

CHANGING DYNAMICS OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

Turkey's negotiations for accession to the European Union are going through a difficult period while Turkish foreign policy is in the midst of a rapid change with active involvement in adjacent regions such as the Middle East. As long as Turkey defends norms such as peace and democracy, which are compatible with EU values, the active policy of engagement may contribute to an expansion of the zone of stability and security outside of the EU. Turkey may become a competent carrier and transmitter of such norms and values. However, Turkey needs also to clearly define its priorities in its foreign policy, and achieve a credible balance between its commitments and capabilities.

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Turkey and its foreign policy started to attract much more attention in recent years in the global arena. This observation may be explained through changes in Turkey, such as its economic dynamism and increasing rate of growth as well as the country's growing activism in foreign policy. Economically speaking, Turkey was hailed as a country that was able to recover relatively quickly from the effects of the global economic crisis. Its growth rate reached 11.7 percent in the first quarter of 2010 and 10.3 percent in the second quarter, while an economic shrinkage rate of 4.7 percent was recorded in 2009.¹ While its foreign trade displays a gap between exports and imports, a steady increase in exports is discernible since 2003 despite a drop in 2009.² The recent initiative to form a customs union area between Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan may be evaluated as an attempt on the part of Turkey to strengthen commercial relations and to enhance its leverage in the Middle East. The 1995 customs union decision of the EU-Turkey Association Council was an earlier attempt to boost foreign trade and renovate the industrial base in an export-oriented economy.

Turkey's presence in international politics has been growing as well, fueled by, among others, its election as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council for 2009-10, Ahmet Davutoğlu's appointment as minister of foreign affairs in May 2009 and the adoption of the "zero problems with neighbors" approach, implementation of a more active regional role in the Balkans, Caucasus, and Middle East, intensifying partnership with Russia, the signing of protocols with Armenia despite setbacks in their ratification, and dramatic events such as the Davos walk-out of Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan and the Mavi Marmara flotilla incident that further deteriorated Turkish-Israeli relations. Turkey is arguably becoming an indispensable regional actor in the Balkans, Caucasus and Middle East, and aligning the economic and political aspects of its foreign relations towards a more active, multidimensional and less cautious foreign policy.

While this trend may lead to an improvement in relations with countries such as Syria and Iran, it at the same time has led to a deterioration of relations with Israel. The two countries used to be strategic partners and both being close American allies; their interests coincided with each other. Their Middle Eastern policies more or less complemented each other, while one detested involvement into Middle Eastern politics, while the other was at odds with neighboring Arab countries and implemented an aggressive foreign policy. Before Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's visit to Turkey and the Gaza War of 2008-09, Iran and Israel could be considered

¹ See Turkish Statistics Institute, News Bulletin, No:157, 11 September 2010, http://tuik.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?tb_id=55&ust_id=16

² See TUIK website, http://tuik.gov.tr/VeriBilgi.do?tb_id=12&ust_id=4, table displaying foreign trade according to years.

as the two opposing poles of the Middle East. However, Turkey's foreign policy turned against Israel after the Gaza War, and became more incisive with the Davos affair. The prime minister used strong, incriminating language against Israeli President Shimon Peres at the Davos Summit in 2009.³ Relations worsened following the Mavi Marmara incident. Today, Turkey and Israel stand opposite each other in the Middle Eastern equation.

The government's embrace of the Palestinian cause also contributed to the rise in Turkey's (and especially Prime Minister Erdoğan's) prestige and popularity among the peoples of the Muslim Middle East.⁴ This may, in turn, contribute to Turkey's soft power in the region; Turkey's emphasis on the injustices inflicted to the Palestinians, empathy with their suffering, and allusion to religious values may be intentionally used by the government and the prime minister as a discursive source of international leverage. When this policy is analyzed in light of the fact that Turkey has quite amicable relations with the Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir –who is accused of crimes against humanity in Darfur– double standards and inconsistency between the policies against these two atrocities come up. Also close relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran and the autocratic ruler of Syria may lead to the questioning of Turkey's foreign policy as an interest-based “real politik” rather than a value-based approach based on projecting soft power – not only on religious affinity or the Palestinian cause but also championing of democracy and human rights. One may also argue that Turkey's current foreign policy under the second Justice and Development Party (AKP) government displays a mix of the normative and ethical with a pragmatic and interest-oriented search for geo-strategic prominence.

Continuity and Change in Turkish Foreign Policy

Turkey's foreign policy has been evolving since the 1980s in line with the global trends. Such trends include the neoliberal turn starting with the January 24 decisions and continuing with the gradual opening up of the economy to the outside world, the increasing need to expand commercial relations as a result of increasing competitive pressures in global markets, as well as the shift in the international system from a bipolar to a unipolar, and an emerging multipolar environment. Engendered by the change in economic policies, democratization and socio-economic modernization, Turkey's becoming a more open country is certainly correlated with its becoming more vocal and active in the foreign policy domain.

³ “Davos'ta büyük gerginlik” [Tension in Davos], *NTVMSNBC*, 30 January 2009, <http://arsiv.ntvmsnbc.com/news/473840.asp>

⁴ “Q&A with Paul Salem”, Carnegie Endowment, 6 July 2010, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=41113>

In the wake of the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, Turkey began to show an interest in taking advantage of the new political and economic opportunities emerging in the former Soviet territory, most prominently in the newly established Turkic republics. Both President Turgut Özal and Süleyman Demirel made references to the changing geopolitical landscape and a new vision for Turkey. In a speech he made at the end of 1999, President Demirel spoke about the coming era and made some prophecies about developments in the world and region related to Turkey:

Turkey should turn the year 2000 into a beginning point not only on the calendar but also in its history. The following years will be a period when permanent peace and stability will prevail in the Middle East, Caucasus, Balkans, and Caspian, Black Sea and Mediterranean basins; Turkey will become a global energy hub with the completion of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, Caspian natural gas pipeline and Blue Stream projects; and our full membership negotiations with the EU will commence.⁵

The establishment of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in 1985, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation in 1992, and Developing Eight (D-8) Organization for Economic Cooperation in 1997 can be seen as institutional initiatives reflecting an increased willingness and necessity to engage with countries in adjacent regions. While such initiatives were linked to economic and commercial relations, political ties were also becoming much more important and creating a strong pressure to implement a more active foreign policy. Turkey was no longer at the margins of a Euro-Atlantic community of states and the Cold War barriers that barred Turkey's relations with the territories lying especially to the northeast and southeast were no longer relevant.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs between the years 1997-2002, the late İsmail Cem, referred to a new reading of Turkey's history and an evolving identity perception in these words:

Turkey's specific historical development –its cosmopolitan characteristics, its civilization melding Western and Eastern values, a multitude of beliefs and ethnicities– bestowed on Turkey a unique identity. We consider ourselves both European (which we have been for seven centuries) and Asian and view this plurality as an asset. Our history

⁵ "Demirel'den 1999 ve Yeni Yüzyıla Bakış" [Demirel's Outlook to 1999 and the New Century]. *Belgenet*, <http://www.belgenet.com/arsiv/demirel1999.html>

was molded as much in Istanbul, Edirne, Tetova, Kosovo and Sarajevo as it was in Bursa, Kayseri, Diyarbakır and Damascus.⁶

The references to Turkey's role as a bridge also intensified during this period. It could be easily observed that Turkey was adopting a wider approach to the region beyond its borders. Remembrance and reevaluation of the Ottoman heritage became the basis of a changing identity perception for the country's new geopolitical role.

Turkish foreign policy was already undergoing changes in terms of a renewed interest in adjacent regions when the AKP (Justice and Development Party) won the elections and formed the government in 2002. No matter how one defines the AKP –an Islamist or a center-right party– it is possible to discern certain differences with its predecessors in the center-right tradition in terms of its approach to the state establishment in Turkey, comprehension of the West, worldviews and reference values. The political tradition of AKP's members was mostly reactionary against the conventional tenets of foreign policy as well as the Turkish state. As frequently expressed by Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan, the AKP argued to represent the so-called silent masses who were sidelined and neglected by previous governments. The conventional wisdom of statecraft in Turkey was critically appraised by the AKP cadres. Similarly, the AKP's foreign policy outlook was not based on a notion of allying with the West only but included establishing a close cooperation and partnership with non-Western –especially Islamic– countries and regions. Many of the party cadres based their worldview and perception of concepts as state, people and government on religiously inspired values and understanding.

The AKP included the goal of EU membership in its government program and declared its support for the reform process. Between 2002-2004, eight harmonization

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⁶ İsmail Cem, "Turkey and Europe: Looking to the future from a Historical Perspective", *Perceptions*, Vol. 5, (June-August 2000), <http://www.sam.gov.tr/perceptions/Volume5/June-August2000/VolumeVN2İsmailCem.pdf>

packages and one major constitutional amendment were passed by the Parliament under the AKP government. The process of EU-induced reforms lost its momentum after 2006. This could be explained by the repercussions of the EU's approach towards Turkey's membership, especially the decision of the European Council not to open eight chapters of the *acquis* to negotiations in 2006, and the discouragement this has led to with respect to the reform aspirations of the government. In addition to this factor, one could also observe that the AKP's support to the reform process was also linked with the internal power configurations. The EU goal was instrumentalized by the AKP government to increase the room of maneuver in the political system, silence and weaken the power base of its opponents such as the civil and military bureaucracy and find a strong basis of legitimacy for the party in the eyes of the public.

The so-called novelty of the AKP, and their differences with the traditional elite made it easier for the members of the AKP to dissociate themselves from conventional foreign policy choices espoused by the civil and military bureaucracy. The U-turn in the policy towards Cyprus, rapprochement with Syria and Iran, and the initiative to normalize relations with Armenia may be cited as examples of a new approach in foreign/regional policy. One should also note that such changes were also directly related to international developments and had already started under previous governments as in the Greek-Turkish rapprochement of 1999.

Relations with the U.S. also went through a difficult period during this period. The 2003 rejection of a resolution permitting U.S. troops to pass through Turkish territory to form a northern front in Iraq was a watershed in Turkish-American relations. It led to deterioration in relations and until 2009 Turkey could not form amicable relations with the northern Iraqi-Kurdish authority. The deployment of the PKK separatist organization in northern Iraq caused much unease in Turkey especially following the reignition of terrorist activities after 2004. The Obama administration's decision to pull American troops out of Iraq enhanced Turkey's significance in the eyes of the U.S. as a regional actor indispensable for stability in the post-American Iraq and Middle East. After limited military interventions of the Turkish military forces against PKK bases in northern Iraq, Turkey also started a process of dialogue with regional leaders and Iraqi authorities contributing to an internal process of democratic opening with regard to the region and citizens of Kurdish origin.

Relations with the EU and the Prospect of Membership

The process of candidacy to the EU started with the Helsinki European Council's recognition of Turkey as a candidate state and took a new turn with the initiation of accession negotiations on 3 October 2005. This turn further facilitated the reform

and democratization process in Turkey and led to further alignment of Turkey's policies to the EU *acquis*. The onset of closer relations with the EU and the prospect of membership acted as a strong stimulus for change and internal restructuring by prioritizing the constitutional and legislative reform process as well as attaching a deadline for the reforms. The decision to begin accession negotiations on 3 October 2005 by the European Council was hailed as a historic step that would carry Turkey into the EU in the near future.⁷

However, the initiation of negotiations was marred by doubts due to the cautious language used by the Commission in its recommendation to open accession negotiations with Turkey. While recommending the opening of negotiations the Commission also added a word of caution:

This is an open-ended process whose outcome cannot be guaranteed beforehand. Regardless of the outcome of the negotiations or the subsequent ratification process, the relations between the EU and Turkey must ensure that Turkey remains fully anchored in European structures.⁸

The negotiation framework dated 3 October 2005 mentioned the possibility of serious and consistent breach of human rights:

In the case of a serious and persistent breach in Turkey of the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law on which the Union is founded, the Commission will, on its own initiative or on the request of one third of the Member States, recommend the suspension of negotiations and propose the conditions for eventual resumption.⁹

The document also stipulated "long transitional periods, derogations, specific arrangements or permanent safeguard clauses, i.e. clauses which are permanently available as a basis for safeguard measures." The Commission's expression of an "open-ended process" created doubts about the intention of the EU regarding Turkey's membership. Nevertheless the government agreed to begin accession negotiations on the basis of a differentiated accession procedure envisaged by the EU.

⁷ İsmail Cem, "Turkey and Europe: Looking to the future from a Historical Perspective", *Perceptions*, Vol. 5, (June-August 2000), <http://www.sam.gov.tr/perceptions/Volume5/June-August2000/VolumeVN2İsmailCem.pdf>

⁸ "Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, Recommendation of the European Commission on Turkey's Progress towards Accession", COM (2004) 656 final, 10 June 2004, pp.2-3, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2004:0656:FIN:EN:PDF>

⁹ Negotiation framework, 3 October 2005, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52004DC0656:EN:HTML>

The 2006 conclusions of the European Council set back the negotiations with the decision not to open negotiations in eight chapters of the *acquis* and not to close a single chapter. The EU demanded that Turkey open its ports and airports to vehicles from South Cyprus as a condition of full and non-discriminatory implementation of the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement. When signing the Additional Protocol which extended the customs union to the new member states, Turkey added a declaration which stipulated that “the signing, ratification and implementation of this Protocol does not mean that Turkey recognizes the Republic of Cyprus in any way...”¹⁰ The EU requested Turkey to change its policy. The latest call was made in the 2010 progress report published on 9 November 2010:

Despite repeated calls by the Council and the Commission, Turkey still has not complied with its obligations as outlined in the declaration of the European Community and its Member States of 21 September 2005 and in the Council conclusions, including the December 2006 and December 2009 conclusions.

It does not meet its obligation of full, non-discriminatory implementation of the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement and has not removed all obstacles to the free movement of goods, including restrictions on direct transport links with Cyprus.¹¹

The uncompromising attitude of the EU on this matter and the continuing isolation of the TRNC (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus) prevented the opening of eight critical chapters of the *acquis*, and blocked negotiations which were evaluated to be related to the free movement of goods, and the provisional closing of the remaining chapters. To complicate the picture further, the French government led by President Nicolas Sarkozy objected to the opening of five chapters arguing that those chapters were related with full membership to the EU. The French government continues to advocate a special partnership with Turkey and while claiming that Turkey is not a European country, objects to Turkey’s entry into the EU. This change in France’s policy under the Sarkozy government compared to the support given by the former President Jacques Chirac stood in contradiction to the initial decision to open accession negotiations and the negotiation framework.

The current situation in the negotiations raises concern due to the European Council’s conclusions of 2006 and blockages by France and the Greek Cypriots. After opening the chapter on competition policy, public procurement and social policy

¹⁰ “Türkiye’nin Kıbrıs’la İlgili Deklarasyonu” [Turkey’s Cyprus Declaration], Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 29 July 2005, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/ek-protokol-ve-deklarasyon-metni.tr.mfa>

¹¹ Commission Staff Working Document, Turkey 2010 Progress Report SEC (2010) 1327, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2010/package/tr_rapport_2010_en.pdf, p. 36.

and employment, based on Turkey's fulfillment of the opening benchmarks, the negotiations are under the risk of coming to a complete stalemate. The problems encountered in the negotiation process and the faltering of the political will to integrate Turkey in the EU led to a decline in public support for Turkey's accession both in Turkey and EU member states and deteriorated mutual trust.

Despite such developments, the EU process had a positive impact on Turkey. As a country competing with European industry in the customs union, Turkey was able to restructure and modernize its industrial base and increase its competitive power. Politically and socially the EU acted as a model and anchor for standards, contributing to progress in democratization, welfare and living conditions. Although the level of commitment to Turkey's integration on the part of the EU, compounded by financial and technical assistance, is weak, the prospect of membership acted as an external support mechanism to reform-minded groups in Turkey, especially those interested in restructuring the regime, such as the Islamists, supporters of ethnic demands and liberals, and shifted the internal political and economic balance in their favor. It may be argued that closer ties with the EU in the candidacy and negotiation process contributed to the dynamic growth in the country, liberalization and strengthening of civil society, improvement in competitive position in world markets, and ultimately to an intensifying engagement as a foreign policy actor on the basis of a revitalization and renewal of self-confidence.

New Horizons in Turkish Foreign Policy and the EU Process: How Compatible?

Arguably Turkey's EU process, especially since Helsinki, is closely intertwined with a more active role in the international system. While some may argue that Turkey is turning away from the EU by forging closer links with its non-European neighbors, in fact, its recent activism is linked with closer ties with the EU. Turkey is a part of diverse regions such as the Balkans, Middle East and Caucasus. When compared to all other countries in the region, Turkey has the closest ties with Western organizations and forges strong transnational ties due to its customs union and ongoing accession with the EU. Such initiatives and their positive results may be the reasons for Turkey's increasing self-confidence and its innovative approach to regional issues in the Middle East – as most amply exemplified by the abolition of visas with 61 countries and the customs union attempt with Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.¹² Turkey's active foreign policy is not only limited to the Middle East and extends to Africa and Latin America with the opening of new embassies, frequent high-level visits and increasing economic and commercial ties.

¹² "61 ülkeyle vize kalktı" [Visas Abolished with 61 Countries], *Cumhuriyet*, 4 July 2010, <http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/?hn=154444>

The change in Turkish foreign policy may be understood through a number of factors: an awareness of a shifting geopolitical landscape and new opportunities resulting from the demise of the Soviet Union, gradual realization of the changed role for Turkey and redefinition of its identity, as well as and the evolution from a more cautious, limited and skeptical foreign policy understanding to a more open, at times adventurous and risk-taking, and innovative policy.

When the AKP formed its first government in November 2002, it inherited a country that was a candidate to join the EU and expected to carry out major reforms with the aim of fulfilling the membership criteria. An area that needed to be reevaluated under international and especially EU pressure was Turkey's policy towards Cyprus. The former governments supported President Rauf Denктаş in Northern Cyprus and were more or less aligned with his policies regarding the UN plan for reunification of the island. However, the new government, coming from a different and maybe unconventional¹³ background changed the traditional policy towards Cyprus, withdrew its support from the Denктаş government, and supported the Annan Peace Plan that was rejected by Denктаş in the Hague meeting on March 2003. This was a radical change precipitated by the EU's opening of accession talks with the Greek Cypriots in 1998.

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The EU's membership criterion entailing putting an end disputes with neighboring countries¹⁴ had a transformative impact on Turkish foreign policy. Greece's lifting of its veto against Turkey in Helsinki also started a process of rapprochement between the two quarrelsome siblings of the Aegean. This trend was continued under the AKP governments most notably coming to the fore with Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu's "zero problems with neighbors" policy and the recent initiative towards Armenia.

¹³ Meaning different from the elite structure in Turkey and most importantly displaying a contrary and critical stance to the main tenets of state policy in Turkey.

¹⁴ Conclusions, Helsinki European Council, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/ACFA4C.htm

Although problems with neighboring countries have not yet been resolved, they are no longer constitutive of Turkey's foreign policy. One may discern a change in mentality and outlook from a state of mind which approaches international relations with caution and restraint to acting in self-confidence and with ease in the international arena. Moreover, foreign policy is no longer dominated by security concerns that prioritize foreign threats but is also influenced by the search for economic benefits, and expectation of gains in the international competition for markets, raw material, natural resources and energy.

Systemic changes in the international system, internal developments in Turkey, and the EU process contributed positively to Turkey's role in the diplomatic arena. The emphasis of Turkish foreign policy on peace and stability also fits in well with EU norms and principles. Turkey's increasing engagement in its region does not contradict its EU perspective. In fact, Turkey's growing economic power, and democratizing society may be evaluated as an asset in its international effectiveness. Coupled with the EU perspective, Turkey's increasing engagement in its region, if based on similar values and strategies, would complement and strengthen rather than contradict Turkey's European vocation.

Lastly, a word of caution may be appropriate. Recent Turkish foreign policy was characterized by a strong discourse against Israel with regard to its attacks against the Palestinians, the Davos incident, and the Marmara flotilla operation. Both the prime minister and the minister of foreign affairs strongly backed the Palestinian cause while criticizing Israel. Relations show a tendency to deteriorate after the announcement of a report about the Mavi Marmara flotilla operation by Israel and its refusal to apologize or assume the obligation to pay for damages. Another important development was related with Iran and Turkey's opposition to the UN Security Council resolution to impose new sanctions on Iran and the joint initiative with Brazil for a uranium swap agreement. While Turkey could not yet solve its problems with Greece and Cyprus and no progress was recorded with regard to relations with Armenia, its foreign policy was mostly associated with such bold attempts to steer an independent course in its foreign policy. Commentators in the West described the approach of the Turkish government as being anti-Israeli and friendly towards Iran.

Such developments are increasingly out of tune with the foreign policy of a country that is a candidate to join the EU. While Turkish civil society and business sectors are increasingly becoming more effective in influencing Turkey's foreign policies, a multi-dimensional and multi-regional foreign policy is undoubtedly in line with the ever-increasing needs of a fast-growing and dynamic Turkey. However it should also be noted that Turkey is going through an interim period or a transitional phase: the country is willing to join the EU but is put on hold with no

clear membership perspective on the horizon and is neither an EU member of the future nor a “privileged partner” of the EU. Inasmuch as which of these alternatives will materialize in the future is important for the foreign policy of the country, it is also vitally important how today’s Turkey will act to shape its future with the EU. Turkish foreign policy today is falling out of line with the EU, which may reflect the effects of the faltering of the accession process and the EU’s own weaknesses in the wake of the economic crisis. However, the new Turkish foreign policy should be reassessed with a view to the EU membership perspective and the government should firmly assess the role of the EU dimension for Turkey’s future.

In a recent visit to Gulf countries, Prime Minister Erdoğan made the following remarks: “It is us who best understand the region. We understand ourselves the best. The reason is that we lived together in this geography in the course of history; we are countries that have identical sorrows, joys, ideals and aims. Above all, we are brothers. Being brothers, we have not yet taken the necessary steps. We have to achieve this. Believe me, we suffice to us.”¹⁵ While it would not be wrong to argue that political leaders regularly use such a rhetoric to influence target groups, this particular speech shows us a recent trend in Turkish foreign policy: to highlight cultural, historical, religious and other affective bonds as part of Turkey’s soft power to reach out to adjacent regions particularly Middle Eastern and Islamic states while increasingly employing a critical and challenging stance against the EU. This may be a natural tendency on the part of the Prime Minister and other functionaries to respond to the EU policy towards Turkey in recent years and to strengthen Turkey’s standing in the Middle East. However, foreign policy discourse, norms and ideals referred to as a basis of policy is also an act of construction of Turkey’s international status in the near future, either as a country integrated to Europe or a country with a clear claim for a leadership role in the Middle East and the Moslem world. The government prefers the latter over the former.

Conclusion

Turkish foreign policy displays a process of revitalization with an active, multi-dimensional and multi-regional foreign policy shaped by global and regional trends. This policy also reflects the understanding of the government and especially the minister of foreign affairs, which can be summarized as “putting Turkey at the center”. Turkey shows a greater inclination to resolve its disputes with neighboring countries, forge close relations with countries in the region with the exception of Israel, and become involved as a mediator in regional crises and conflicts such as the recent involvement in the formation of the Lebanese government. Although

¹⁵ Translated by the author, “Erdoğan: Biz bize yeteriz” [We are Self-Sufficient], *Vatan*, 12 January 2011, <http://haber.gazetevatan.com/erdogan-biz-bize-yeteriz/352350/1/Gundem>

such initiatives may not always produce the desired results, it could be stated that they add up to reshape Turkey's image in its region and the world as a country striving to achieve international peace and stability.

The new Turkish foreign policy does not suffer from lethargy or passivity. On the contrary, dynamism, engagement and audacity are the order of the day. However, the new foreign policy should also be structured around some fundamental norms, principles and priorities. Turkey should adopt a more balanced foreign policy outlook that does not overrun the country's capabilities. It cannot be active at the same level in all regions. Turkish foreign policy priorities should be carefully examined with regard to Turkey's internal dynamics, probability of effectiveness with regard to aim and target, and the international conjuncture.

Turkey's democratic and secular regime is one of its most important strengths in the international arena. It is a country that is aiming to improve its flawed democratic system. Combining the ideals of democracy and human rights, which are also a prominent aspect of the EU dimension with Turkey's search for stability, peace and cooperation in surrounding regions could be the key to a more balanced and principled foreign policy. This could of course always remain an ideal that is hard to attain in reality when judged from the experience of EU foreign policy. However, if Turkey could make democracy promotion and human rights a pivotal part of a consistent and integral foreign policy understanding, it could also become a more influential actor in its region. While the prime minister and minister of foreign affairs criticizes the West's approach to Hamas as implying double-standards and lack of respect for democratic processes, they should also make sure that they voice their concern against the regime of Omar El-Bashir or lend some support to the popular movement in countries such as Tunisia.

While other rising actors in the world stage, especially China, may not act on the basis of such norms and may enjoy a "free hand" so to speak, Turkey's situation is not comparable when judged on the basis of its geography, history, size, economy and relations with the West and particularly the EU. Its growing influence in adjacent regions is sometimes referred to as "neo-Ottomanism". While this may be a flawed comparison, Turkey's increasing activism, its soft power instruments based on cultural and religious ties and economic resources may be observed to usher in a new era of acting as a pivotal actor if not a hegemonic one. Turkey should make sure that it does not overemphasize its role in the region to the point of causing resentment in neighboring countries.

One should also note the mutually constitutive relationship between internal political developments, Turkish foreign policy and the EU perspective. It should not be forgotten that the EU occupies a special place for Turkey in its remit of interna-

tional relations due to its close involvement in Turkish politics and society. The EU process is not only about foreign policy, but is closely linked with internal developments and changes in Turkey. Ever-closer relations with the EU intended towards an eventual membership would be a safety valve for Turkish democracy, which is going through a problematic period at the moment.

At this point, one may ponder whether the EU is not in a crisis and no longer fulfills its role as a pole of stability and democracy in the wider region. Its power to shape and project its values and norms to its vicinity have declined due to its internal problems, the adverse effects of its recent enlargement on its internal cohesiveness, and realization of the limits to the extent of its foreign policy, as exemplified by the Georgian crisis of 2008. Global power shifts and the increasing significance of new centers of international economic and political influence such as the BRIC countries may also explain the decline in the EU's international standing and effectiveness. Despite such observations, European integration and its evolution are relevant especially for a country such as Turkey. While the EU still has no alternatives as a union of states based on values of peace, democracy and human rights, the Middle East is a region with instabilities, unresolved security issues, poverty, and authoritarianism: a region rife with opportunities as well as threats. The recent public demonstrations and protests in Tunisia and Egypt which led to a change of government in the former and expected to lead to similar changes in the latter, are a clear reflection of the dynamic nature of these societies, the longing for democracy, freedom, and welfare, and a sign of a bright future in the horizon.

Turkey's active engagement and search for closer ties with the countries in the region as well as initiatives for mediation of disputes and problems are a clear reflection of the growing importance of the Middle East for Turkish foreign policy. While the EU dimension does not in any way prejudice Turkey's involvement in other regions or countries, the viability of the EU process would determine the contours and nature of this involvement. In the absence of a clear framework, orientation and backbone of Turkey's foreign policy, its attempts to become a leading regional actor could fail. Thus, the outcome of Turkey's ambiguous and faltering accession process is extremely important for the shaping of the new Turkish foreign policy. A credible EU perspective and eventual membership could only contribute to Turkey's international effectiveness.

Turkey's role in the new international system is determined by its economic strength, economic and political enterprises, innovative and potentially effective foreign policy, soft power assets based on its history and culture, and its geopolitical status as a trade, finance and energy hub. Above all, however, Turkey's fragile yet improving democratic system, and its unique blend of western ideals and eastern cultural traditions would determine its role as an influential international

actor. On this account, the EU dimension has contributed and still possesses the potential to contribute to the further development of a democratic, stable and prosperous regime in Turkey.

Although it is true that EU member states may encounter problems of democracy and human rights, as exemplified by the Hungarian government's media law recently, a closer analysis would reveal the following insight: The EU, rather than being an oasis of democracy and human rights, is a community of states that aim to achieve those aims and upgrade the implementation of standards of democracy and human rights on the basis of interaction, communication, deliberation, argumentation and persuasion. The European Convention on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights would be among the mechanisms for the setting of standards in this area as well as the recently adopted Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU. On this account, the EU does not have an alternative. Despite setbacks and problems, the EU accession process is still important for Turkey not only for economic benefits, structural funds or other material expectations but also for obtaining the chance to belong in a community of states that can criticize, influence and modify each other. Whether Turkey will be able to realize this opportunity is a question for coming years. However, it could be concluded that inasmuch as it is a test for Turkey to patiently and industriously prepare for EU accession, it is also an even bigger test for the EU to determine whether it will be able to overcome its fears and prejudices and integrate Turkey in this community of states.