

## The Impact of Turkey's Socio-Political and Natural Context on Tourism Between 2010 and 2018

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### Abstract

*Tourism represents, for many states, an important part of the economy. Socio-political and economic, local or regional crises affect the upward trend of the sector through its specific nature, role and content. Turkey is a world-renowned tourist destination due to its particular natural conditions, historical and cultural monuments, and traditions combining European modernism with Oriental refinement. The moments of socio-political tension and the negative effects of natural phenomena and processes, in relation to the time and place where they occurred, led to significant fluctuations in its choice as a tourist destination over the last decade. The presentation is a study that highlights, from the perspective provided by the analysis of the flow of Romanian tourists who chose this destination during 2010-2018, the effect of the socio-political and natural context on the tourist phenomena in Turkey.*

**Key words:** tourism, Turkey, crises, perception, Romanian tourists

**J.E.L. classification:** Z32, Z39

### 1. Introduction

Tourism, through the plurivalency of the activities that define it and the benefits it generates, is an element of special value in the local, regional and global economy. This, through its socio-cultural and economic dimension, has deeper implications in the evolution of the contemporary society that it influences, but which is conditioned. The variables that can be introduced into the inter-conditioning operation are numerous - political imbalances, precarious security, economic crises, restrictive legislative framework, natural disasters - climate change, epidemics, demographics, poor international cooperation, under-dimensioning of the specialized workforce, lack of variety of services tourism, poor performance of the technical infrastructure, and generates vulnerability for the tourism industry that is primarily based on stability and balance. They are assimilated to moments of crisis. *The crisis affecting tourism manifests itself as an event or set of circumstances that compromises or destroys the potential of the market and the reputation of a tourist business or of an entire region* (PATA, 2011).

Turkey, the recipient of a special natural and cultural heritage with a tradition in tourism, is one of the main tourist destinations in the world (e.g. 37.6 million arrivals in 2017 - 8th place among the most visited countries in the world in 2017, UNWTO 2018). The regional political and economic context, domestic socio-political turmoil, natural events and the permanent pressure of competition in the global market affected, to a lesser or more extent, the upward trend of the Turkish tourism sector.

The purpose of the research presented in this paper was to establish the link between the main elements of disruptive character (terrorist attacks, social movements, economic events, regional and internal political instability, natural earthquakes, floods) and the dynamics of tourist flows through the perception of the tourist destination. Turkey has offered this opportunity to study on the basis of analyzing the flows of Romanian tourists who chose this destination for holiday or business in 2008-2018.

## 2. Theoretical background

The topic of the impact of socio-political or economic crises and natural disasters on the tourism industry can be found in many specialized papers, with the approaches being extremely different. The negative elements induced by crises, irrespective of their nature, generate effects both globally and locally, and their management can fit into a generally valid paradigm or differs from one space to another from one moment to the next. We mention some general works (Dwyer et al., 2004, Santana, 2004, Henderson, 2006, Hall, 2010, Drutu, 2011) or event-related events - financial fluctuations, exchange rate fluctuations, the fall in the stock market (Melvin&Taylor, 2009; Claveria&Poluzzi, 2016), terrorist attacks (Sönmez et al., 1998; Faulkner, 2001; Blake&Sinclair, 2003), politics (Sönmez et al.,1999, Alvarez&Campo, 2014; Neumayer, 2004), natural disasters ( Huang&Min, 2002; Goodwin, 2005), or particular locations (Mikulić, 2018 - Croatia; Weiss et al. 2013- Slovak Republic, Kapiki, 2011- Greece, Ritchie et al., 2010 - North America, Okumus&Karamustafa, 2005; Okumus et al. 2005; Alvarez&Korzay, 2008; Icoz et al., 2008; Ozcan et al., 2012; Gul et al., 2014; Elimdar&Abdullayev, 2018 -Turkey).

## 3. Data and methods

Turkey is the state whose territory spans two continents - Europe (3%) and Asia (97%) separated by the Bosphorus Strait. Paleogeography evolution led to the completion of the present territory by the union of several continental fragments at the end of the Tertiary. Two zonings of these fragments, one with Laurasian affinities, Pontides (northern Turkey), have been separated in the alpine orogenetic phases (Variscan, Cimmerice) and another, Anatolide-Tauride (south of Pontide), that represents similar characteristics to Gondwana, strongly deformed and partly metamorphosed during the Alpine ogenesis. The dynamics of these continental blocks create tectonic instability, and structural rupture elements amplify it - the structural element with the greatest seismic potential being the North-Anatolian fault along which periodic earthquakes occur (at intervals of 3, 10 or 30 years) magnitude over 7 degrees on the Richter scale (Oaie et al., 2008, p.170). Morphologically, the mountain structures (Pontics and Koroglu in the North, Taurus in the South), the Anatolian plateau (800m altitude) and the narrow coastal plains are highlighted.

Turkey is surrounded by the Aegean Sea (West), the Black Sea (North), the Marmara Sea (Northwest) and the Mediterranean Sea (South), with a coastline of about 8300 km.

Throughout history, Greek civilization (e.g. Efes, Troy, Halicarnassus, Miletus), the Roman (the Eastern Roman Empire with the capital of Constantinople), the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Empire, have been present in the present territory of Turkey and left the mark of culture in today's modern Turkey, whose foundations were laid by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in 1920. It is a democratic state that wants to harmonize Western economic and social visions with the relatively strict framework imposed by Muslim religion.

In this natural, socio-cultural and political context, Turkey offers the international tourism market more than just *sea, sun and sand* (Emekli et al., 2006). Thus, the tourism development strategies proposed by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (2006-2023) have activated and reward the cultural valences of this space (archaeological sites, historical towns, cultural objects - museums, art galleries, historical monuments and architecture , many of them listed on UNESCO's heritage list), varied natural offerings (special geological structures, hundreds of endemic plant and animal species), favorable climate, private medical services with a high level of specialization and costs much lower than in other countries (aesthetic surgery, orthopedics, gynecology, dermatology, ophthalmology). The variety of natural and anthropic heritage can be covered by many forms of

tourism - cultural and shopping, ecotourism, wellness, business, gastronomic, adventure, spa-thermal, medical, but which are still a long way from intensively promoted coastal tourism.

The research methodology of the presented study was mainly based on methods of statistical, quantitative and qualitative analysis. The interpreted data was provided by the NIS (National Institute of Statistics) by querying the Tempo Online database of the TUR109C and TUR109D matrix and those of the 2018 Statistical Yearbook on Tourism. The results obtained from the interpretation of the statistical reports were necessary for the comparative approaches and establishing causal links between events with local or regional destabilization and choosing Turkey as a tourist destination. Graphical analysis was used for this purpose. Key literature and media sources have been used to identify the main crises-generating events.

A brief overview of the main crisis-generating events with an effect on the evolution of the tourist phenomenon is made in the following table:

Type	Illustrations
<b>Terrorist attacks</b>	2008 - Bomber attack Turkey Diyanbakir (03.01); Murder-Tomb Assault Turkey Erzican (11.08); Mine explosion (18.08); Armed attack Turkey Sîrnak (02.09.); - 2013 - Civelgozu Terrorist Assault (South East) (11.02); Double Reyhanli Assault (South) (11.05); - 2015 - Double suicide bomber, Ankara Central Station (10.10); Attack Suruc-Sanlıurfa (South East) (22.07); - 2016 - Vezneciler bombing - Istanbul (7.06.); Suicide attack Istiklal-Istanbul (19.03); Attack with a Kizilay-Ankara Trap Machine (13.03); Assassination-Bayrampassa-Istanbul (3.03); Terrorist machine-trap attack, Kizilay-Ankara (17.02); Armed attack Sultanahmet-Istanbul (12.01);
<b>Political and societal instability</b>	- Permanent threats from PKK militants (the issue of recognizing ethno-linguistic minorities - the Kurds); - Turkey's involvement in the Syrian issue; Diplomatic issues with Egypt (2013); - Internal protests and tensions (ample and violent street demonstrations-2013, 2016, corruption scandals - 2013-2014) - Immigrant Issues (2015) - Military State Trial (2016); - Tensions with Russia due to the collapse of a Russian plane (2015); - Stereotypes about women.
<b>Economic</b>	- The global economic crisis and its effects (2008-2009); - The crisis from Turkish Airlines and Pegasus, the TAV airport operator and the Celebi airport service company (2016); - Increase of US customs duties on imports of steel and aluminum (2018); - The collapse of the Turkish lira (2018)
<b>Natural</b>	- Earthquakes (1999 – Izmir 7.6 Richter; 2011 - Van 7.2 degree Richter, 2018-Antalya) due to active extension tectonics in the West Pontes and the Aegean Sea. - Tectonic subsidence phenomena, liquefaction and sliding of the banks; - Floods (2009-Saray, in Tekirdag Province, Istanbul, 2017-Western Turkey, Istanbul, 2018-Ankara).

Source: Authors' contribution

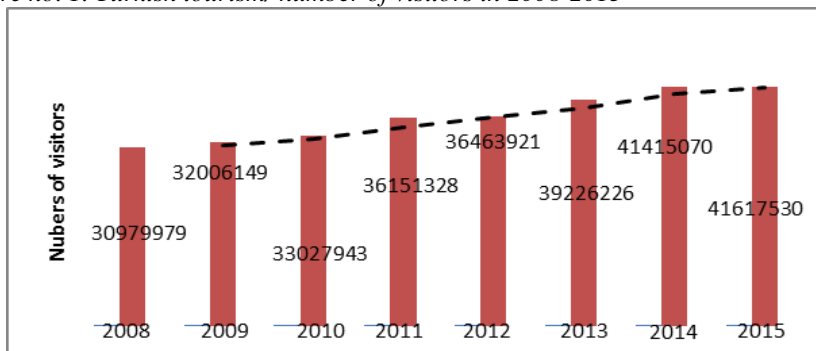
#### 4. Results and discussions

Worldwide, tourism represents a significant revenue-generating industry – 1,186 million dollars in 2017 (UNWTO 2018). It is, however, extremely sensitive to any dysfunction affecting one of the components on which it is built (attractiveness, safety, flexibility). As the system in which it operates is multi-layered, and its elements are inter-conditioned, any impulse can be at a time of crisis. The tourism crisis is anything that *threatens the normal operation and management of tourism-related businesses; destroys the overall reputation of the tourist destination in terms of safety, attractiveness and comfort by adversely affecting the visitor's perception of that destination; and, in turn, causes a slowdown in the local economy of travel and tourism and interrupts the continuity of business operations for the local tourism industry by reducing travel arrivals and spending* (Sonmez et al., 1999). For Turkey, four major categories of elements - natural, economic, political and terrorist attacks - have been identified, to which a set of actions having a negative effect on this segment of the economy are associated (Table 1). They are manifested both directly, creating uncertainty about the destination - terrorist attacks, natural disasters, or indirectly by

affecting structures of tourism infrastructure such as travel agencies, hotels, transport means - economic, financial, political, legislative.

Tourism accounts for 5% of Turkey's economy, with nearly two million jobs, meaning 8% of the world's total (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2017). Even if its natural and cultural potential is not fully exploited and the image of the country as a tourist destination has been affected by various moments of crisis, Turkey receives an increasing number of tourists every year (Figure 1), which is not reflected on the revenue they generate (insignificant fluctuations around \$ 30 billion in 2008-2015, with a maximum of US \$ 34 billion in 2014 - Bayramov & Abdullayev, 2018, p.167). Maintaining a relative income balance can be attributed to the influx of tourists from the Middle East (United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain) who spend 6 times more than the other (Ozcan 2012, p. 988).

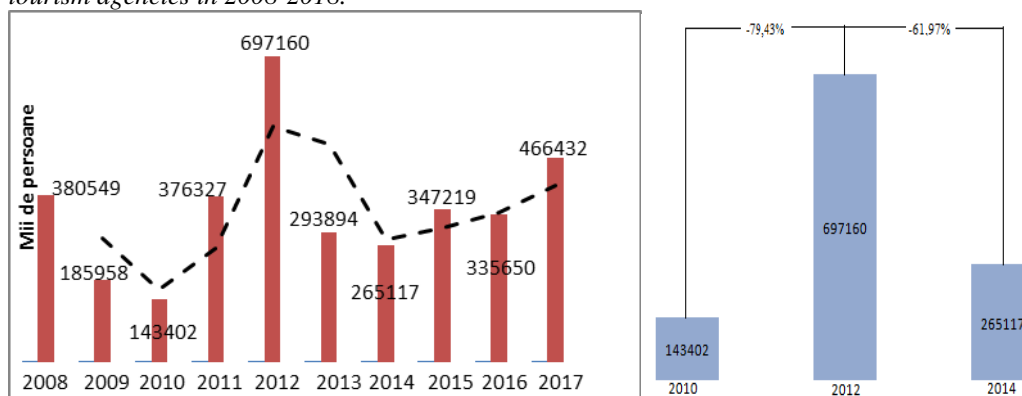
Figure no. 1. Turkish tourism/ number of visitors in 2008-2015



Source (Graphic representation of authors using data from Cetin et al, 2016, p.2564)

Analyzing from the perspective of the flow of Romanian tourists who chose Turkey as a destination during the period 2008-2018 it is noticed that the maximum was in 2012 with 697160 thousand persons. Between the limits (meaning 2008 and 2018) and this maximum there are two levels with a low number of tourists. Their minimums, 2010 and 2014, are by 79.43% and 61.97% lower than the maximum pick.

Figure no. 2. Number of Romanian tourists participating in external tourism (Turkey) organized by tourism agencies in 2008-2018.



Source (Graphic representation of authors using data from INS, 2018)

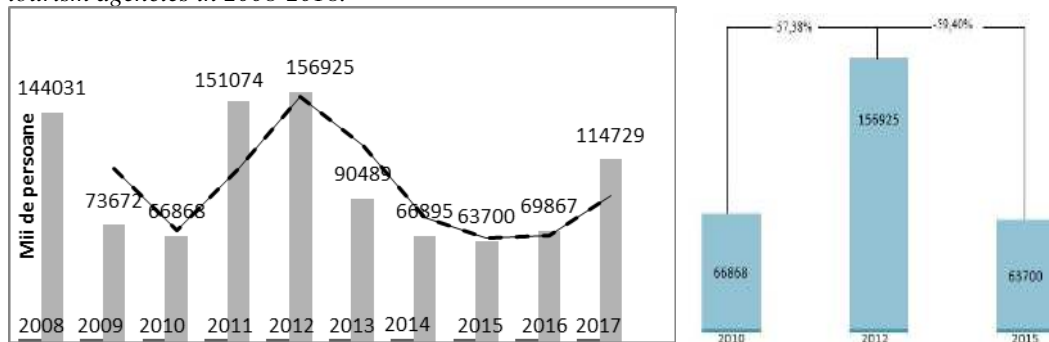
The interpretation of these trends in terms of the moments of crisis affecting Turkey can be differentiated on the two segments 2008-2012 and 2012-2018. In the first instance, the minimum is due to the effects of the global economic crisis and the numerous terrorist attacks that took place in 2008, doubled by natural events (Table 1), and in the second domestic political tensions and foreign relations that Turkey has, had with the states in the region and the USA.

The effects of the global economic crisis have been strongly felt in both states, with implications for tourism companies, transport, tourism infrastructure, services by lowering the purchasing power of their citizens. Turkish tourism companies have not been affected by the global

economic crisis (Ozcan et al., 2012), the decrease in the number of Romanian tourists to Turkey being a clear reflection of the austerity measures imposed by the Romanian Government in that period (e.g. wage cuts by 25%). This interpretation is supported by the similar trend of the Romanian tourists to Europe.

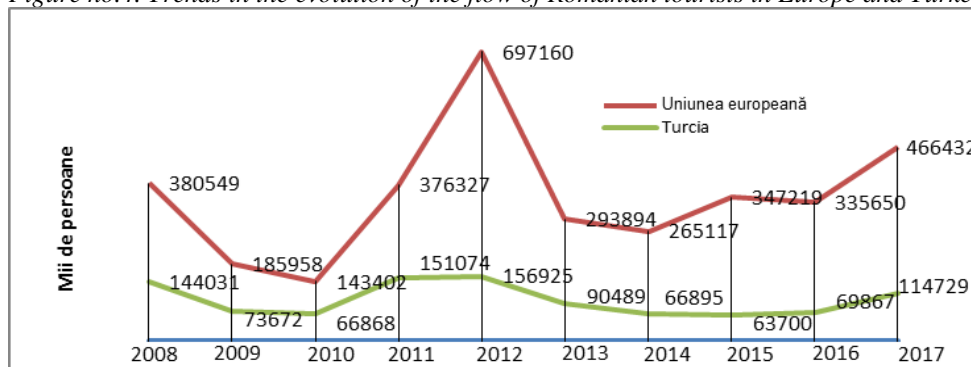
The satisfaction of the tourist is supported by the balance between physical, social and psychological needs (Kay, 2003, p.604), and safety is the control element of all of them. The Institute for Economics and Peace considers it a real threat to the tourism industry. The value of GTI calculated for Turkey is increasing, but for the analyzed range (2008-5.5, 2009-5.23; 2012-6.05; 2014-5.74 - IEP 2016) it has an average of 5.

Figure no 3. Number of Romanian tourists participating in external tourism (Europe) organized by tourism agencies in 2008-2018.



Source (Graphic representation of authors using data from INS, 2018)

Figure no.4. Trends in the evolution of the flow of Romanian tourists in Europe and Turkey



Source (Graphic representation of authors using data from INS, 2018)

The upward trend of the global index of terrorism negatively affects the main tourism indicators - tourism flows, tourism revenues (Bayramov & Abdullayev, 2018, p.173), but not the Romanian tourists who in 2012 (GTI-6.05) arrived in high number in Turkey. Political and social instability, change of power regimes, street movements, international relations) generate vulnerability and affect the tourism industry consistently. The coup d'état of 2015, preceded by tensions and followed by social and economic repercussions, tensions with other states represent for Romanian tourists a moment of insecurity and generate a decrease and capping of the number of Romanian tourists who choose as destination Turkey.

## 5. Conclusions

Crisis situations that can affect the tourism industry are numerous. Each crisis is unique and thus perceived by the actors involved in the tourism phenomenon. The analysis of reality shows that Turkey is affected both by crises specific to the natural, socio-political and economic environment, some of which tend to become permanent (Kurdish conflict) as well as regional or global situations. Their connections and implications in the tourism industry are multiple and difficult to fully assess. The negative influence it generates is certain, and the fight against it is

related to the implementation of governmental economic and political strategies that create sustainable effects on the tourism phenomenon. The perception of the Romanian tourists about the reality of tourism in Turkey is filtered through personal realities and does not coincide to a small extent with the general trend imposed by the parameters in which this phenomenon falls and its consumers of tradition.

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