as they provide a nuanced understanding of the diverse perspectives within Turkey regarding EU integration. They underscore the importance of considering a broad range of voices in the EU accession process and highlight the need for policies that are inclusive and responsive to these varied interests.

Contribution to EU Accession Studies and Discourse Analysis

This study contributes to the field of EU accession studies by providing a detailed analysis of the Turkish context, an area that has been relatively underexplored in the discourse analysis literature. By employing Critical Discourse Analysis, the research adds depth to our understanding of how interest groups use language to shape perceptions and policies towards EU accession. It also demonstrates the value of discourse analysis as a tool for unraveling the complex dynamics of international relations and policy-making processes.

Suggestions for Future Research

Given the evolving nature of EU-Turkey relations, future research in this area could take several directions. One avenue could be a longitudinal study tracking changes in the narratives of these interest groups over time, particularly in response to developments in EU-Turkey relations or shifts in the EU's enlargement policies. This would provide insights into the dynamic nature of these discourses and how they adapt to changing political landscapes.

Another area of interest could be a comparative study of Turkish interest groups' narratives with those of other EU candidate countries. This would offer a broader perspective on the common challenges and strategies employed by different countries in their EU accession journeys.

Finally, a more in-depth analysis of the impact of these narratives on policy-making and public opinion, both within Turkey and the EU, would be valuable. This could involve examining the ways in which these discourses are received and interpreted by policymakers and the public, and how they influence decision-making processes at both national and EU levels.

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