

International organisations on national politics: Council of Europe effects on political party in Turkiye

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Abstract

This paper intends to examine influence of the Council of Europe (CoE) in two major political parties of Turkiye through their election manifests during the first quarter of the 21st century. The ruling AK Parti and main opposition party, CHP, election manifests are reviewed via MAXQDA data analysis panel. As one of the founding member states of the Council Turkiye has got close ties with the organisation and this has impositions on the national politics. This being the case, the problem of how this area is put on the agenda and evaluated in terms of Turkish political life becomes important. The effects of the CoE on Turkish political parties are classified under eight headings. These headings are examined with the help of graphics as 8 subcategories: "law", "fundamental rights and freedoms", "foreign policy", "public administration", "fight against corruption", "democracy", "labour and social security" and "family and social policies". Among these, "law" and "fundamental rights and freedoms" categories stand out as the most emphasized issues in the context of the CoE for both parties. Finally reveals that CHP and AK Parti priorities or emphases diverge on certain issues related to CoE. Thus, family and social policies for the CHP, and foreign policy and the fight against corruption for the AK Parti have defined the more prominent categories. Having examined the effects of the Council the paper draws a clear line of relations as far as the eight categories are concerned.

Keywords: Council of Europe, political parties, election manifestos.

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Introduction

Ever since the declaration of *Tanzimat* as an Imperial Decree to reform entire political system of the country in the first part of the C19th international involvement and organisations play a pivotal role in shaping political and administrative structure of Turkiye (Kutlu & Kahraman, 2020; Koçak & Sancaktutan, 2021). The international order designed after the WWII has introduced new dimensions to Turkiye as philosophy and tools of international community have been shifted to upheal an orderly system and with certain checks and balances (Balkaya, 2013; Akın, 2017). At this point, it can be stated that the Council of Europe, which has the characteristics of a political and international institution (Selçuk, 2022b: 2), has gained an exemplary meaning in terms of this study.

Turkiye's membership of the CoE signifies a cornerstone of the country to act together with international community and its governing atmosphere. Political parties operating in the country constitute a basis for measuring their reflections to international organisations. Therefore, the article intends to provide an analysis of the parties as to the CoE. Besides, prospective membership status of Turkiye with the EU

has also played an important role in directing the political parties to pay attention to CoE.

In terms of political representation in Türkiye, the Republican People's Party (CHP) has regularly completed behind the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Parti) during the last two decades or so. Thus, CHP was always the main opposition party within the parliamentary system and the largest opposition within the presidential government system too. The AK Parti has registered success in obtaining popular support of the Turkish electorate since 2002 general elections, and still successfully holds the power. The paper concentrates on the election declarations/manifestos since 2002 election as AK Parti was formed only in 2001, and therefore attended first in 2002 elections.

This article intends to pay attention to the levels and emphasis of both political parties that being as the two major parties of general politics in Türkiye for the last quarter of a century, to maintain their general election promises in the relations with the CoE. This has been the originality and contribution of the paper as there has been lack of studies comparing the relations of Turkish political parties related to the CoF and Türkiye. As one of founding members of the CoE, Türkiye has a prolonged experience to walk with the Council. In such a hectic, confusing and contradictable atmosphere in global politics, especially during the last two decades the CoE's projections of Türkiye would pose a remarkable analysis aspect. Being based upon its legislation and institutional structure within the framework of fundamental rights and freedoms and the principle of the rule of law, the CoE signifies a convenient ground for a democracy oriented international institution. Hence, eight principles as such law, fundamental rights and freedoms, foreign policy, public administration, fight against corruption, democracy, labour and social security and family and social policies represent the interests of this paper vis-à-vis general election promises in Türkiye (Kutlu, 2004).

The first part of the paper deals with the research design, expressing methodology, purpose, subject, scope and limitations of the study. Second, foundations of the legal and institutional aspects of CoE-Türkiye relations are highlighted to shed light on the involvement of Council in relations to the political parties. Third, the findings of the paper about the eight dimensions mentioned above are displayed. Fourth part analyses the findings with the prospect of drawing lessons and providing a frame for the parties to evaluate their position. Finally, the paper concludes by presenting the specific results occurring from research.

Research Method

The main purpose of the study is to reveal the approaches of the two largest political parties in Türkiye, in the right and left political spectrum, regarding the CoE as an international organisation, in the context of their election promises. CHP and AK Parti have been selected chosen as examples among other political parties in Türkiye, as they are the most popularly supported political parties. This article presents an up-to-date evaluation of the ruling party and the main opposition party in Türkiye, which have a long-standing CoE history and experience (Hohberger, 2021). Within the scope of the research, election manifestos of CHP and AK Parti provide a basis for comparison opportunities from 2002 to 2023.

One can possibly wonder the positions of other political parties as to CoE policies. It has been evident that political parties other than the two already selected for evaluation have shown a good deal of fluctuations especially since 2002 elections.

Governing political parties of MHP, ANAP, DYP and DSP pre-2002 period lost in the general election, being pushed out of the Parliament, as they failed to obtain 10 % vote, that was the threshold for the representation in parliament. Therefore, the following elections resulted in a similar picture and only Ak Party and CHP have been continually represented in the Parliament during the period. This has been the logic behind selecting the two political parties as the cases to follow a smooth line of continuation in the political spectrum. Otherwise, the evaluation would be limited to follow the policies and principles highlighted by CoE.

Selection of 2002 to evaluate the positions of political parties has several reasons: First, during this period Europe-Turkiye relations have been developed rapidly due to the prospective candidacy status to the EU given to Turkiye. EU and CoE are hand-in-hand organisations, specifically on the issues selected for evaluation in this study. Second, this period reflects various national and international political problems, mainly after 9/11. Third, the elements selected for evaluation have become visible especially after so many human rights abuse cases in the regions. Final, the continuity in politics has also a motivating factor to follow the line of succession in government circles.

Though party documents are varying texts depending on differing dynamics and power relations within their respective institutional systems, the paper aims further to evaluate conjunctural contexts that the dynamics are shaped. Qualitative method is deployed through the MAXQDA data analysis program. Therefore, the evaluation takes the issues according to their literal meanings, as the political parties might have their own explanations, and the nuances might not be fully covered. It may not be possible to cover the exact meaning adopted by the respective political parties. Instead, the paper takes their literal meanings, because this study intends to analyse the meaning of the principles according to the electorate, rather than the deep meaning deployed by the party policy makers.

Political parties are supposed to shape their priorities and principles in terms of main public policy areas. Besides, their policies might also overlap the policies determined by international organisations. Highlighting the major policy areas in Turkish political parties would show their interest areas for their respective supporters: "disaster and crisis management", "youth and sports", "commerce", "tourism", "education", "science and technology", "health", "economy", "politics", "foreign policy", "environment" and climate", "transportation and infrastructure", "agriculture, forestry and animal husbandry", "culture and arts", "energy and natural resources", "public administration", "internal and external security", "labor and social security", "family and social policies". In addition, democratic policy dimensions are also mentioned: "democracy", "fundamental rights and freedoms", "fight against corruption" and "visual and social media" can be added. In addition, "foreign immigrants", which is one of the important agenda items of the 21st century, and "overseas communities" (citizens-kinsmen-co-religionists). As seen, the aspects by political parties could be extended beyond the twenty-five topics specified above.

Certain policy areas by political parties i.e. "disaster and crisis management", "youth and sports", "visual and social media", "commerce" and "tourism" have not matched the areas of the CoE policies. Besides, the Council of Europe has not also shown direct interest in "education" and "science and technology" in the AK Parti election manifestos. "Health", "expatriates", "economy", "environment and climate", "transportation and infrastructure", "agriculture, forestry and animal husbandry", "culture and art" and "energy and natural resources" are the areas that CHP has provisions but no CoE interests. These areas which the CoE has no direct provisions are

not worthy of evaluation as there is no basis for a comparative analysis. Therefore, main emphasis put forward on "law", "fundamental rights and freedoms", "foreign relations", "public administration", "fight against corruption", "democracy", "labour and social security" and "anti-corruption struggle". The figures on the eight topics are as follows:

Table 1. Prominent CoE Issues in CHP and AK Parti

	Party	Sections	Percent	2002	2007	2011	June 2015	Nov 2015	2018	2023
Law	AK Parti	50	34,97	6	8	8	8	8	8	4
	CHP	30	32,26	0	1	3	2	6	3	15
fundamental rights and freedoms	AK Parti	31	21,68	1	5	4	4	4	8	5
	CHP	20	21,51	0	1	2	4	4	2	7
public administration	AK Parti	13	9,09	3	0	1	3	3	3	0
	CHP	17	18,28	0	0	1	2	4	4	6
foreign policy	AK Parti	27	18,88	1	3	3	5	5	6	4
	CHP	8	8,60	0	0	1	0	0	3	4
fight against corruption	AK Parti	10	6,99	2	2	0	2	2	2	0
	CHP	2	2,15	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
democracy	AK Parti	6	4,23	0	0	3	1	1	0	1
	CHP	4	4,30	0	0	2	0	1	0	1
labor and social security	AK Parti	1	0,70	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
	CHP	10	10,75	0	1	0	3	3	2	1
family and social policies	AK Parti	5	3,50	0	0	0	2	2	1	0
	CHP	2	2,15	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
TOTAL	AK Parti	142	100,00	13	18	19	25	25	28	14
	CHP	93	100,00	0	3	9	11	18	14	38

Source: processed by the authors with MAXQDA panel, 2024

Among the eight topic headings in Table 1, the most significant comparative difference findings in CHP and AK Parti in terms of proportional slice and emphasis division are given by the headings "labour and social security", "public administration", "foreign policy" and "fight against corruption". Among the eight subject headings in CHP, the subjects "labour and social security" and "public administration" produced proportionally more data than AK Parti. In the AK Parti, proportionally more data has been produced on the subjects of "foreign policy" and "fight against corruption" among the eight headings compared to CHP. The issues producing the highest data for both parties are "law" and "fundamental rights and freedoms".

A more party-based comparative analysis for this study could allow the study to exceed the writing limits of an article and become a subject for a thesis or book. Secondly, the fact that CHP and AK Parti constituted the ruling and main opposition parties of Turkiye during the period in which this study was examined and generally gained the vast majority of representation in the country's parliament after each general election (for example, in the 2002 general elections, only two political parties, CHP and AK Parti, were able to enter the parliament), provided the feature of representing two strong samples in terms of reflecting the general political situation in Turkiye. Thirdly, the fact that the Council of Europe - Turkiye relations focused on certain issues facilitated the determination of the focal examination, discussion and analysis headings of this study. In this respect, it strengthened the possibility of a limited but distinct analysis focusing on certain themes. Fourthly, the comprehensive election manifestos prepared by the parties for the general elections are important

documents that provide important signals in terms of showing the course of change in other domestic and foreign issues of the country.

In the design of the study, CHP and AK Parti election manifestos for 2002, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2018 and 2023 general elections constitute the basic research documents and data set. Having long historical roots compared to AK Parti, CHP has regularly followed the policies and political style of government in Türkiye as the main opposition party within the period of the study. Due to its history and continuity in policies CHP is mentioned first in relevant sections and comparisons. Election manifestos of CHP and AK Parti are taken as basis. AK Parti revealed only one manifesto for June 2015 and November 2015 elections, while CHP was revising its June 2015 manifesto. In addition, instead of publishing an independent election manifesto for the 2023 elections, CHP chose to publish the *Joint Consensus Text* of six political parties as the Nation Alliance members.

Legal Legislation and Institutional Structure in CoE - Türkiye Relations

The Council of Europe (CoE) plays a crucial role in Turkey's social and economic development, particularly in the realm of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Various CoE legal instruments and institutions relevant to Turkey, including the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), European Social Charter, European Charter of Local Self-Government, European Urban Charter, Istanbul Convention, Lanzarote Convention, Civil Law Convention on Corruption, European Code of Police Ethics, and the Council of Europe Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism. These instruments form the basis for examining the election promises of two Turkish political parties and their engagement with CoE standards.

The European Convention on Human Rights, signed by Turkey in 1954, is a cornerstone document defining rights and freedoms in democratic regimes. It established the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), which has become a normative power center due to increased individual applications in the 2000s. The Convention's structure includes two main parts: the first defining rights and freedoms, and the second detailing the establishment and functioning of the ECtHR. The General Secretariat of CoE oversees processes such as member states becoming parties to the Convention, submitting reservations, and signing, while the Committee of Ministers supervises the execution of ECtHR decisions.

The European Social Charter, initially signed in 1961 and revised in 1996, focuses on protecting social, cultural, and economic rights. Turkey signed the Revised European Social Charter in 2004, which came into force in 2007. However, Turkey made several reservations on articles related to fair employment, wages, and rights to organize and collective bargaining. These reservations include provisions on paid annual leave, fair wages, and the right to organize and collective bargaining, reflecting Turkey's specific approach to implementing these social and economic rights.

The European Charter of Local Self-Government, adopted in 1985 and signed by Turkey in 1988 (coming into force in 1993), aims to strengthen local and regional democracies. This Charter is a binding text that prioritizes the strengthening of democracy at the local level and institutionalizing democratic local governments in member countries. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities oversees the implementation of the Charter through regular visits to local governments and monitoring of local elections. The document also mentions the European Urban Charter, which defines urban rights based on human rights but does not have the

status of a formal agreement. This Charter has been revised twice, with the latest version (Urban Charter-3) addressing themes such as local democratic participation, gender equality, smart cities, and digital equality.

The Council of Europe has been active in fighting corruption, as evidenced by the Civil Law Convention Against Corruption and the establishment of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO). The Civil Law Convention Against Corruption, dated January 4, 1999, emphasizes the threat of corruption to the rule of law, democracy, and human rights, and promotes the use of civil law to combat corruption. Additionally, the European Code of Police Ethics, introduced in 2001, sets standards for policing services within the framework of social trust, justice, and fundamental rights. This code is based on the ECHR and principles adopted by the Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, prioritizing policing objectives in democratic societies governed by the rule of law.

By discussing the Venice Commission, an advisory body of the Council of Europe established in 1990, of which Turkey has been a member since its inception. The Commission, officially known as the European Commission for Democracy through Law, publishes opinions on various legal and judicial matters for member countries. For instance, in 2017, the Venice Commission criticized Turkey's proposed presidential system, arguing that it lacked proper separation of powers and could lead to an uncontrolled executive with significant control over the judiciary. This illustrates the Commission's role in providing critical assessments of member countries' political systems and regimes, further demonstrating the comprehensive influence of the Council of Europe on Turkey's legal and political landscape.

Prominent CoE Issues in CHP and AK Parti

The legal-institutional dimension of CoE has already been underlined in the previous section as a leverage for institutional development mechanisms in Türkiye. Keeping this in mind, and in the light of the data related to election manifestos, the categories defined in the previous heading are examined in this part of the paper. Thus the data obtained through MAXQDA are analysed in details.

Process of change in the priorities and policies adopted by both political parties depend very much on national politics as well as international political conditions. Take the developments after the 9/11 as an example. Invasion of Iraq in 2003 has been an important issue in Turkish politics and therefore democracy and human rights related priorities needed to be taken into consideration. Besides, especially after 2015 general elections, the opposition party seemed to obtain confidence in highlighting important issues in the public as Ak Party was unable to control majority in the parliament in June 2015 election and had to push hard to gain success in November 2015 elections.

This logic has worked nearly in every election since 2002. So there is positive correlations between the political atmosphere and the principles and policies put forwarded in elections manifestos. One can mention with a great deal of confidence that Turkish politics is in line with the relations between Türkiye and CoE. As one of the founding members of CoE in 1949, Türkiye has always paid attention to the Council. This has been true also for political parties operation in the political arena.

Law in Manifestos

As far as the CoE involvement was concerned in CHP and AK Parti election manifestos "law" was the most-widely repeated item. The logic and structure of legal provisions can be classified on two major grounds: "judicial units" (judicial functioning) and "legal norms" (legislation). Besides, Chart 1 below signifies that "law" in the context

of CoE displayed a significant increase in 2023 compared to previous years for CHP. While the CoE-law relationship in CHP produced the highest data in 2023, AK Parti was registering the lowest data for the same year. However, in total, more data was produced on this issue in the AK Parti manifestos than in the CHP, except for 2023. This shows a significant rise in CHP in 2023; whereas legal issues in AK Parti showed a steady increase between 2007 and 2018, hinting the first indicators of decline after 2018.

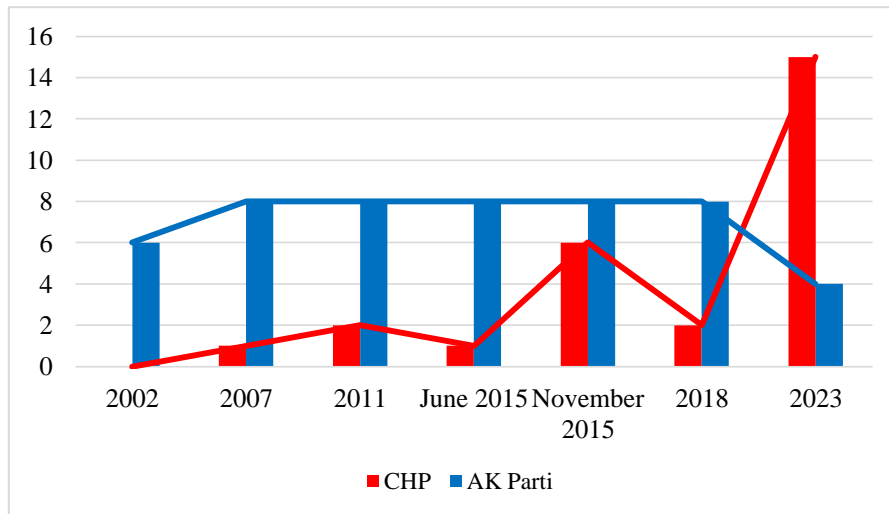


Figure 1. Law in CHP and AK Parti Election Manifestos
Source: processed by the authors with MAXQDA panel, 2024

The election manifestos of Turkey's CHP and AK Parti parties from 2002 to 2023, focusing on their references to Council of Europe (CoE) legal instruments. CHP initially made few references to CoE instruments but gradually increased its emphasis, particularly on the Revised European Social Charter, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), and the European Charter of Local Self-Government. AK Parti, on the other hand, consistently referred to various CoE instruments since 2002, with a focus on the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), ECtHR, and anti-corruption agreements.

CHP's approach evolved over time, with no significant mentions of CoE instruments until 2011, when it began emphasizing ECtHR decisions and Venice Commission criteria, particularly regarding political arrests and party closures. By 2023, CHP made comprehensive promises to comply with the ECHR and ECtHR decisions, prioritizing freedom of expression and peaceful demonstrations. AK Parti initially emphasized the ECHR as part of domestic law and promised to base constitutional reforms on it. Over time, their focus shifted towards implementing ECtHR decisions and cooperating with CoE bodies.

AK Parti's manifesto evolution showed a consistent reference to the ECHR and ECtHR from 2002 to 2018. They highlighted the integration of ECHR principles into domestic law, the impact of ECtHR rulings on reducing applications from Turkish citizens, and the recognition of domestic remedies by the ECtHR. However, by 2023, direct references to the ECHR were absent, with only the ECtHR mentioned. This shift reflects changing priorities in their approach to European human rights mechanisms over two decades.

Fundamental Rights and Freedoms in Manifestos

The momentum by CHP and AK Parti regarding fundamental rights and freedoms has been irregular. The highest value in CHP since 2002 reached in 2023, while AK Parti registered the lowest data in 2023, after 2011.

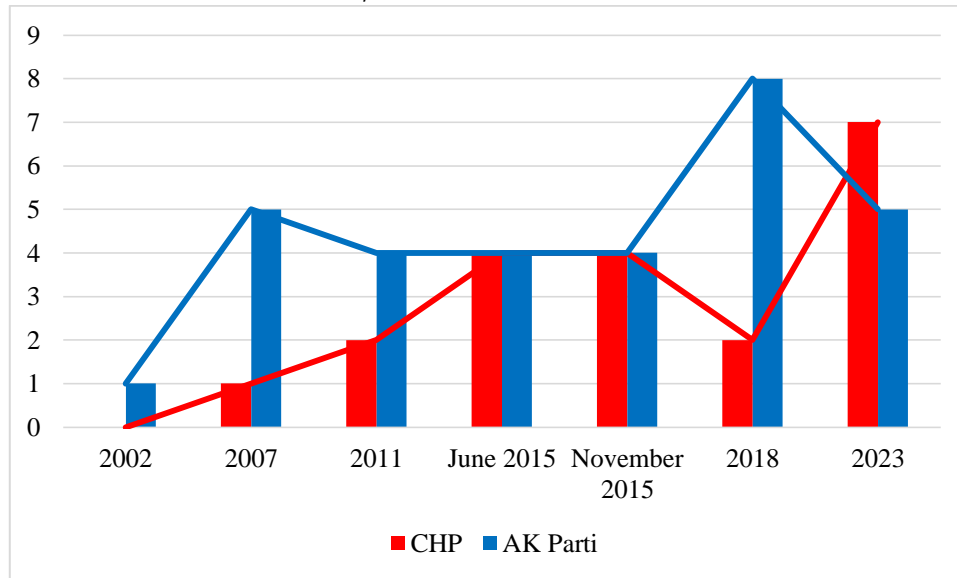


Figure 2. Fundamental Rights and Freedoms in CHP and AK Parti Election Manifestos
Source: I processed by the authors with MAXQDA panel, 2024

The evolution of CHP's approach to fundamental rights and freedoms in their election manifestos from 2011 to 2023. Initially, CHP emphasized individual rights, respect for private life, and security, citing ECtHR decisions to criticize the situation in Turkey. Over time, their focus expanded to include trade union rights, police ethics, and specific conventions like the Lanzarote Convention and the Council of Europe Artificial Intelligence Convention. By 2023, CHP's manifesto reached its peak in provisions on fundamental rights, promising constitutional changes and criticizing AK Parti's record on human rights.

AK Parti's approach to fundamental rights and freedoms, as reflected in their manifestos from 2002 to 2023, consistently referenced the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). Initially, they promised to draft a new constitution in line with ECHR principles and highlighted improvements in fundamental rights. After 2016, following a coup attempt and subsequent state of emergency, AK Parti emphasized cooperation with the Council of Europe on rights issues and the recognition of domestic legal mechanisms by the ECtHR. They also promised zero tolerance for torture and continued improvement of legislation within ECHR boundaries.

Both parties addressed personal data protection, but with different timings and emphases. CHP only included it in their 2023 manifesto, focusing on EU-related protections, while AK Parti implemented policies on this issue after 2015. The parties also differed in their approach to specific rights areas, with CHP placing more emphasis on labor and employment rights as fundamental freedoms. Despite some similarities in their promises, the document suggests that AK Parti's actions did not always align with their stated commitments, particularly regarding constitutional reforms based on ECHR principles after 2011.

Foreign Policy in Manifestos

In the field of foreign policy, the AK Parti has produced more data than the CHP. However, the foreign policy data determined for 2011, 2018 and 2023 for the CHP were able to produce continuous data for the AK Parti except for 2002 and 2011. In the AK Parti context, the highest data was reached in 2015-2018, and in the CHP in 2018-2023.

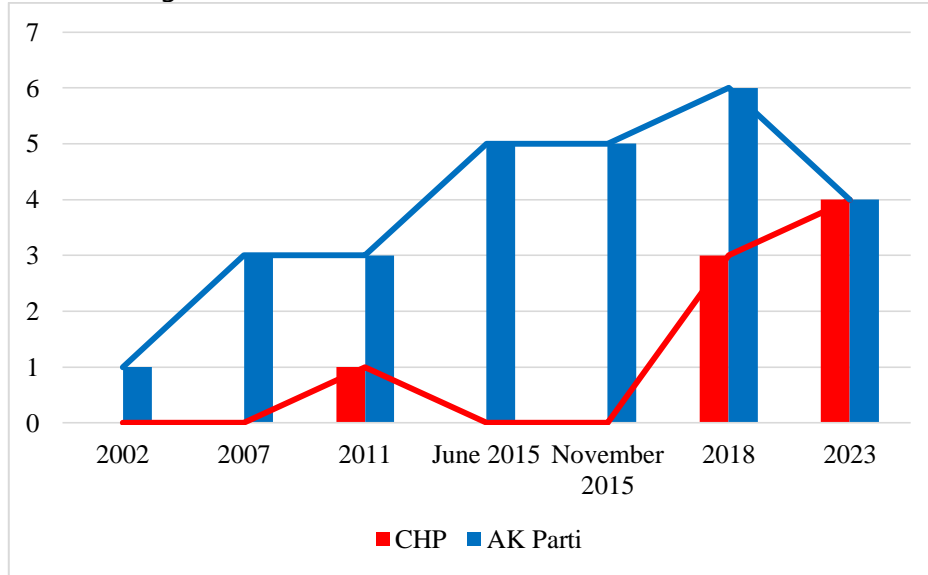


Figure 3. Foreign Policy in CHP and AK Parti Election Manifestos
Source: processed by the authors with MAXQDA panel, 2024

CHP asserted in the 2011 Election Manifesto that certain international organizations, including CoE, would support international efforts in preventing the great powers from becoming dominant over national issues. So, CoE should not be under the control of imperialistic hegemonic states and therefore every member should benefit from and contribute with equal power and share. The 2018 manifesto complained about the problems in the field of human rights abuse allegations filed against Türkiye and the country being placed among the problematic member countries of CoE. It is further assumed that Türkiye's reputation as an CoE member should be protected by resolving the problems resulting from the failure to meet internationally recognised standards. As a result, the relations with CoE would be normalised, and national priorities would not be neglected in effectively voicing national and regional problems in CoE. The propositions that "Türkiye is a founding member of CoE" and "being a GRECO member of the CoE" necessitates an emphasis rather than an evaluation on the prospective relations with the Council.

From the point of the view of AK Parti, human rights issue was defined as one of the pioneering and priority issue of the foreign policy in 2015 by the CoE token. The party claimed that Türkiye would continue to strengthen its place for "European architecture" as one of the countries that provide support to the CoE budget. Therefore, the the number of representatives in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) need to be increased so that Turkish would be studied in PACE as one of the widely used languages. Besides, the need for global cooperation on xenophobia and Islamophobia was great especially by the help of CoE in 2018. Furthermore, the cooperation with CoE on the state of emergency measures emerging after the *coup'd etat* attempt on July 15, 2016. By 2023, within the scope of effective multilateral diplomacy efforts, the term presidency of the Committee of Ministers and the Presidency of the PACE are exemplified.

Public Administration in Manifestos

Whereas the data produced by CHP and AK Parti on central government was generally parallel between 2007 and 2018, the policies in this field was proposed only by CHP in 2023. The public administration category consisted contradicting and irregular data as to the period studied.

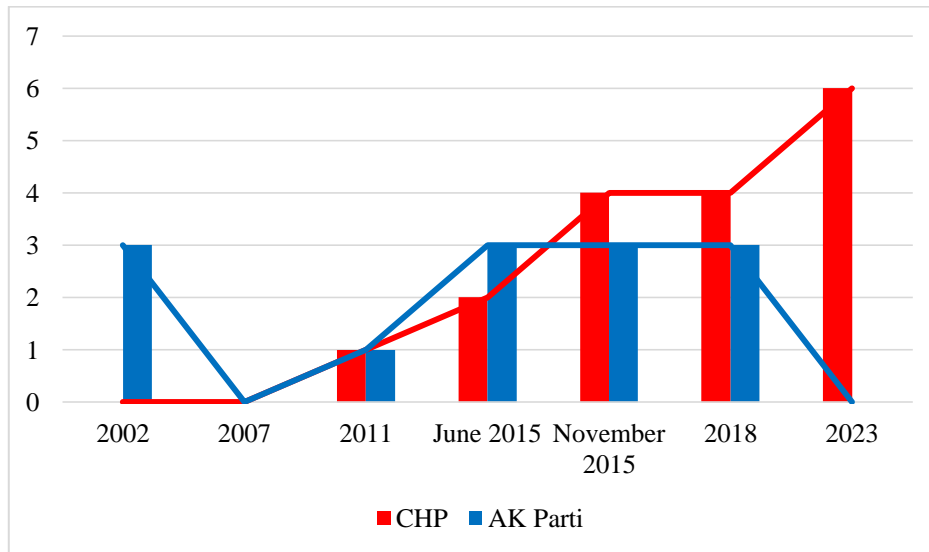


Figure 4. Public Administration in CHP and AK Parti Election Manifestos
Source: processed by the authors with MAXQDA panel, 2024

The election manifestos of CHP (Republican People's Party) and AK Parti (Justice and Development Party) in Turkey, focusing on their approaches to public administration. For CHP, the main issues addressed were public personnel management, local government reform, and police training. CHP promised to remove obstacles to union rights for public servants, with exceptions based on the Revised European Social Charter. They also committed to implementing the European Charter of Local Self-Government and training police personnel according to the European Code of Police Ethics.

CHP's manifestos also touched on other issues related to public administration. They proposed holding prosecutors and judges personally responsible for compensation payments ordered by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). The party also promised to base their anti-terrorism policies on Council of Europe agreements and decisions, and to use GRECO (Group of States against Corruption) in designing a system to protect public officials in the fight against corruption.

AK Parti's approach to public administration, as reflected in their manifestos, consistently emphasized the European Charter of Local Self-Government. From their first manifesto in 2002, they promised to incorporate the Charter into domestic law and the constitution. They pledged to grant local governments autonomy within the Charter's principles and to review reservations on the Charter. AK Parti also highlighted that the State of Emergency Affairs Investigation Commission, established after 2016, was recognized by the ECtHR as a domestic legal mechanism, demonstrating their focus on aligning domestic practices with European standards.

Fighting Against Corruption in Manifestos

In the CoE context, while the anti-corruption category is only relevant in 2023 for the CHP, it has been evident that it has regularly become a subject of emphasis for AK Parti, except 2011 and 2023 elections.

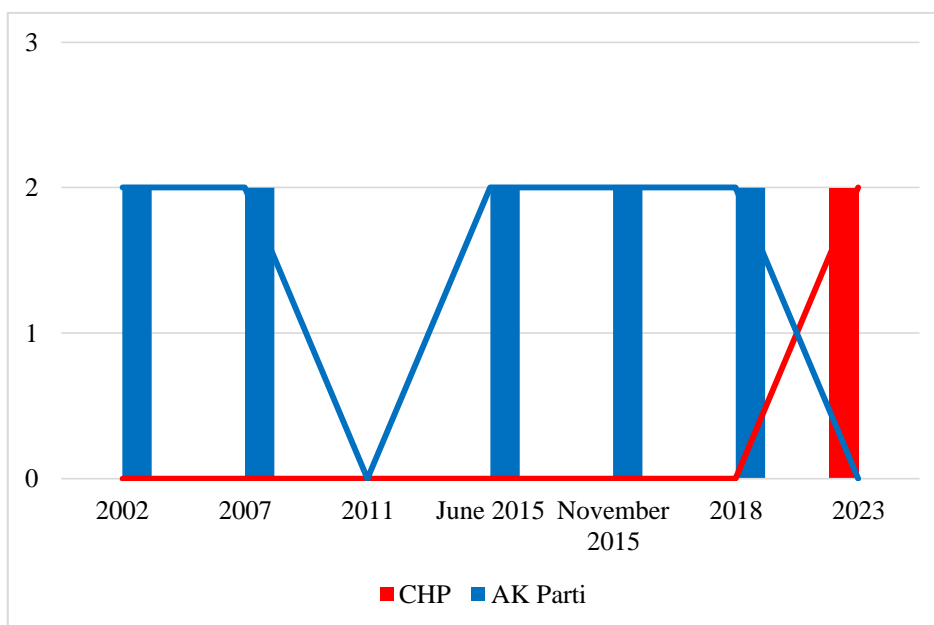


Figure 5. Fighting Corruption in CHP and AK Parti Election Manifestos
Source: processed by the authors with MAXQDA panel, 2024

The Republican People's Party (CHP) in Türkiye demonstrated a strong commitment to anti-corruption measures aligned with international standards. In their election manifesto, they emphasized that any anti-corruption legislation implemented in Türkiye would fully comply with the recommendations set forth by the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO). The CHP stressed the importance of incorporating GRECO decisions into the development of an effective audit and sanction system, particularly focusing on crucial areas such as asset declaration and prohibiting the acceptance of gifts by public officials from individuals receiving services from their respective authorities. This stance reflected a clear intention to align Türkiye's anti-corruption efforts with established European norms and practices, showcasing the party's dedication to transparency and accountability in governance.

On the other hand, the Justice and Development Party (AK Parti) exhibited a consistent focus on anti-corruption initiatives throughout its election manifestos. In its inaugural manifesto before coming to power, the AK Parti pledged to secure Türkiye's membership in GRECO, a promise that was fulfilled in 2004. The party also committed to ratifying two significant anti-corruption agreements issued by the Council of Europe (CoE). Subsequent manifestos in 2007, 2015, and 2018 highlighted the party's achievements in this realm, including the ratification of CoE's anti-corruption agreements and Türkiye's ongoing membership in GRECO. Notably, the AK Parti oversaw the signing of crucial international treaties, such as the CoE Civil Law Convention Against Corruption and the Convention on Laundering, Investigation, Seizure and Confiscation of Proceeds from Crime. These actions demonstrated the party's sustained effort to integrate Türkiye into the global anti-corruption framework and enhance the country's standing in international anti-corruption initiatives.

Democracy in Manifestos

Democracy category has registered irregularities in the CHP and AK Parti election manifestos, and yet it would bear fruitful results as one of the noteworthy topics in the CoE context.

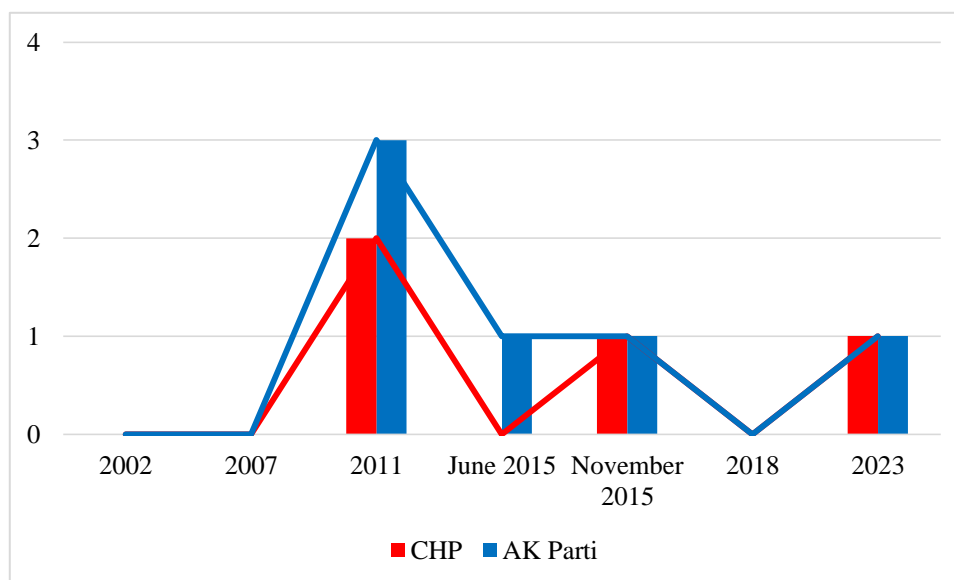


Figure 6. Democracy in CHP and AK Parti Election Manifestos

Source: processed by the authors with MAXQDA panel, 2024

Among the issues related to democracy in the context of CoE, CHP defended first that the existence of a libertarian democratic environment was essential for the implementation of fundamental rights and freedoms in Türkiye. Secondly, the documents mentioned that there would be very exceptional cases for the closure of political parties in line with the ECtHR jurisprudence and the Venice Criteria. For November 2015, CHP would propose to bring a democratically compatible institution as such ECHR. In addition, it emphasised that sensitivity would be shown in harmonizations of Türkiye with that of democracy, so that it illustrated by the studies of the CoE Artificial Intelligence Convention in 2023.

AK Parti stressed on that they received positive remarks from CoE and the Venice Commission in strengthening Turkish democracy with the Judicial Reform Strategy they initiated before the 2011 elections. AK Parti, during their struggle in facing a closure case in the Constitutional Court, was forced to draw attention to the judicial reform vis-à-vis political parties with the intention of receiving a positive response from the Venice Commission while going to the 2011 elections. In this vein, a package of constitutional amendments in 2010 was placed in a referendum. Eventually, the automatic dismissal of a person who causes his party to be closed down by the constitution was abolished, the requirement for three-fifths of the Constitutional Court members to vote for the closure of a political party has been increased to two-thirds majority (Prime Ministry, 2013). On the other hand, it asserted that the democratic reforms implemented by AK Parti before 2015 included the ECHR provisions and ECtHR jurisprudence. It was also evident that certain contributions made to the efforts of CoE as to digital democracy.

Labour and Social Security in the Manifestos

In the context of CoE, while there has been almost no direct proposition in AK Parti in related to the labour and social security category, CHP produced concrete data in this field. The record by AK Parti bears indirect involvement so that the Revised

European Social Charter was ratified only once. This category provides a ground to speculate especially for CHP perspectives.

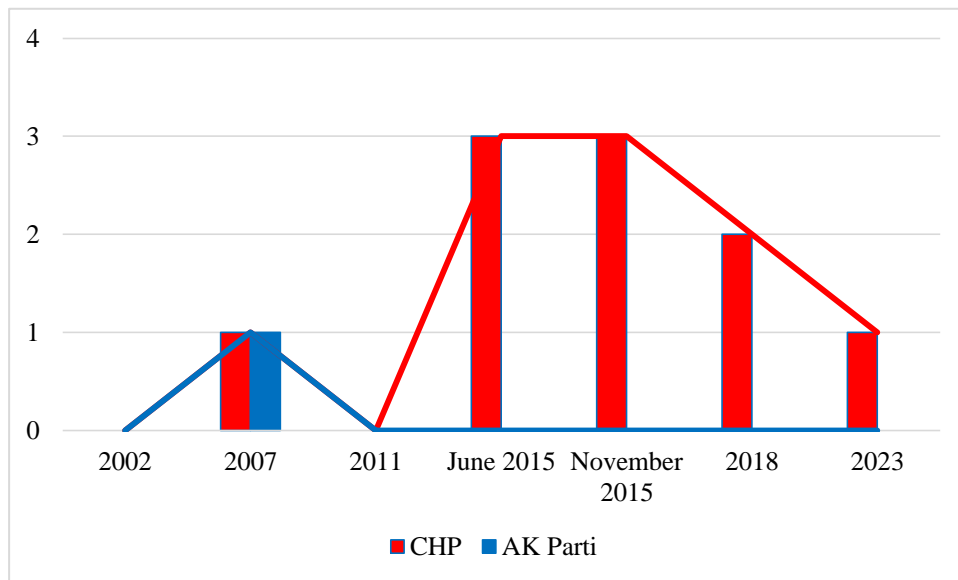


Figure 7. Labor and Social Security in CHP and AK Parti Election Manifestos
Source: processed by the authors with MAXQDA panel, 2024

The Republican People's Party (CHP) in Türkiye consistently advocated for a comprehensive overhaul of labor rights and social policies, aligning them with European standards as outlined in the Revised European Social Charter. Initially, the CHP made a bold promise to completely eliminate the reservations that the AK Parti government had placed on the Charter. This commitment reflected a desire to fully embrace the progressive labor and social rights enshrined in the European document. The party identified specific areas of concern, particularly focusing on laws that were perceived as anti-democratic in their restriction of union rights, including collective bargaining agreements, strikes, and lockouts. The CHP's dedication to this cause was evident in their repeated emphasis on restructuring the labor sector and employment conditions to achieve compatibility with the Revised European Social Charter, a promise that was reiterated in their 2007 and 2015 election manifestos. This consistent stance demonstrated the party's long-term vision for enhancing workers' rights and social protections in Türkiye.

As the years progressed, the CHP's commitment to aligning with the Revised European Social Charter became more detailed and concrete. In their 2015 manifesto, the party provided a more comprehensive analysis of the changes they sought to implement. They specifically highlighted key provisions of the Charter, such as annual leave, minimum wage, and union rights, pledging to ratify these without any reservations. This level of detail signaled a more mature and focused approach to labor reform. The party's dedication to this cause remained unwavering, as evidenced by the repetition of these promises in subsequent election manifestos, including those for November 2015, 2018, and 2023. In these later manifestos, the CHP continued to emphasize the removal of reservations and restrictions on union rights, while also broadening their focus to include fair working conditions, social security, the right to organize, and collective bargaining. This persistent and evolving commitment to harmonizing Türkiye's labor laws with the Revised European Social Charter underscored the CHP's vision for a more equitable and rights-oriented labor market, aligned with European standards.

Family and Social Policies in Manifestos

Certain provisions were placed in the category of family and social policies in 2023 by CHP and in 2015 and 2018 by AK Parti. There was no direct determination for either party in the period before 2015.

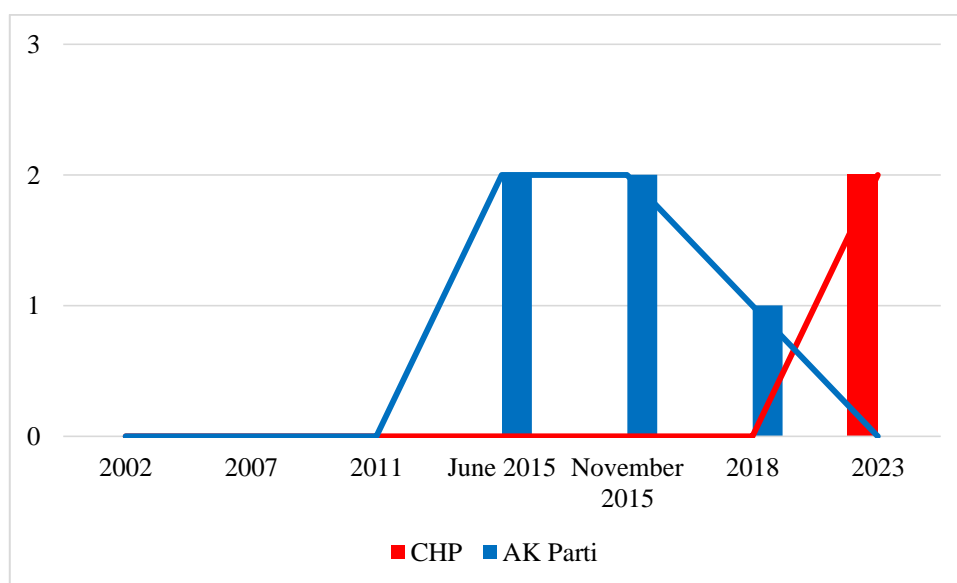


Figure 8. Family and Social Policies in CHP and AK Parti Election Manifestos

Source: processed by the authors with MAXQDA panel, 2024

Looking at the election manifestos of both parties, CHP promised to comply with the obligations of the Lanzarote Convention, while AK Parti claimed to be the first country to sign Istanbul Convention without reservations and asserted that the national procedures were fulfilled entering into force. In this respect, emphasis on children's rights was developed by CHP and women's rights by AK Parti. Moreover, AK Parti withdrew from the Istanbul Convention after 2021, despite its emphasis in 2018. The "becoming a party to the Istanbul Convention without reservations" were the terms which AK Parti expressed with special emphasis in its election manifestos, the Convention terminated fully by a Presidential Decree published in the Official Gazette dated March 20, 2021.

Discussion and Evaluation

CoE involvement in national politics of Türkiye has always been contentious, as the Council has interfered with the arena that is deemed to be within the realms of national sovereignty. For instance, one of the Council organs, European Court of Human Rights decisions are not always easy to accept by Türkiye, as they often go beyond acceptable levels of criticism in terms of human rights, law & order problems, and social and political provisions by Turkish governments. This has caused sporadic relations between CoE and Türkiye. The reality seemed to be that both parties do not eager to terminate relations in every aspect as they are aware that they have symbiotic relations. Türkiye needs CoE, because the country has got economic, political, historical and legal ties with Europe. Türkiye is a part of the Customs union with the EU, and a prospective candidate since 1959. CoE needs Türkiye, because there are nearly 10 million Turkish citizens living in the EU countries as well as its influence in various Balkan countries makes it an important and irresistible ally and a buffer-zone between

the Middle East and Europe. Besides, economies of several European countries depend very much on the manufacturing companies in Turkiye. Besides, its religious, cultural and social richness have a solid argument for cooperation, due mainly to show that CoE member states value different cultures and civilisations. There are also other reasons worthy of mention. Besides, the issue of sovereignty and political independence is not only the issue of today, but also the problem of nearly last two centuries. So, the nation in a quite difficult geopolitics should find a way of striking a balance between independence and political and economic interests.

In the account of CoE it has been evident that CHP has been able to develop emphasis on the *legal* category such as arrests, party closures, and human rights violations in Turkiye. It is visible that AK Parti, on the other hand, prefers an agenda related to domestic law within the framework of a regulatory approach, including judicial decisions, judicial institutions, judicial members and legal legislation in the "law" category in the CoE context. Moreover, two different approaches deployed by CHP and the AK Parti stand out regarding members of the judiciary. According to CHP, the ECtHR verdicts ordering Turkiye to pay compensation, the judges and prosecutors causing this would be held responsible for the financial burden. AK Parti stated in their manifestos that ECtHR decisions have been taken into account in the promotion and appointment of judges and prosecutors. This dispute is essentially parallel to the political debates and negative perceptions towards judges and judicial decisions in Turkiye.

As a legal provision in the law category, the ECHR has been a decisive and effective element. As parallel to this, the ECtHR also came to the fore as a complementary emphasis. In this respect, ECHR and ECtHR were the most prominent issues in the election manifestos of both CHP and AK Parti. However, in the 2023 Manifesto, CHP has a stronger support for the ECHR provisions and ECtHR decisions than the AK Parti. This ownership shows that CHP has accelerated the pace of change, placing special importance to the field, especially due to its alliance partners. In this context, the ECHR and the ECtHR have gained value as important political tools and mechanisms in the objections of the opposition led by CHP on violations of fundamental rights and freedoms and legal issues. On the other hand, there has been no negative approach towards the ECHR and ECtHR, which are included nearly in every manifesto by AK Parti.

In the field of CoE, three issues have become visible by CHP regarding *fundamental rights and freedoms*. Firstly, it has been advocated that, following the negative verdicts against Turkiye by ECtHR regarding the violation of fundamental rights and freedoms, the members of the judiciary overseeing the relevant case should also be subject to criminal sanctions. Secondly, legal rules and regulations alleviating the restriction of fundamental rights and freedoms are specifically targeted. Thirdly, the aims and goals related to the protection of union rights of working individuals have been set up. In addition to these three prominent issues, the problems of police violence, children's rights and women's rights were also taken into consideration by CHP manifestos as a part of human rights issues.

It has been also clear beyond doubt that CHP's criticism of AK Parti governments on *fundamental rights and freedoms* in relation to CoE became evident in 2011. Before then, CHP's political stance in the position of defending actors of the cases such as Ergenekon and Sledgehammer was quite decisive. Then, "security policies", which reached their peak with the military *coup'd etat* attempt of Fetullahist Terrorist Organization (FETO) on July the 15th, 2016 and included a kind of obligation meeting

various objections by CHP. In parallel, it could be stated with a degree of confidence that CHP drew attention to the ECtHR decisions in 2011, 2015, 2018 and 2023 in the context of human rights, and law and order. Moreover, it would be stated that after the change of government system in Türkiye in 2017, CHP's fierce opposition against the new system began to be reflected in the election manifestos. For example, in 2018, CHP claimed that Türkiye as a CoE member country, was among the countries with the most negative human rights records, and therefore more attention paid for human rights in 2023 than in previous election manifestos (See also Kurban, 2024).

Considering the AK Parti election manifestos, there appear to be a concentration on three major issues: first, Türkiye would continue to attach utmost importance to the ECHR provisions and ECtHR decisions; second, it is and may continue to be a party to other human rights agreements issued by CoE; third, it has a commitment to continue efforts to transpose all agreements within the framework of CoE into domestic law.

The fact that AK Parti emphasises the ECHR principles in election manifestos more than CHP indicates in a more orderly attitude. In addition, for AK Parti, ECHR was deemed to include as a part of the new constitutional goals in the period of 2002 and 2011. It was also noted that in 2015, a number of prisons that was measured to violate human rights and freedoms within the scope of CoE standards were shut down, and therefore human rights and freedoms were also addressed as a foreign policy issue. Besides, it was claimed that in 2018, there was zero tolerance policy towards ill-treatment of security forces and the State of Emergency Procedures Investigation Commission was recognized by ECtHR as a domestic law mechanism.

One can claim possibly that one of the most significant emphases in terms of the diversity in *foreign policy* issues by CHP was in 2018, and by AK Parti in 2015. In addition, CHP has emphasised that CoE should not be an international tool where great powers manipulate the international community in the way they please. AK Parti places CoE as an important mechanism itself and that Türkiye tries to increase its diplomatic effectiveness in CoE. For this purpose, CoE appears to be a direct subject of foreign policy for AK Parti more than CHP. During the AK Parti rule, CoE was also considered to be of special importance as an international actor.

It has been evident that CHP has deployed an emphasis on *public administration* issues in the context of CoE since 2011. Additionally, there has been a steady increase in this goal from 2011 to 2023. In CHP, the principles of public personnel should be paid attention against union rights and corruption, local government reform, subjecting police forces to in-service training, making judicial officers financially responsible for violations of human rights due to convictions, and taking the CoE principles into account in the fight against terrorism. AK Parti signalled a prominent importance on local government reforms until 2015.

As for the *anti-corruption* category no direct provision has been developed by CHP in the context of CoE until 2023. CHP has accused especially AK Parti governments of corruption at number of times. CHP stressed on its election manifestos that GRECO decisions would only be implemented in 2023, when they come to power in both public administration and anti-corruption legislation. On the other hand, AK Parti developed a more detailed analysis on GRECO and the CoE agreements on the fight against corruption compared to that of CHP from 2002 to 2018. Two reasons might have played roles by the part of AK Parti, as a ruling party, to devote more space to fight against corruption in the CoE context. First, it could be argued that AK Parti has developed a response by allocating space in its election manifestos to the issues that CHP brings to the agenda from time to time in the domestic public. Second, it would be

possible to assert that AK Parti, as a ruling political party, aims to obtain trust among the voters by focusing actions and new goals in this field.

For the *democracy* category, data provided by CHP and AK Parti election manifestos reported irregularities and discrepancies. First, while CHP has argued that a strong democratic presence in Türkiye is a prerequisite for the implementation of democratic goals in the context of CoE. Second, it is possible to state that both parties emphasize the relationship between technology and democracy. Third, in democracy category, the Venice Commission and the Venice Criteria came to the fore as a common base point for both political parties. In this vein, CHP drew attention clearly to the importance of the Venice Criteria in closing down political parties by the Court of Constitution.

It has been possible to argue that, compared to AK Parti, CHP has produced more data in the field of *labour and social security*, which can be considered to highlight its identity as a social democratic party. As a matter of fact, a special attempt was detected by AK Parti on the implementation of relevant legal legislation in the context of CoE in 2007. On the other hand, CHP made special reference to the Revised European Social Charter in various years' election manifestos, and even promised in the 2007 manifesto that the reservations made by AK Parti governments to the Revised European Social Charter would be removed. In subsequent election manifestos, a great deal of promises were issued to protect various union rights, from fair working conditions to freedom of association.

It has also been visible that the Istanbul Convention offers a special evaluation opportunity for both parties regarding the *family and social policies* category. First of all, it was noteworthy that the Istanbul Convention was not included in CHP election manifestos. Therefore, it could be asserted that the most obvious reason is to avoid opposing alliance partners such as the Felicity Party or the conservative segment whose votes they aim to get as an election strategy in the 2023 elections. For this reason, it would be possible to utter that the LGBT issue, which came to the fore during the Boğaziçi University protests in 2021, has not attracted the interests of CHP in terms of domestic political motives. Secondly, when it came to AK Parti, it resulted in AK Parti unilaterally withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention with the rising reactions from the conservative segments of the society and a domestic political justification that would reassure a part of the electorate.

Conclusion

The longevity of AK Parti in power for the last two decades or so has enabled them to maintain public policies with a degree of confidence that has seemed to provide consistency, continuity and endurance as to international organisations. The party has already been able to implement the policies which have been valued as important for the sociologically and economically poor parts of its electorate. This has been quite vital for the political party, because it was able to obtain a landslide victory only after its establishment in the political arena. History of the nation never witnessed such easy and long-scale achievement. Therefore, 2002 elections have dominated the political agenda. This also directed political actors to take radical decisions in terms of human rights, law & order, social and economic rights, family and social policies, labour market, democracy, public administration and other relevant principles and values.

This position of the Ak Party has also been evident for the account of CHP as the main opposition party and the first political organisation established just after the declaration of Republic in 1923. Therefore, the evaluation of the two major political

parties have potentially had a convenient ground for comparison. As one of the founding members of CoE, Turkish state and necessarily political parties operating in it have got a long-standing interest in this Council. Therefore, a thorough examination of the policies in the eight headings defined in this article bears fruitful results for academics as well as policy makers at central and local levels of government. This hints clearly that international involvement in reform processes of government and even daily activities of political actors have kept the international dimension in their designs of political sphere.

Regarding the positions of political parties as to these principles, they have resembled their political views in national politics and international arena by closely following concrete mechanisms. Take the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the Revised European Social Charter as an example. CHP made constant promises that they would lift the reservations in their government. AK Parti, in parallel with its responsibility as the ruling party, emphasised high commitment/loyalty to the CoE institutions and agreements in almost every election manifesto. Although the decision of President Erdoğan related to the Istanbul Convention has produced a degree of criticism, it seemed to be an exception rather than a general rule. CHP has declared to implement CoE legal agreements without any reservations, a full-scale approval.

AK Parti adopted a number of policies that has not attracted initially the attention of CHP. Implementation of Law, for instance, relating to personal data protection has been a success of AK Parti, as CHP has not been involved in this dimension and therefore no mention of the issue. CHP election manifestos avoided making any reference to the issues deemed to be positive regarding the Council. This has resulted in a severe criticism especially on the role of international order, as a self-claimed social democratic political party policy.

The MAXQDA data analysis reveals that CHP and AK Parti priorities or emphases diverge on certain issues related to CoE. AK Parti has not attempted to make comprehensive and binding promises regarding labour and social security issues, whereas CHP sticks to these issues with strong notions. On the other hand, AK Parti attaches utmost importance to family and youth policies as well as corruption and female rights within the borders drawn by CoE, while CHP has been paying no or little attention to these issues.

Both political parties have produced emphasis on "law" and "fundamental rights and freedoms" that has a great deal of CoE involvement as a legal and institutional context. The examination reveals that law signifies a common ground highlighted by the manifestos of the political parties. As the institutional evaluation of CoE shows, the Council has produced quite a wide range of initiatives in law and order. As being the champion of democracy and human rights, CoE principles and priorities register success in the field by deploying certain concrete mechanisms i.e. ECHR.

It has been visible that CHP has shown a quick recovery especially after 2015 elections to widen and deepen its policies that are also evident in CoE policies. In general terms, the political party has provided numerous issues in national politics. The issues include human rights, foreign policy, public administration, democracy, labour and social security, and law & order. This might resemble the political atmosphere and environment that also reflect the proportion of the political parties in the seats of Parliament.

Eventually, a general conclusion to draw from the election manifestos of CHP and AK Parti is that both parties have seemed to pay attention to CoE as an important international actor that have a close surveillance mechanism in domestic politics.

Türkiye's stance in democracy and rule of law have been always followed by CoE, in return domestic politics has got to keep an eye on CoE during their designs of party politics and national conditions relating to differing issues underlined by seven headings of this paper. Besides, the CoE involvement in national politics or the political views of the political parties seem to match as the outcome reveals direct impositions. In other words, it may be difficult to different and distinguish the process of democratisation if there is a causal relationship between the two outcomes: CoE motivating for democratisation, or democratisation leads to CoE policies. As a matter of fact, this final point has always been an issue of dispute: who causes what in national politics?

As a general conclusion, the changing positions the political parties related to CoE principles may have been caused by the changing electoral preferences, as Ak Party has been in power since 2002. During this period a reasonable degree of developments occurred in the political arena from social media interference to economic and political problems stemming from national and international conditions and from digitalisation of public policy processes to human rights abuses. This list can be prolonged. This has been a motivating factor for the political party elites to put their priorities in the order they think is correct. CoE has always been important for the country, but the importance could have its own reasoning according to the conditions of the nation.

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