



Turkey

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Football is the most popular sport in Turkey through its success, its excesses, its prestigious victories in the 2000s (Galatasaray's victory at the 2000 UEFA Cup and the third place in the 2002 World Cup). Imported by European foreigners at the end of the nineteenth century, practiced secretly by Muslim elites, it became in a few decades the symbol of the nation fighting against the external enemies, against a threatening Europe.

Turkish football is also known for the passion of its supporters for the national team or club teams. The matches between the “Big Three”, the three most successful football clubs in Turkey, all based in Istanbul (Galatasaray, Fenerbahçe, Beşiktaş) are considered among the most spectacular derbies in the world that sometimes trigger violent clashes between fans.

The place of football in Turkey is such that it constitutes an area particularly invested by politicians and thus reflects the major debates of Turkish society. Thus, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has ruled the country since 2002 has regularly staged his (mythicized) past as a semi-professional footballer and does not hesitate to put on his shoes and kick a ball, in front of the cameras, for the pleasure of his followers. The football stadium is also a place of nationalist and partisan political expressions. In May 2013, football

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fans (and particularly the supporters groups of Beşiktaş) were very active during the largest protests against the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality project to destruct the Gezi Park in Istanbul.

Finally, Turkey has been a candidate on several occasions to host major sports events such as the Olympic Games and especially the Football European Championships (Euro). It has already hosted a final of the Champions' League and the Europa League but its aim is to host an event such as the Euro for which it was twice beaten little (for the Euro 2008 and the Euro 2016). Hosting this kind of event is a way to strengthen its domestic and international image.

1 The Political Origins of Football

Turkish football has a history that goes hand-in-hand with the history of faltering Ottoman Empire and the rising of modern Turkey. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was entering in a period of rapid modernisation. The Sultan Abdulhamid II initiated “a rapid move towards ‘westernisation’ in an array of fields that ranged from administration to law, education and health...” (Okay 2002) But he also imposed a strong control on the society. “The old structure and traditions were not abandoned completely, which resulted in a duality in political culture and social structure where both the traditional, and the Western/modern styles were experienced simultaneously” (Okay 2002). In this context, football was regarded as a representation, or expression of a foreign, Western European and unwanted culture and was therefore discouraged by the Abdulhamid regime for the Muslim Ottomans. As the capital Istanbul was under the continuous surveillance of the sultan police, cities such as Salonika and Izmir enjoyed considerably less pressure. In the faltering Ottoman Empire, the expansion of association football had a similar process as those of the vast majority of other nations. The empire's port cities, such as Thessaloniki or Izmir had commercial connections with the British. It was not a surprise that the first known football game in Ottoman territories was played in Thessaloniki in 1875 by some British residents of the city (Gökçağı 2008). Even though the date of the first-ever football match in Anatolia remains unknown, it can be said that football was being played in Western Anatolia, notably in Izmir, starting from the 1870s. English residents of the city were the pioneers of the game, and Anatolian Greeks were the first indigenous community to play football by founding clubs. At the time, the Greek community of Western Anatolia, inspired by the Hellenic Kingdom founded in Greece in 1826,

were in the process of discovering their national identity. The main axes of the Hellenic enlightenment project were linguistics and antique Hellenic culture. In this context, cultural clubs for Greek community were founded in various cities of Anatolia, especially in Izmir. The Orpheus, founded a music-oriented association in 1890, gave birth to two sports clubs that would shape the entire athletic scene in the region, Apollon and Gymnasio (later Panionios). Among these clubs, the first one, Apollon¹ is particularly important since this club was founded in 1891, by Smyranean Archbishop Chrysostomos and businessman Emmanuel Samios, therefore connecting the clergy and the bourgeoisie. Bearing in mind the ever-present tension between religious and secular Greeks that practically shaped the political axes in Greece, this cooperation for national unity in Izmir is extremely striking. This may show that both parties, disregarding their conflict, agreed on the necessity of a sports club for gathering the masses at a popular event. Izmir, pioneering the sports activities—including football—in Anatolia, also influenced Istanbul in the last years of the nineteenth century.

In Istanbul, association football started much later than in Izmir and Thessaloniki; however, it evolved more rapidly in terms of organisation. This can be explained by the fact that before football appeared, Izmir and Thessaloniki had strong sports communities. Hence, when football came to these cities, it was included in local sports organisations (such as Panionian and Apollonian clubs) and it was governed in the way the other sports branches were. This meant that although the British were the ones to bring football to those cities, they were unable to establish the system under which the football was played under in the British Isles. The local sports organisation perception was competition based, possibly carried over from very early Greek traditions, and the League concept was unknown. The conditions in Istanbul were more suitable for the British to set up a brand-new tournament scheme; thus, the first Constantinople Football League was begun just one year after the foundation of the first Istanbul football club Cadi-Keu (Kadıköy) on the Asian side of the city, whereas it took almost two decades for a League to start in Izmir. Cadi-Keu was founded by English residents of Kadıköy with the participation of the local Greek youth; it was followed by teams called Moda, Elpis, Imogene and others.² The Constantinople Football League started in 1903, with the participation of these four teams. The winner of the first League was Imogene, the team of the British Embassy's boat.

In the early 1900s, despite the interdiction for Turkish Ottoman to play football, some Turks, notably the students of Izmir American College in the 1900s, attempted to play football for their school teams, but they were

suspended from their schools owing to pressure from local officials. In the Turkish military schools, the same interest for sport and football emerged. A Turkish student from the Naval Academy (and son of an Admiral) formed with his friends the first Turkish football team played by Muslims. To avoid the repression of Ottoman authorities, they took an English name “Black Stockings” and trained clandestinely. They played only one game against a local Greek team in October 1901 that they lost 5-1. After the game, most of the players were taken into custody.

Another attempt to form a Turkish football team came from the Galatasaray High School (Sultanî (Sultans’ school) of Galatasaray), the prestigious institute which was founded in 1868 to give modern formation to the palace elite. The school itself was an attempt to reform the Ottoman administration, especially by training a well-educated (mostly Muslim) elite (Galatasaray High School Official Web Site., n.d.). For this, a secular school system was set up, mainly based on the French education system. The majority of the academic staff was also French. The students that Sultanî produced quickly learned about modern concepts, including liberty, nationalism and of course, sports. They took courses on modern sports and they were encouraged to practice them. One of these students, Ali Sami (Yen) was the first one to be influenced by football. Whereas his first attempts to form teams within the school failed, he eventually managed to gather a group that had enough enthusiasm to follow through the principles to found a football club. The team initially avoided using a name, so as to avoid the same difficulties the Black Stocking had had, but they were quickly nicknamed as “the Gentlemen of Galatasaray” (Gökaçtı 2008, 34). In 1905, they joined the League, as the first Muslim-Turkish team. Although Galatasaray’s participation in the League happened in the Hamidian era (Sultan Abdulhamid II, 1878–1908) and much before the declaration of the Second Constitution, it should not be considered to have been a move against the Palace, or some attempt at civic resistance. The football team had no political agenda against the Ottoman administration at that time. It seems that the Ottoman regime ignored the Galatasaray team. In addition, nationalism was rising and Hamidian era was reaching its end. While the first Turkish team Black Stocking had to face persecution from the Ottoman palace, Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe (which was founded in 1907) took advantage of Sultan Abdulhamid’s quasi-paranoid *Istibdat* (repression) regime losing its power and competed rather freely against non-Turkish/non-Muslim teams. It is without a doubt that the foundation of these two clubs was motivated by the rising Turkish nationalism, as stated in Galatasaray founder Ali Sami Yen

declared; “Our goal was to play together like Englishmen, to have a colour and a name, and to beat the other non-Turkish teams” (Yüce 2014, 147). As in Izmir, Greek and Armenian clubs joined in, followed by Galatasaray in 1905 and Fenerbahçe 1907, two Turkish clubs who aimed to challenge the predominant non-Turkish teams in Stambulite football leagues (Beşiktaş opened its football branch in 1910) (Yüce 2014, 147–148). The emergence of Turkish teams such as Beşiktaş, Galatasaray, Fenerbahçe in Istanbul, as well as Altay and Karşıyaka in Izmir depend on the “belated” Turkish nationalism and its almost obsessive desire to catch up with non-Muslim Ottoman communities. One cannot understand how Turkish nationalism is essential to these clubs and how their relationship with their fans resembles the nationalistic relationship between Turkey and its citizens without this context. Particularly regarding the “three giants” of Istanbul (which are supported by an estimated 80% of football fans in the entire country), the nationalism component is essential, because these clubs, since the occupation of Istanbul by the Allied Forces (British, French and Italian) after the First World War (between 1918 and 1923), thus before the foundation of the modern Republic of Turkey, have been of national character and represented the whole nation. They owe their popularity to being “national teams”, a phenomenon maybe comparable to Al-Ahly³ in Egypt, and Basque and Catalan clubs in Spain. They even constitute an important part of the Turkish identity among diaspora Turks.⁴ Therefore, these clubs, their emergence, their existence and their entire modus operandi are always associated with Turkish nationalism.

2 Historical Club Rivalries: Beşiktaş, Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe

The rivalry between Beşiktaş, Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe is a rivalry with many layers, with different phases and narratives throughout the history. First of all, it should be underlined that these three clubs were founded in very emblematic neighbourhoods of Istanbul; Beşiktaş, Beyoğlu (Galatasaray) and Kadıköy (Fenerbahçe). These neighbourhoods have been the core of the Ottoman cosmopolitanism and the Turkish modernism. Favouring one of these neighbourhoods over the others is an important question for any Stambulite, which often triggers heated discussions. Therefore, three immensely successful clubs founded in these neighbourhoods would be inescapably in the rivalry.

Moreover, this rivalry was born as a rivalry of young Ottoman Turkish elites, in a period where Turkish nationalism emerged as “belated” compared to rival Ottoman nationalisms, and these clubs, from the beginning, competed against each other in better representing the Turkish nationalism. Their engagement to the national cause goes way back, almost two decades before the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, and it is always primordial to their existence. In a country hardwired to nationalism, this reason would alone constitute a fierce rivalry. The question of which team Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founding father of Turkey, supported is still a matter of debate today, or which team has represented Turkey better abroad.

Through the years, as the football League expanded to all over the country and so did the popularity of these three successful teams, the meaning of this rivalry has obviously changed. Even though the nationalism component has always been present, it is not the same as in the years where Istanbul was occupied by the British, French and Italian allied forces and these clubs played against their teams, as well as against the Greek, Armenian and Jewish Stambulite teams. The nationalism now translates to beating European teams in UEFA competitions. Also, the inner-city nature of these derbies is now less relevant, since all three teams have millions of supporters in every Turkish city and abroad, among the diaspora. These core, tangible elements related to the early twentieth century Istanbul are more and more replaced by constructed narratives. For example, “being from the neighbourhood” (*semtin çocuğu olmak* in Turkish) is still important, but it is now a cultural component shared by millions of fans, including those who have never been to Kadıköy, Beşiktaş or Beyoğlu. Despite the wide expansion of these clubs’ fan base, the fandom experience can only be decentralised to a certain extent. Those who live closer to the “neighbourhoods” will always be the ones who shape the way how the fandom and the rivalry are experienced. Going to the games from the neighbourhood is still a substantial ritual (and it will always be). Of course, there are other modalities of fandom, for long distance fans and those who cannot afford to attend the games. However, these fandom modes inevitably mimic the Istanbul-style fandom and its narratives. And this mimicking is astonishingly powerful in Turkey, as the fierce rivalry between the neighbourhoods and clubs are recreated in every part of the country, and even in the Turkish diaspora abroad. The fans share the same love and hate for their club and the others. Media evidently plays a huge part in recreating the intensity of the rivalry. The narrative of the rivalry is transmitted through the media. In the 1990s, when Fenerbahçe board member Ömer Çavuşoğlu tore down a Galatasaray flag, or the Galatasaray coach Graeme Souness planted a red and yellow flag to

the centre spot at Fenerbahçe stadium, the media had a field day in retransmitting these images over and over again, thus spreading the mutual hatred between two clubs to the fans everywhere. In the 2000s, the fans had their own forums, blogs and eventually the social media to pass along their own stories to other fans. The intensity of the rivalry grew much bigger in these recent periods, even compared to the times in the 1970s and 1980s when all clubs shared the same stadium (İnönü Stadium at Beşiktaş), and had to sit side-by-side in the derby games.

Yet, the reason that the Istanbul rivalry is unique is again political. The rivalry between Beşiktaş, Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe is not a rivalry between three sports clubs. It is a rivalry between three nation-like entities, founded in a setting where everything is based on the nationalism. As in most nationalisms, nationalism itself is the sufficient reason for rivalry. The other reasons may be, and mostly are, constructed to reinforce the narrative.

It is possible to call major Turkish clubs with millions of fans as “micro-nations” (Irak 2014, 116) for multiple reasons. First of all, the popularity of these clubs transcends every single distinctive category. Beşiktaş, Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe have fans in every corner of Turkey and in diaspora, from every walk of life, every social and ethnic background. Between these clubs’ fan bases; there are no social differences as in Hamburg and St. Pauli, religious as in Rangers and Celtic, ethnic as in Barcelona and Real Madrid, or political as in Al Ahly and Zamalek. “Three Giants” of Istanbul were all founded by the young, well-educated, late Ottoman elite a century ago, in cosmopolitan neighbourhoods (namely Beşiktaş, Beyoğlu and Kadıköy) which are pillars of modern, secular, urban lifestyle in Istanbul. Therefore, the roots of fierce rivalries between Istanbul teams are predominantly results driven, and club identities that are usually given as a reason for rivalries are mostly imagined; as in nations, regardless of other differences. If there is a political rivalry between these clubs, it is mostly about which club is more nationalistic than others, or which club Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey actually supported,⁵ even though the Kemalist regime and Atatürk himself had very little interest in football, and prioritised physical education-based sports policy over team sports.

The second reason for calling Stambulite football clubs as “micro-nations”, is their power structure and democratic procedure within these clubs (or lack thereof). Even though, these clubs have millions of fans, their membership figure do not exceed a few thousands. For an ordinary fan, club membership is usually unaffordable or inaccessible in other ways.⁶ Also, it is known that, even under more open membership policies, club presidents or presidential candidates tend to register bulk members to vote in club

elections; since the number of voting members is very limited, it is an easy method to manipulate ballots by recruiting new members ready to vote for any candidate. Fan representatives are not really a component of any democratic procedure, and fans are hardly represented in any agency within the whole football world, including clubs and the Turkish Football Federation. According to the Law No. 6222 regulating fan behaviours in sports, the fan representative is a board member at the club, who is not necessarily elected for these functions. As there is almost no official representation, informal relations between club boards and fans emerge from time to time. However, as fan groups are not usually formal associations, but loose organisations based on the comradeship; these relations are not contractual, and they very frequently serve the interests of the few in club boards and among fans. Inner-club nationalisms come handy in justifying these undemocratic structures; criticizing the board or the president would mostly mean criticizing the club, “criticizing us”, therefore strengthening the rival’s hand. The politically motivated match-fixing case in 2011 is a prime example of this type of chilling effect created by club nationalisms. After Fenerbahçe President Aziz Yıldırım was arrested with a police raid, all criticism against the president among the fans were silenced. Some sort of personality cult for Yıldırım was created (such as wearing his facemasks in the stands during games), which he used to silence all his critics in the club after he was released. Ironically, after Yıldırım was released, he stays on good terms with President Erdoğan, even though Erdoğan, as the Prime Minister of the 2011 period, helped the Gülenist clique⁷ rise within the ranks of the justice system to launch many politically motivated court cases, including the one Yıldırım was arrested for.

Another consequence of inner-club nationalisms is the difficulty they create in fans’ defending their own causes; such as the controversial e-ticket scheme implemented by government, or ticket and TV subscription prices. Purchasing powers of all countries taken into account, Turkish football is among the least affordable in Europe, and buying a season’s ticket would require a bank card named Passolig (which belongs to Aktifbank, run by a group close to Erdoğan) that would collect personal information from its clients, in other words the fans. Whereas some fans’ rights groups, who are not in majority in the stadiums, challenge the e-ticket scheme in court, major fan groups of the “Three Giants” are hardly a part of these efforts. Even though some groups boycott the games because of Passolig, a full-fledged movement for defending fans’ rights is out of question in Turkey. The same thing goes for pushing club boards for better conditions for fans (such as more affordable ticket prices or right to stand on terraces). While the lack of such organisation is a complicated question that is also connected to the lack

of social and political engagement in Turkey in general; the requirement of cooperating with rival fans and challenging one's own club board certainly plays a huge role in not having a democratic football environment with fans' organised and collective participation. Nevertheless, the fans' expressions have a political value in a broader sense that can even sometimes reach an extent that would make an impact on the political agenda of the nation.

3 Football as a Sports Spectacle

The football field in Turkey is a place for political and social mobilisations (Polo 2016). Players, rulers, spectators and politicians constantly invest this space to express social and political demands, assert national, regional, local, political identities, to challenge or support government actions. Football arenas thus appear eminently political despite the assertions from sports leaders and politicians on the boundary between sport and politics which they nevertheless themselves cease to transgress. The football news crush sports information and occupies a very important place in the generalist media. The slightest adventure in and out of the field involving players, leaders, supporters give rise to endless discussions, debates in the print and audio-visual press, on social networks. These political expressions take several dimensions, ranging from nationalist assertion to more partisan expression and even social demands.

Football in Turkey is the preferred theatre for nationalist expressions from the 1930s to the present. Football has played an important role in the national cohesion and identity formation process (Bora 2000). The songs and slogans enable to spread the feeling of belonging to a group, a community united by collective emotion. At the beginning of the Republic, football allowed Turkey to meet European teams and assume its place in the Western camp (of the 36 international matches played between 1923 and 1949, only four opposed Turkey to non-European teams). After the Second World War, the first victories of Turkish teams against major European ones (Hungary in 1956 in a friendly match, the elimination of Manchester by Fenerbahçe in 1968 in the European Champion Clubs' Cup) were celebrated with passion by supporters and political leaders, as they served to exalt nationalist fervour (Kozanoğlu 1999).

Nationalism is even stronger after the bloody military coup of September 1980. The ruling military has sought to depoliticise Turkey, which was on the brink of civil war, by promoting the "Turkish-Islamist synthesis" which reconciles Turkishness and religion as the foundation upon which

the Turkish nation must rest. In this context, the stadium became a place of celebration of nationalism, a new state religion, while the national political debate was heavily controlled. The role of the media was fundamental in spreading this ideology, as football dominates the rest of the sporting news in Turkey (Sert 2000). Paradoxically, in the context of a public space controlled, sport arenas remained one of the only places where there could be antagonisms between supporters of rival teams in the national football championship. This has certainly reinforced the exacerbated and sometimes violent rivalry between supporters of Turkish teams, especially those of Istanbul (Bostancıoğlu 1993).

But beyond the rivalry between supporters, politicisation took an even greater dimension in the 1990s, at the height of the armed struggle against the Kurdish separatist organisation (PKK), with an opportunistic exploitation of ultranationalist movements to spread its ideology among supporters (Irak 2010). During this period, international matches were charged with the mission of first “solacing the nation going through times” and “then avenging the treacherous and striking the ignoble” (Bora 2000, 378). There were very close links between right-wing activists and supporters organisations, with the complicity of the police and intelligence services to provoke and encourage an exacerbated nationalism. There are many expressions of this nationalism which ranges from the obligation, beginning in 1992, to play the Turkish national anthem before each match of a national championship to the deployments by the supporters of banners containing nationalist slogans, Turkish or ultranationalist flags. When the PKK leader was arrested in 1999, all teams entered the land with Turkish flags and sang nationalist and anti-separatist slogans.

In the 2000s, in the context of Turkey’s accession negotiations with the European Union (EU), nationalist expressions took a different turn in meetings against European teams. While the Turks were at that time very much in favour of the EU membership, football matches between a Turkish team and one from a European state were the occasion for impressive nationalist demonstrations. Warlike words are sung or painted on the banners: “Europe, do you hear the footsteps of the advancing Turks?” “Tremble of fear Europe, we are coming”. These demonstrations were particularly strong during the meetings against teams from countries formerly under Ottoman domination; the most extremist supporters recalled the Ottoman power drawing from the imagery of a master Empire of Europe. Football thus appears as a formidable telling of the frustrations, the unthought and the malaise in the country. For Turkish fans convicted of being despised by a Europe to which they want to belong to but which is reluctant to accept it, the sports

stage allows the expression of a symbolic revenge on the real world of social and political relations. The ambiguity of the relationship with Europe thus reveals a real social schizophrenia of a Turkey in the midst of a crisis of identity between the nationalist assertion and the desire of Europe (Kozanoğlu 1999, 118).

However, over the past ten years, according to Bora and Senyuva (2011), football fans in Turkey have altered their behaviour by becoming less nationalist and more Europeanised. These changes could be explained by the increasing exposure of Turkish fans to European football through the media and the Internet, the growing number of Turkish teams competing in European competitions, foreign players in Turkish teams and players from Turkish of European national teams. It would then encourage Turkish supporters to identify identification of national predominance in favour of more complex membership processes, blurring the boundaries between “them” and “us”. Turkish football would thus come closer to the process of “post-nationalisation” of football in Europe in the 1990s, as a result of various factors: introduction of the Champions League, intensified marketing and professionalisation of the game, liberalisation of media landscapes, in the governance of football after the Bosman ruling, feminisation of supporters, etc. (Sandvoss 2003).

The politicisation of football fandom is not restricted to nationalistic expressions against the external enemy. Over the last fifteen years, several groups of supporters have demonstrated by drawing from the classical repertory of political action, addressing sometimes to the power, to the opposition, to internal or external enemies. These political expressions reflect, without surprise, the main subjects of political news: the Kurdish issue, the Armenian issue, and even the social question. They are all as much supported by partisans of power as by their adversaries. The question of territorial identities is particularly strong in the politicisation of the football stadium, particularly around the Kurdish issue. If teams and their supporters have been able to claim and celebrate their Kurdish origins (sometimes even with references to the PKK’s struggle), they have also been targeted with insults, provocations, even direct physical violence by supporters nationalists without necessarily having a specific claim from their part. On other occasions, clubs in the Turkish Kurdistan region have claimed their Kurdish origins and even took a Kurdish name when the court lifted the ban on using Kurdish names. It may also be pointed out that certain causes, such as the support to Egyptian President Morsi (from the Islamist movement of the Muslim Brotherhood) expressed through the sign “Rabia” (hand extended with the thumb folded), have been used both by supporters, players and

opportunistically by Prime Minister Erdoğan from 2014. In fact, to execute this gesture means as much support to the Muslim Brotherhood as to the Turkish government.

These political expressions which point to major issues on the political agenda are as much carried by the partisans of power as by their opponents. Erdoğan was shouted down at the inauguration of the new stadium of Galatasaray in 2011 or during a match at the stadium of Fenerbahçe in December 2013. The political expressions in the stadium closely follow the national news and can also address social issues. After the Soma mining disaster⁸ in May 2014, supporters denouncing state failures in security checks expressed their support to the families of the victims.

However, at the beginning of the year 2010, several events reveal a strong takeover of the power, even an authoritarian drift of the leader of the AKP which tolerates less and less the criticisms and the protests against its policy. This evolution appears in a spectacular way with the demonstrations against the park of Gezi transformation project at the end of May 2013. This huge mobilisation and the occupation of the Gezi park during two weeks surprised by its plural message and its claim in favour of a social and political pluralism in Turkey. Football fans were particularly active during the early stages of the protest. Indeed, their experiences in confrontations with the police forces allowed them to participate effectively in the demonstrations to occupy the park of Gezi. The reconversion of the skills and resources of supporters, accustomed to rubbing against the forces of policing, in the service of a political cause has been patent. Supporters of the *Çarşı* group of the Beşiktaş club have been particularly prominent and have been joined by supporters of the other two major Istanbul clubs after the occupation of the square to celebrate a reconciliation of supporters against the power that fuelled a myth of a union of supporters gathered under the slogan “Istanbul United!” (Irak 2015).

4 The Turkish Sport Diplomacy

Sport in general and football, in particular, have been utilised by Turkish political authorities as a means of foreign policy to diffuse a positive image at home and abroad, and consolidate its role in the region. This strategy was particularly remarkable during under AKP's ruling between 2002 and 2012. During this decade, Turkish authorities have used the opportunity offered by sporting competitions between the teams of countries with historically difficult relations to display its benevolence towards reconciliation. However,

the question is raised as to the intended ends of these strategies. There are multiple possible explanations: national security concerns over its borders, a means of demonstrating its compliance with EU membership requirements during the negotiations, or alternatively, an act made by a regional power demonstrating its commitment and generosity towards populations outside of its borders. Participation in international sports matches have provided opportune occasions for the implementation of Turkey's strategy of "zero-problem with neighbours policy", developed by the then Foreign Minister Davutoğlu.

Turkey's strategic use of sport as a tool of diplomacy was observable in two football events: The friendly Aleppo match between Fenerbahçe of Turkey and Al-Ittihad of Syria in 2007; and secondly, the two football matches held between the Turkish and Armenian national football teams in 2008 and 2009, respectively. The matches represented an occasion for the demonstration of Turkey's goodwill towards establishing relations with its former enemies, a strategy that corresponded to its wider aim of strengthening its role in the region.

On 3 April 2007, Prime Minister Erdoğan joined Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Aleppo to watch a friendly match between Turkey's Fenerbahçe and Syria's Al-Ittihad to mark the opening of the new stadium. After receiving a personal request from Assad, Erdoğan convinced Fenerbahçe officials to hold the match. Occurring during a period of comparative stability in Turkish–Syrian relations, the match provided an advantageous occasion to publicly demonstrate the progress of reconciliation that had been achieved by the two countries which were previously on the brink of war. An official meeting was held at the presidential palace in Aleppo to correspond with the match and facilitate discussion about regional geopolitical issues. Future possibilities for cooperation on natural gas, water and energy trade were explored. According to the mainstream Turkish media, the match was a friendly watched by 75,000 supporters inside the stadium and 150,000 outside in celebration of the two countries and its leaders with slogans and flags. Therefore, it can be argued that the Aleppo match offers a useful example of the instrumentalisation of sport by political authorities for the benefit of its leaders. The event and its media coverage were utilised as platforms for the public affirmation of the political will behind the desire to overcome past tensions and build new forms of cooperation. With regard to Turkey, the visit coincided with a favourable political climate towards a Syrian rapprochement. The match served to endorse Davutoğlu's doctrine and strengthened Turkey's regional image.⁹

Another astonishing example can be drawn with the two football matches held between the Turkish and Armenian national football teams in 2008 and 2009, respectively. An intervention of fate resulted in the drawing of Turkey and Armenia in the same group for the qualifying rounds of the 2010 FIFA World Cup (European zone), the matches scheduled to be played in Armenia, 2008, and Turkey, 2009. However, since Armenia's establishment as an independent state following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the two states had no official diplomatic relationships. In addition, Turkey's territorial border with Armenia had been unilaterally blocked since 1993, in reaction to international pressure for the recognition of the Armenian genocide, and in expression of Turkey's solidarity with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijan's territory. Although in all likelihood the matches would have continued irrespective of the diplomatic situation, Turkish–Armenian relations entered an unprecedented period of conciliation from 2008. In June 2008, the Armenian President Sargsyan surprised the international community with an invitation to his Turkish counterpart, Abdullah Gül, to attend the Turkey–Armenia World Cup qualifying match in Yerevan. The question of attendance provoked fierce debate in Turkey throughout the summer among political actors, intellectuals, and “civil society” (Polo 2015). The leaders of the main political opposition parties argued that this so-called invitation should be declined. However, Prime Minister Erdoğan, pro-government newspapers, and liberal intellectuals broadly supported the gesture. Thus, Gül, became the first-ever Turkish President to make an official visit in Armenia in 2008. The visit, comprising joint meetings in addition to the match, took care to avoid any potentially contentious political issues; the visit was to resolutely convey an image of mutual peace and cordial dialogue. The two Presidents exchanged signs of mutual friendship and benevolence. The pretext of the game opened an unprecedented dialogue in daylight, making almost forget that the contacts had never been completely suspended. Following the match, the symbolic significance of Gül's visit was perpetuated by the media and politicians. The political import of the event totally eclipsed the football event, including the national win achieved by the Turkish team. The matches between Turkey and Armenia had a real diplomatic impact, at least in the short term. The EU and the United States publicly supported Gül's visit to Armenia. Olli Rehn, the European Commissioner for Enlargement, warmly welcomed the visit. International acknowledgment of the visit was marked in other ways. The Monaco-based Peace and Sport organisation distinguished Turkey and Armenia with the “Peace and Sport Image of the Year Award” in December 2008, for the photograph of the historic

handshake between Gül and Sargsyan taken at the Yerevan match as embodiment of the image of fraternisation through sport. In the following year, the FIFA Fair Play Award, 2008, was presented to the respective Football Associations of Armenia and Turkey in recognition of their part in facilitating dialogue between two countries with otherwise absent diplomatic relations. Notwithstanding the historic accomplishments of Yerevan, the most momentous outcomes were achieved in the political events that followed, without which the visit would have remained a simple meeting of state representatives and limited to a basic level of diplomatic exchange. Gül returned the invitation to President Sargsyan to attend the away match in Turkey in 2009. But the Armenian President exerts diplomatic pressure to ensure on Turkey by conditioning his presence at the return match to the signing of two diplomatic protocols. The protocols envisaged the establishment of diplomatic relations and the founding of an intergovernmental commission to address the political issues that existed between the two countries, including the institution of a subcommission on history. Of course, the negotiation process sparked a harsh backlash from the Armenian diaspora, the Armenian opposition, Azerbaijan, and nationalist circles in Turkey. The content of the protocols was passionately debated in both countries and negotiators had difficulty in reaching an acceptable compromise that would be agreeable to both parties. But finally, the protocols were signed in Zurich on 10 October 2009. Sargsyan attended the return match between Turkey and Armenia on 14 October 2009, alongside President Gül. However, the Parliaments never ratified the protocols which were eventually abandoned.

Turkish authorities have also used sports mega-events to promote the country abroad (Polo 2015). The last thirty years, Turkey host all the biggest sport competitions except the Olympic Games (but Istanbul was five times candidate), the Football World Cup and the European Football Championships (two applications for Euro 2008 and Euro 2016). It hosts the UEFA finals of the Champion's League (2005) and of the Europa League (2009).

Over the last twenty years, the political use of football and more broadly of sport in Turkey has been integrated into an influence-building diplomacy to foster a positive image abroad. From 2000, sports diplomacy, alongside other diplomatic instruments, have participated in a new AKP-driven foreign policy, such as the international cooperation policy, and an external cultural policy. In the aftermath of the Arab revolts in the early 2010s, Turkey paraded itself, and was correspondingly vaunted abroad, as a political model of the ideal modern state, which had succeeded in successfully combining

democracy with Islamic values. However, since 2013, Turkey faced with a series of domestic and international setbacks which tarnished its image and challenged this strategy of using sport as a diplomatic tool.¹⁰

Football in Turkey occupies a very important place in daily discussions, in the media and in the public space. This passion goes well beyond the sporting issue and appears as an indicator of the tensions and issues that work this society. Its complex relationship to the West, the persistence of strong nationalism, the investment of political actors in the world of football are all manifestations of the politicisation of football in Turkey.

Notes

1. After having migrated to Greece, Apollon and Panionios are still active in today's Athens.
2. *Türk Futbol Tarihi 1-2*, 11. For detailed records of Ottoman football, cricket, rugby and tennis games, see Yüce (2014).
3. For a detailed account of football supporters taking part in the Egyptian revolution, see Gibril (2016).
4. For a recent ethnography on football fandom in European Turkish diaspora, see Szogs (2017).
5. While Beşiktaş, Galatasaray and Fenerbahçe all present different arguments on why Atatürk was their supporter, there is absolutely no evidence on the famous Turkish statesman having the slightest interest in football. For the early Republican period sports policies which favoured physical education, see Akın (2003).
6. For example, in Galatasaray, not being a graduate of Galatasaray High School or a former athlete in the clubs dramatically reduces the chances of becoming a member, since it is completely in club board's initiative to open memberships to the general public.
7. Fethullah Gülen is a Turkish Muslim intellectual and the inspirational figure of the Gülen movement. He has set up a worldwide network of Turkish primary and secondary schools. Members of his movement cultivate secrecy, and they have infiltrated the Turkish administration, particularly the police and judiciary. Gülen went into exile in the USA in 1999. From 2002 to 2011 he was an important ally of Erdoğan's government. However, their relations became strained (he criticised Erdoğan's actions, in particular, the growing hostility towards Israel, the violent repression of Gezi Park and the negotiations with Kurdish rebels), and they were broken off in late 2013 in the wake of revelations about cases of corruption involving ministers, AKP officials and Erdoğan's family members. The Gülen movement was accused of being behind these revelations and of attempting to destabilise the

government. It was declared to be a terrorist organisation and the authorities embarked on the severe repression of its members, seizing their financial assets and demanding that Gülen be extradited from the USA. Gülen and his allies were said to be behind the attempted coup on 15 July 2016, justifying a new wave of arrests and dismissals of public-sector officials.

8. On 13 May 2014, an explosion at a coal mine in Soma, Manisa, Turkey, caused an underground mine fire. 301 people were killed in what was the worst mine disaster in Turkey's history. Soma miners' relatives and lawyers denounced the dangerous working conditions and inadequate infrastructure. The disaster triggered a large sympathy movement in Turkey.
9. However, although these benefits were the cumulative product of diplomatic overtures, the match failed to have a significant impact on Turkish–Syrian relations. The decline into civil war following the Syrian revolt in 2011 and Turkey's ensuing support of the opposition, considerably altered relations.
10. After the Gezi movements (June 2013), Erdoğan's close circles and collaborators were accused of corruptions which triggered in 2014 strong repressions against journalists, and lawyers, police officers. In 2015, in the framework of the Syrian drama, Erdoğan who lost its majority at the Turkish Parliament (June) relaunched during the military actions against the PKK. In July 2016, the failed state coup gave to Erdoğan the opportunity to implement the state security and to engage repression against those accused to be linked to the plotters (especially the Gülen movement). More than 50,000 people had been put in jail and 140,000 of the civil servant were dismissed (among them scholars, lawyers, police and military officers). In 2017, after a narrow victory in a referendum (with important fraud suspicion), Turkey adopted a controversial new Constitution that gives still more power to the President Erdoğan. In the context of a growing pressure on Turkish media, some European leaders have called to stop Turkey's EU accession talks.

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