



## Where are Turkey's new international relations taking it?

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It is undeniable that Turkey's path in the international arena is changing. However, commentators have yet to predict where this change in Turkish politics is taking it.

For most of the twentieth century Turkey's 'Kemalist' principles envisioned a continuous turning towards the West, and the West largely appreciates and welcomes Turkey's commitment to engage with international organisations such as NATO, the UN, the WTO and the OECD. As well as its persistence in the process of EU accession.

But since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002, an eastward orientation has become prominent. On the one hand this appears worrisome for those in the West who are suspicious that the claims of the Turkish Republic about Neo-Ottomanism and 'strategic depth' amount to neo-imperialism and a move away from Kemalist principles. On the other hand, many consider that Turkey has a key role to play in mediating and brokering agreements between the West and the East—as well as within the Middle East—which actually strengthen its relationships with the West.

Whatever the interpretation, Ankara states that it can no longer see the West as the only pillar in its foreign policy and that Turkey, by virtue of its historical, cultural and religious ties, has a greater mission than simply following its European neighbours.

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# 1 Introduction

Turkey became a republic on 29 October 1923, abolishing all its formal ties with the Ottoman Empire. That empire had ruled for over 600 years, with borders reaching at times from Vienna to the Gulf, but it did not survive in the international arena of the 19th century due to a lack of economic, social, political and to a certain extent philosophical progress. The new republic under the first leader Kemal Ataturk made promises to the Turkish nation as well as to the world, stating that Turkey would be an ally of the West, especially Europe, and dispelling fears that it would seek to enlarge its borders. Ataturk's 'Kemalist' principles had envisioned progress based on democracy, secularity and a continuous turning towards the West, so that Turkey would become a trustworthy ally rather than the 'sick man of Europe'. Due to a lack of educated citizens in Turkey at the end of the First World War, his idea of progressive politics was mainly formulated by the political elite educated abroad. In order to catch up with the developed world, the Republic relied on its uneducated masses to produce and its educated elite to decide, which rendered Turkish politics fairly elitist in nature.

Then, after almost 80 years of following Kemalist principles with greater or lesser success, Turkish politics started to take a different course. It was very surprising to most commentators that the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi—Justice and Development Party) won a crushing victory in its first national elections in 2002. This newly-established political party, boasting that it included each and every citizen in the political system, appeared to have captured the mood of the nation, given that the AKP won its second national elections, as well as the 2009 local elections, with almost an absolute majority. With both the prime minister and the president of the republic coming from the lower socio-economic strata, the AKP has consolidated its domestic support and taken control of industrial cities including Istanbul, Ankara and Adana. Commentators argue that the AKP has also shifted the traditional path of Turkish foreign policy, which had tended to focus on the Western states and organisations, view its regional neighbours as threats and mostly ignore the East. New concepts such as Neo-Ottomanism, 'strategic depth' and 'zero problems with neighbours' have stressed that Turkey will break away from its Western-centric foreign policy and will equally engage in the East, whether brokering peace agreements or cooperating in political or economic issues.

This new turn in Turkish politics appears worrisome for some Western authorities who consider that its eastward orientation might prove problematic for Ankara's western ambitions, such as accession to the EU. Turkey has been walking on thin ice on sensitive issues such as the Iranian nuclear programme and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and, although it presents strong potential for the West in energy security and political bridging, Ankara's choices could lead to the loss of this potential. This note will analyse the new turn in Turkish foreign policy, after a brief survey of the domestic political context and how this will affect or already has affected its relations with the West.

## 2 New turn in Turkish politics

### 2.1 Context: Change in domestic politics

The 'new Anatolian elite', of which the incumbent Prime Minister and the President of Republic form part, have a very different mindset and perception of the world from the previous political elite. They have fairly rapidly projected their principles to the foreign policy arena, thanks partly to the army taking a much less active role in politics than hitherto.

### Mass Politics and the 'new Anatolian elite'

When Recep Tayyip Erdoğan became the provisional chairman of the Islamist Welfare Party (Refah Partisi), he predicted that the only way for a right-wing party to win elections was to include the segments of society that seemed to be alienated by the elitist nature of Turkish politics. His campaign was hugely successful and secured a very high voter turnout for the 1989 local elections. In the 1994 local elections, he worked intensively to gain the support of less-than-affluent neighbourhoods in Istanbul, as a result of which he won the mayoral office. The Welfare Party even won the 1995 national elections but despite being the largest party in parliament, lacked support for forming a government except for a short period in 1996-97. After the banning of the Welfare Party by the Turkish Constitutional Court in 1998 on the grounds that it was anti-secular, Erdoğan established the AKP party, a centre-right political party that aimed to bring together fragmented segments of the right political spectrum. His technique paid off, giving the AKP a majority of the seats in the 2002 national elections, despite obtaining only 34% of the national vote.<sup>1</sup> Erdoğan and his party members effectively capitalised on the failure of the previous coalition, producing a two-party parliament for the first time in 48 years and replacing a series of left-of-centre Kemalist parties or coalitions. The result reflected the soaring popularity of the AKP, established barely a year earlier, and prompted a number of established party leaders to resign. These resignations brought forth a change in the Turkish political elite as new politicians emerged from ordinary public milieus rather than being groomed by the Kemalist elite.

The next national elections were held on 22 July 2007 when Erdoğan's party not only emerged as victorious but also notably increased its share of the national vote (47%).<sup>2</sup> This percentage allowed Erdoğan to form another single-party government. The Turkish electoral board confirmed that the voter turnout was almost 80%, an all-time high.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Erdoğan's tactic of integrating all segments of the society into Turkish politics was succeeding, as Turkey turned from elitist to mass politics.

The most recent Turkish local elections, which took place on 29 March 2009, were another victory for Erdoğan's AKP, albeit not as big as the national ones. The AKP's share of votes dropped to approximately 40%, while the main opposition party, the CHP, notably increased its share.<sup>4</sup> Although victorious in the national level, the drop in votes resulted in a failure to win target constituencies such as Izmir and Diyarbakir, the former a Kemalist city in western Turkey and the latter a predominantly Kurdish-populated city in the east. This outcome was interpreted by some commentators as reflecting the integration of the masses in politics but ironically at the expense of the AKP.<sup>5</sup> Given that Turkey remains prone to regional divisions in politics due to the concentration of ethnic and political minorities<sup>6</sup> in certain provinces, the strategy of Erdoğan and the AKP may have a divisive effect on Turkish politics. Ali Çorakoğlu argues, however, that the negative impact of regionalisation on the AKP is less than for other major parties.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, it has been argued that the AKP's successful strategy was only successful in capitalising on the shortcomings of previous governments

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<sup>1</sup> [2002 Elections Results](#), *Electionresources.org*, retrieved 3 December 2009

<sup>2</sup> [The Grand Assembly of Turkey](#), retrieved 3 December 2009

<sup>3</sup> "2007 Elections", *Euractive*, 5 April 2007

<sup>4</sup> "Ruling Party Main Loser in Local Ballot", *Hurriyet*, retrieved 22 December 2009

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Kemalists in the Western provinces especially Marmara and the Aegean Regions, Conservatives in the Eastern and Islamist in the Central Province

<sup>7</sup> "Turkey's Local Elections of 2009", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 11 No.2 2009 pg 7

and the absence of a strong opposition, and as other parties undergo a generational change the future domestic success of the AKP appears unassured.<sup>8</sup>

After the 2007 elections, a constitutional referendum on electoral reform took place. The main issue in the referendum was the proposition that the president of the Turkish Republic should be directly elected by popular vote rather than by a parliamentary one. Secular constituencies have argued that this was an attempt by Erdoğan to secure the next presidential post for himself or a member of his party. It would have meant that any political party possessing a nation-wide majority of votes—i.e. the AKP—would very probably have gained the presidential office as well.<sup>9</sup> Following a major backlash from the media and the secular segment of society, electoral reforms were rejected by numerous cities and thus were not established. But the AKP's attempt showed again its desire to turn Turkish politics from elitist to mass in nature.

A further crucial change is that the current prime minister, president and foreign minister come not from the urban elite but from the new "Anatolian elite", which is seen as more Islamic and conservative,<sup>10</sup> and arguably more reflective of the wider Turkish society.

Whatever the future holds for the AKP and its electoral success, one thing is certain: the AKP has successfully transformed the elitist nature of Turkish politics, under which policies were formulated by highly-educated western-looking technocrats and diplomats, to mass-driven politics. This change in the domestic elite became the catalyst for a turn in foreign policy.

### **Army disappearing from politics**

The second important domestic change came about with the disengagement of the Turkish Armed Forces from the mission they had assumed for almost a century of ensuring the secularity of the republic – a mission which had led to frequent coups and which was strongly supported by the majority of Turkish people.<sup>11</sup> This change allowed the new government elite to pursue a freer foreign policy path without worrying about how a possible eastward rapprochement would be viewed by the army.

There has been considerable pressure from the EU for a separation between the military and politics in Turkey. Turkey's current constitution dates a period of military rule, and successive European Commission progress reports have criticised Turkish law for granting the military wide room for manoeuvre by providing a broad definition of national security, allowing some internal military operations without a request from the civilian authorities and providing no parliamentary scrutiny of large amounts of military procurement funding.<sup>12</sup> This has led to some legislative changes: for example, a law requiring armed forces personnel to be tried in civilian courts in peacetime, including in the event of attempted coups d'état, crimes affecting national security and organised crime, was ratified in the Turkish parliament on 27 June 2009.<sup>13</sup> More recently, it has been reported that the Government and the military

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<sup>8</sup> Turkey's Local Elections of 2009", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 11 No.2 2009

<sup>9</sup> "Turkey Court Rules Reforms Valid", *BBC*, 5 July 2007

<sup>10</sup> "Turkey's Strategic Depth", *Qantara German News Agency*, 7 August 2009

<sup>11</sup> See Ersel Aydinli, "A paradigmatic shift for the Turkish Generals and an end to the coup era in Turkey", *Middle East Journal* vol 63 no 4, Autumn 2009, p581

<sup>12</sup> See for example European Commission, *Turkey 2008 progress report*, COM(2008)674, 5 November 2008, pp8-9; *Turkey 2009 progress report* COM(2009) 533, 14 October 2009, pp10-11

<sup>13</sup> "Asker Artık Sivil Mahkemede Yargılanacak" (Army will face civil courts), *Ntvmsnbc*, 27 June 2009

have agreed to abolish the measure permitting the army to intervene to calm unrest in cities without a governor's request.<sup>14</sup>

But the real turning point came with the army's humiliation over its attempts to intervene in the appointment of a new President in 2007. It had made an implicit threat to stage a coup if the AKP's choice of candidate, Abdullah Gül, was appointed; but this was confounded by the AKP winning a second landslide at the early election it called to test public opinion on the question. After this, the army stayed silent as Gül and other AKP nominees were appointed to key posts.<sup>15</sup> It appeared that the military, still the 'most trusted' institution in the country, did not want to risk jeopardising its standing in society.<sup>16</sup>

The ongoing 'Ergenekon' trials have also affected the military's ability to intervene in politics, despite allegations that the trials were politically motivated. Ergenekon is the name given to an alleged clandestine, Kemalist, ultra-nationalist organisation in Turkey with ties to members of the country's military and security forces.<sup>17</sup> It has been argued that this group was responsible for terrorism in Turkey: alleged members have been indicted on charges of plotting to foment unrest, among other things by assassinating intellectuals, politicians, judges, military staff, and religious leaders, with the ultimate goal of toppling the Government in a coup that was planned to take place in 2009.<sup>18</sup> Two generals who are accused of leading the coup were detained in January 2009,<sup>19</sup> and by May 2009 over 200 suspects had been detained and 142 formally charged. Some commentators have argued that the investigation was intended to clamp down on the AKP's secular opposition, including the military, pointing to the coincident timing of the dissolution case against the AKP and the Ergenekon probe.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the trials have weakened the army's ability to intervene in politics.

This shift in the traditional civilian-military balance in Turkish politics does not signify that the army has become redundant as an institution. The army has undertaken important missions in 2008-2009, including attacks against terrorist targets in Northern Iraq that were ordered by the government and authorised by the parliament. But these show the army taking a more accepted role as the backbone power for the government's foreign policies, rather than interfering in domestic politics.

## 2.2 Change in foreign policy

Following the change in the incumbent party from left-wing Kemalist to centre-right populist, Turkish foreign policy has been notably re-shaped. Not only have new concepts emerged in Turkish foreign affairs, but the way that international relations are perceived in Turkey has also shifted considerably.

### Strategic Depth

Once he had been elected prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan brought his own entourage to the centre of Turkish politics. Unable to speak any foreign languages, Erdoğan has

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<sup>14</sup> ["Turkey tries to rebuild confidence in military"](#), *Financial Times*, 4 February 2009

<sup>15</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Strategic Survey 2009: The Annual Review of World Affairs*, "Turkey: Continuing Domestic Wrangles", p186

<sup>16</sup> Eysel Aydinli, "A paradigmatic shift for the Turkish Generals and an end to the coup era in Turkey", *Middle East Journal* vol 63 no 4, Autumn 2009, p581

<sup>17</sup> ["State connections to murder of journalist Hrant Dink being ignored"](#), *BIANET*, 13 February 2008

<sup>18</sup> Berkan, Ismet, "Ergenekon'un yakın tarihi (4)", *Radikal*, 8 March 2008

<sup>19</sup> ["Tuncer Kilinc Pasa da Gozaltinda Iddiasi"](#) (General Tuncer Kilinc is allegedly detained", *Haber7*, 7 January 2009

<sup>20</sup> ["Turkey 'plotters trial resumes'"](#), *BBC*, 23 October 2008

needed more than interpreters to establish a strong link between Ankara and the rest of the world. His chief advisor, Ahmet Davutoğlu, a former political science academic and ambassador, assumed this linkage mission by offering the PM a set of new concepts that would not only coincide with the AKP's world view, but also draw a new future for Turkey. His main ideas clustered around what he called 'strategic depth', which is the title of a highly influential book he wrote in 2005. The concept mainly refers to the fact that by virtue of its historical ties and geo-political importance, Turkey cannot be tied down to only one political grouping such as the EU, the Middle East, the Caucasus or the Mediterranean. According to Davutoğlu,

Turkey's foreign policy needs a new orientation in the light of new regional and global developments. As a major country in the midst of the Afro-Eurasia landmass, Turkey is a central country with multiple regional identities that cannot be reduced to one, unified category. In terms of sphere of influence, Turkey is a Middle Eastern, Balkan, Caucasian, Central Asian, Caspian, Mediterranean, Gulf and Black Sea country all at the same time. Like Russia, Germany, Iran and Egypt, Turkey cannot be explained geographically or culturally by associating it with one single region. [Therefore] Turkey should appropriate a new position in its region by providing security and stability not only for itself but also for its neighbours and the region. Turkey's engagements from Africa to Central Asia and from EU to OIC are parts of a new foreign policy vision. Domestically Turkey needs to deepen and enrich its democracy, accommodate the differences within its society, and strengthen the coordination and balance among its institutions in 2008 and the years that follow. These initiatives will make Turkey a global actor as we approach 2023, the hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the Turkish Republic.<sup>21</sup>

Following this logic, Turkey is uniquely endowed both because of its location in geopolitical areas of influence, particularly its control of the Bosphorus, and because of the historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>22</sup> It was argued that Turkish foreign policy had been unbalanced, with an over-emphasis on ties with Western Europe and the US, neglecting Turkey's interest with other countries, especially the Middle East.<sup>23</sup>

This concept unquestionably brings a set of policy prescriptions for Ankara as well as a set of question marks for governments observing Turkey. Prescriptions for the 'new' Turkish foreign policy revolve around establishing Ankara as a trustworthy bridge for the uneasy West-East relationship spectrum and finding ways of handling the variety of motivations and political organisations among its regional partners. This has proved to be very hard in many cases. For example, establishing its long-lost diplomatic relations with Armenia triggered criticism from Turkey's ethnic, cultural and economic partner Azerbaijan on the grounds that Ankara's shift in political alliance might have an impact on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In response, Azerbaijan implied that it was no longer prepared to provide Turkey with gas at a discounted price.<sup>24</sup> A similar problem occurred in the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations under Turkey's mediation. Turkey's neutral position in the Arab-Israeli conflict has allowed it to engage in a military partnership with Israel whilst holding good economic and cultural relations with its historical Arab allies; but Erdoğan's personal criticisms of Shimon Perez, were vocalised in an exasperated manner at the World Economic Forum in Davos on 29 January 2009, in an effort to appear as the guardian of the rights of Turkey's Muslim

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<sup>21</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10 No. 1 2008

<sup>22</sup> "Learning Strategic Depth: Implications of Turkey's New Foreign Policy Doctrine", *Insight Turkey*, July 2007

<sup>23</sup> "Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalist Foreign Policy", *Zaman*, 22 September 2008

<sup>24</sup> Gareth Winrow, "Turkey, Russia and the Caucasus: Common and Diverging Interests", *Chatham House*, November 2009

friends in the Middle East. This damaged the strategic partnership with Israel,<sup>25</sup> and whilst boasting that it is a broker of Middle Eastern peace, Turkey has ended up excluding Israel from a planned NATO military exercise.<sup>26</sup> More examples follow, including Turkish mediation in the Iranian nuclear issue and Russian-Georgian conflict.

The theory of strategic depth has four main principles—zero problems with neighbours, outreach to adjacent regions, multi-dimensional foreign policy and rhythmic diplomacy. These are examined briefly below.

### ***Zero Problems with Neighbours***

Davutoğlu believes that in order to gain its deserved political place in the world arena, Turkey has to follow a set of principles. The first one is reconciliation with all neighbours to secure Turkey's territorial integrity, especially in the east and south-east. This 'zero problems with neighbours' policy has already greatly benefited Turkey as it has achieved substantial economic, military and political partnerships with Syria and Iran, and has re-established its long-lost diplomatic relations with Armenia, helped reconstruction in Iraq and officially recognised the Kurdistan province of Northern Iraq. Other examples of the policy are Turkey's building of Batumi airport for Georgia after the conflict while developing the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad project, and its significantly improved relations with Bulgaria after the latter's accession to the EU.<sup>27</sup> These developments in return allowed Ankara to be seen as a trustworthy ally for both the West and the East, rendering the Turkish Republic fit for mediating conflicts including Syria-Israel, Armenia-Azerbaijan and the Iranian nuclear issue.

### ***Outreach to adjacent regions***

Davutoğlu's second principle is developing relations with regions beyond Turkey's immediate neighbours. It has been argued that Turkey's regional impact extends to the Balkans, the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Accordingly, being active in the Balkans through participation in NATO missions, in the Middle East through close engagement in Lebanese reconstruction as well as Palestinian rights and in Central Asia through energy pipeline projects have developed Turkey's influence abroad.<sup>28</sup> This close engagement with adjacent regions and building up soft power is very important according to Davutoğlu who claims that "today, we know that only states which exert influence across their borders using 'soft power' can really protect themselves."<sup>29</sup>

### ***Multi-dimensional Foreign Policy***

The third principle is adherence to a multi-dimensional foreign policy. This principle entails engaging in complementary rather than competitive relationships with global powers, and applying a different approach in each issue considering the expectations and existing rules of international diplomacy. In this matter, Davutoğlu underlines Turkey's strategic relations with the US through the two countries' bilateral ties and through NATO, and considers its EU accession process, its good neighborhood policy with Russia, and its synchronization policy in Eurasia to be integral and complementary parts of a consistent policy.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> "Stormy Debate in Davos over Gaza", *Al Jazeera*, 30 January 2009

<sup>26</sup> "Turkey excludes Israel", *CNN*, 11 October 2009

<sup>27</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10 No. 1 2008

<sup>28</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10 No. 1 2008

<sup>29</sup> "Turkey's Strategic Depth", *Qantara.de*, 7 August 2009

<sup>30</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10 No. 1 2008 pg 82

### **Rhythmic Diplomacy**

The last principle in this framework is 'rhythmic diplomacy'. Turkey has hosted important international meetings while pursuing careful field diplomacy with both state and non-state actors including Hamas. Since 2003 Turkey has hosted the NATO summit, the OIC (Organization of the Islamic Conference) summit, World Water Forum 2009 and more. This increased activity contributed to Turkey being elected to one of the non-permanent member seats on the United Nations Security Council in 2009, giving the republic more weight in pursuing its foreign policy goals.

### **2.3 Examples of strategic depth in Turkish foreign policy**

This shift in Turkish foreign policy has notably turned the focus of international society towards Ankara:

Turkish foreign policy rarely makes global headlines, nor has it traditionally been an important factor in international politics in the 21st century. However, the events of September 11th, 2001, the American-led War on Terror, Second Gulf War, and the most recent domestic political turmoil have refocused world attention on Turkey's future path and progress. The nation's history and experience with democracy, secularism, Islamic fundamentalism, and ethnic minorities present a microcosm of the challenges facing its entire neighborhood.<sup>31</sup>

A few examples are given below.

#### **Iraq and Kurdistan**

A major breakthrough in Turkish foreign policy so far has been to end Turkey's political isolation of Iraqi Kurdistan. Ankara has no longer pretends that the region does not exist and that it need only deal with Baghdad. This 180-degree turn was in part prompted by the US decision to begin withdrawing its troops from Iraq. Turkey has been trying to anticipate the evolution of Iraqi politics in the absence of US combat units in the country. The AKP government wants Iraq to remain whole, but it realises that if tensions in Iraq devolve into all-out violence and the country breaks apart, Turkey would be better off with a partner in Iraq's energy-rich north. The Government managed to convince the Turkish military that an opening to the Iraqi Kurds would not exacerbate existing difficulties with the Turkish Kurds and would increase Turkey's influence in Iraq.<sup>32</sup>

Nonetheless, Turkish authorities and their Kurdish counterparts in Iraq still have to resolve some explosive issues, such as the contested status of the oil-rich area of Kirkuk. Turks believe that it is essential to keep the city's control out of the hands of the Kurdistan Regional Government both to help prevent the breakup of Iraq and to limit the aspirations of the Iraqi Kurds.

#### **Armenia**

The Turkish government also made a significant move earlier this year when it reversed its long-standing policy of isolating Armenia. Repeated negotiations, often secret, had failed to end the stand-off, but a bout of "football diplomacy" brought a breakthrough in September 2008 when President Sargsyan of Armenia invited President Gül of Turkey to watch the two countries play a World Cup qualifying match in Yerevan, the capital.<sup>33</sup> In April 2009, despite

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<sup>31</sup> "Learning Strategic Depth: Implications of Turkey's New Foreign Policy Doctrine", *Insight Turkey*, July 2007

<sup>32</sup> Morton Abramowitz & Henri F Barkey, "Turkey's Transformers: the AKP Sees Big", *Foreign Affairs*, December 2009

<sup>33</sup> "Last Remnant of the Iron Curtain Set to Fall in Victory for Football Diplomacy", *The Times*, 14 April 2009

an apparent promise to the US president Barack Obama, Erdoğan delayed opening Turkey's border with Armenia after nationalists in Turkey and Azerbaijan protested. But in another surprising turn, in August 2009, two protocols were agreed establishing diplomatic and economic relations between the two countries and an agreement in opening the Turkish-Armenian border. This was a major step for Turkey in the Caucasus as Ankara also hopes that the initiative will help its case with the EU and reduce the pressure on the US Congress to pass a resolution labeling the Armenian massacres as genocide. It remains to be seen whether the AKP will stand up to further opposition. Erdoğan has promised the government of Azerbaijan that Turkey will not open its border with Armenia until Armenia has relinquished control over the regions it holds surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh, a landlocked province in Azerbaijan.<sup>34</sup> Erdoğan seems to be betting that a diplomatic solution to this issue will somehow be found but it is quite possible that the deal with Armenia will be rejected by the Turkish parliament because of Azeri and Turkish nationalist pressures.

## Syria

In the past year, Turkey has also established a network of cooperation with its neighbour Syria, with whom relations have historically been uneasy. Ankara and Damascus have signed a set of treaties ranging from jointly building a dam<sup>35</sup> on the Asi (Orontes) river to launching a passenger trains service between Gaziantep (Turkey) and Aleppo (Syria).<sup>36</sup> Given that in the past Syria and Iraq have both very harshly criticised Turkey for constructing dams on Euphrates and Tigris rivers, this joint effort brings hope for the future of bilateral relations. Furthermore, Turkey and Syria issued a joint declaration on 23 December 2009 after meeting of a High Level Cooperation Council. The declaration states that Turkey and Syria agree to clear the region from nuclear weapons and calls on for a diplomatic solution of Iran's nuclear program and that Syria welcomed Turkey's efforts for indirect talks between Syria and Israel.<sup>37</sup> Both parties later signed 50 agreements and memoranda of understanding and a work programme for joint cooperation, and the leaders of the two countries vowed to enhance bilateral relations further.<sup>38</sup>

According to some commentators, the rapprochement with Syria is just a beginning as Turkey intends to do the same with Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan. They suggest that the new Turkish model has two legs. First, Turkey wants to establish close bilateral relations with Middle Eastern countries. Through this network Turkey will become some sort of coordinator in the region. However, these Middle Eastern countries have serious problems with each other. Thus, the second leg of this model is to make sure that these develop similar close relationships with each other. Both legs of this model must be working simultaneously otherwise the whole system will be deadlocked sooner or later. Turkey would act as a facilitator in the second leg, by providing a neutral ground for cooperation between Iraq and Syria, Arabs and Israel, Iraq and Iran, Lebanon and Syria etc. through its cultural and historical ties to this region.<sup>39</sup>

As this model intends to create a stable area around Turkey, Turkish soft power and mediation is likely to play a key role in Davutoğlu's strategic thinking:

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<sup>34</sup> Morton Abramowitz & Henri F Barkey, "Turkey's Transformers: the AKP Sees Big", *Foreign Affairs*, December 2009

<sup>35</sup> "Turkey: Turkey and Syria to Build 'Friendship' Dam", *Plus News Pakistan*, 7 January 2010

<sup>36</sup> "Turkey, Syria launch Passenger Rail Service", *BBC*, 7 January 2010

<sup>37</sup> "Turkey, Syria Issue Joint Declaration", *Day.Az Azerbaijan News Agency*, 24 December 2009

<sup>38</sup> "Syria, Turkey Move Towards Cooperation", *Xinhua News Agency*, 23 December 2009

<sup>39</sup> "The Agreements that Have Been Signed between Turkey and Syria Inaugurate a New Chapter", *Plus News Pakistan*, 26 December 2009

It's no longer sustainable for Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan or even for Iraq to continue with long-running problems with Israel or even with Iran. All these countries must make their decisions on how to join the global system's transformations and how to modify their domestic and international policies' paradigms. Turkey had launched its own changes with the EU process, and Turkey's transformation will influence the change of those around it.<sup>40</sup>

### **Middle East Peace Process**

The Turkish government took advantage of the vacuum created by President George W Bush's unpopular policies in the Middle East to participate in indirect talks between Israel and Syria. Ankara presented itself as both Muslim and pragmatic, and therefore the key player to the peace process, using its long-standing military and economic partnership with Israel and cultural bonding with Syria as proof. Turkey injected itself into the negotiations following the crises in Lebanon in 2006 and Gaza in the late 2008 and early 2009. French President Sarkozy invited Davutoğlu, then a foreign policy adviser, to join the French delegation that traveled to Damascus to discuss the Gaza crisis. Ankara has taken partial credit for the agreement governing the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq, for hosting talks between US representatives and Iraqi insurgents earlier this year.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu jumped at the opportunity to mediate Iraq and Syria's recent dispute over bombings in Baghdad's Green Zone in August 2009, allegedly carried out by insurgents from Syria.<sup>42</sup>

Turkey has played a considerable role in Arab-Israeli relations. Ankara recognised Israel in 1949 and until Egypt's recognition during Camp David Accords in 1978, Turkey was the only Muslim state to have diplomatic relations with both Israel and the Palestinians. While Turkey signed many cooperation agreements with Israel and enhanced bilateral political ties, it also maintained good relations with Palestinians, which allowed the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) to establish an office in Ankara in 1979. By taking an apparently non-ideological approach, Turkey tried to be an honest broker and has promoted a two-state solution to the conflict.<sup>43</sup> This position allowed Turkey to be respected by both sides. As an effort to jumpstart peace talks, Turkey has encouraged Syrian leader Bashar al-Asad to make a clear distinction between Syria and Iran in regional issues in order to prepare the grounds for resuming the long-lost diplomatic relationship between Israel and Syria. By doing so under Turkish mediation, and reassuring Israel that Syria will not go to war over the Golan Heights, Damascus has taken a very important step towards actual negotiations.

Given Turkey's past experience in Iraq and with non-state actors such as Hamas and the PLO, Ankara argues that it could broker a peace with the Taleban. Michael Binyon suggests that:

Ankara's aim is to repeat its success in 2004 in convincing alienated Sunnis in Iraq to end their boycott of the elections to give them a voice in the Shia-dominated Government. The approach by Turkey, whose own populations is predominantly Sunni, had worked in Iraq and must be repeated by NATO in dealing with the Taleban.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> "The Agreements that Have Been Signed between Turkey and Syria Inaugurate a New Chapter", *Plus News Pakistan*, 26 December 2009

<sup>41</sup> Morton Abramowitz & Henri F Barkey, "Turkey's Transformers: the AKP Sees Big", *Foreign Affairs*, December 2009

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

<sup>43</sup> "Hamas Visits Ankara: The AKP Shifts Turkey's Role in the Middle East", *the Washington Institute*, 16 February 2006

<sup>44</sup> "We Can Broker Peace with the Taleban Says Turkey", *Times Online*, 13 January 2010

Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu argues that his country has had relations since the tenth century with Afghanistan, and thanks to their shared cultural traits Turkey can provide a neutral meeting point for the Taleban, the Afghani government and the West.<sup>45</sup> Ankara has already hosted trilateral meetings bringing together President Karzai and President Zardari of Pakistan, the latest on 25 January 2010.

## 2.4 Criticisms

Despite its successes, this new foreign policy has received as much criticism as praise from the Turkish public and international society, and has also raised questions for Turkey's partners and the global powers that are engaged with Turkey.

### Neo-Ottomanism

Turkey's imperial history means that current states that once constituted Ottoman provinces approach the concept of strategic depth with considerable caution. It has been argued that there is a very thin line between Turkish soft power and the continuation of imperial aims. Critics of 'strategic depth' argue that the concept might as well be described as 'neo-Ottomanism', meaning the return to a notion of a Turkey exerting power over its traditional Ottoman sphere of influence.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Davutoğlu's portrayal of the new Turkish republic has exacerbated foreign fears. In language that echoes the European nickname for the late period of the Ottoman Empire, 'the sick man of Europe', Davutoğlu said:

Turkey as an international player was previously seen as having stomach, heart problems and fair-to-middling brain power. In other words it had a powerful army but a weak economy, lacked self confidence and was not good at strategic thinking.<sup>47</sup>

Commentators therefore interpret the new Turkish foreign policy as an effort to cure the sick man by regaining its imperial influence in both hard and soft power.

Davutoğlu has denied on various occasions that his policies amount to "Neo-Ottomanism".

### Anti-Kemalist Paradigm

In Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the first president and the founder of the Turkish Republic, has been seen as the model for development. He prescribed a westward-looking, democratic, Muslim yet officially secular Turkey. His principles have been closely followed by the old political and social elites who sought to establish strong relationships with the West whether economic, military or political. However, the change in the political elite as a result of the transformation of Turkish politics from elitist to mass in nature has brought forth a change in the paradigm towards a pro-Arabic, Islamist foreign policy. Kemalist segments of society have raised concerns about this shift.

Like many other liberal critics, Semih Idiz, a columnist for the newspapers *Hürriyet* and *Milliyet*, has emphasised the importance of a close relationship with the EU, and fears that the government's new foreign policy is a sign that Ankara has lost interest in the EU. Other commentators have warned about the recent Turkish rapprochement with Arabs and its potential negative impact on both domestic and foreign arenas:

Turkey's engagement also carries real risks if the course of influence runs in the opposite direction, i.e. from the Arab countries to Turkey. This was the reasoning behind the traditional Kemalist desire to keep all things Middle Eastern at arms length

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> "Turkey's Strategic Depth", *Qantara.de*, 7 August 2009

<sup>47</sup> "Turkey's Strategic Depth", *Qantara.de*, 7 August 2009

and under control. Turkish officials saw the Middle East as a cultural swamp from which Turkey must escape, not a realm of common culture in which it could thrive. As Davutoğlu must recognize, the problems of the Arab world, and the sources of its misery, are greater and deeper than the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Arab countries are politically dysfunctional and most are economically moribund. There is little they can offer the Turks aside from oil and gas and markets for Turkish consumer goods. In earlier eras, others such as Nasser and Saddam Hussein sought to expand their influence throughout the region by appealing to Arab sympathies against Israel, but their efforts did nothing but bring their own societies to ruin and leave the Arabs as whole worse off. Today Ahmadinejad is attempting something similar with his backing for Hezbollah and routine denunciations of Israel. Yet, one need only look at Iran's recent elections to answer the question of whether Ahmadinejad's version of state craft is serving anyone but himself and those close to him.<sup>48</sup>

### Practical Critique

In addition, Ankara has also been criticised for failing to reflect the new concepts of strategic depth in practice, or for being too quick to claim victory for its policies. Semih Idiz expresses this concern:

What we have seen over the last one or two years is not strategic depth but total confusion on the minds of all concerned. [I] see it is wishful thinking to expect equally good relationships with all one's neighbours at the same time.<sup>49</sup>

For example, Erdoğan has welcomed Sudan's president, who faces an indictment from the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes, to Ankara several times since early 2008, and when asked whether extensive killings in Darfur constitute a genocide, the Turkish government invoked a cliché about the value of closed-door diplomatic undertakings on sensitive matters.<sup>50</sup> And yet Erdoğan has criticized the Chinese government for committing "almost a genocide" in China's western province of Xinjiang. Abramowitz and Barkey argue that:

However reprehensible the Chinese authorities' treatment of the Uighur minority in Xinjiang, the fact is that Turkey, which has been fighting off charges that it committed genocide of its own, against the Armenians, should be careful when it uses such a loaded word.<sup>51</sup>

These events portray Ankara as something different from a self-declared bridge between the East and the West:

The AK party government has been accused of pursuing an ideologically-driven *a la carte* foreign policy. While ostensibly pursuing leadership of the Islamic world, the AKP has been conspicuously silent on Muslims' suffering in the northern Caucasus while collaborating with the Kremlin in promoting the South Stream pipeline at the expense of the Nabucco project that would connect Azerbaijan to the West.<sup>52</sup>

The director of the Washington Institute's Turkish Research program Soner Cagaptay describes this theory-practice disconnect:

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<sup>48</sup> [Michael Reynolds, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Flip", \*Middle East Strategy at Harvard\*, 14 October 2009](#)

<sup>49</sup> "Turkey's Strategic Depth", [Qantara.de](#), 7 August 2009

<sup>50</sup> Morton Abramowitz & Henri F Barkey, "Turkey's Transformers: the AKP Sees Big", *Foreign Affairs*, December 2009

<sup>51</sup> Morton Abramowitz & Henri F Barkey, "Turkey's Transformers: the AKP Sees Big", *Foreign Affairs*, December 2009

<sup>52</sup> [Michael Allen, "Erdoğan's Turkey: 'Refreshing' Pluralism or 'Authoritarian Democracy'", \*Democracy Digest\*, 9 December 2009](#)

The AKP's foreign policy is shaped by 'econo-Islamism', a blending of Turkish business interests with a religio-political world view. Turkey's rapprochement with Russia, Sudan, Iran and Hamas had been considered neo-Ottomanist—a "secular" attempt to project Turkish power within the realm of its former empire.<sup>53</sup>

In one of its biggest blunders, the AKP government opposed the appointment of former Danish Prime Minister Rasmussen as the secretary general of NATO because he had defended a Danish newspaper's decision to publish cartoons offending Muslims. Turkey thereby alienated many Europeans by seeming to favour Muslim sensibilities over liberal democratic values. Eventually, the Turkish government settled the matter by accepting the appointment of a Turk to the new post of deputy secretary-general for NATO, but the incident so irked French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner that he publicly renounced his support for Turkey's accession to the EU.<sup>54</sup> Following the cartoon crisis, Cagaptay concluded that:

The AKP sees itself as the tribune of the politically-defined and politically-charged Muslim world to the West, and not as an emissary of the West to the Muslims. The AKP has shifted Turkish foreign policy away from the West, helped catalyze a transformation of the Turkish identity towards Islamist causes, and is busy imposing an illiberal view of society, defined by orthopraxy as well as disregard for check and balances, such as media freedoms... Additionally, the AKP experience demonstrates that when Islamist parties moderate, it reflects not a strategic change but a tactical response to strong domestic and foreign opposition.<sup>55</sup>

According to some commentators Turkey used to punch below its weight; now, it seems to be punching above it. This would be an unmitigated advantage for Turkey if the AKP were not so quick to call every one of its foreign policy initiatives a resounding success. Turkish foreign policy officials have even said that by suggesting China had committed genocide against the Uighurs, Erdoğan actually increased Ankara's influence with Beijing.<sup>56</sup> The Turkish government has also claimed credit for getting the Syrians out of Lebanon (angering the Americans and the French, who parented a UN Security Council resolution arguing for their exit) and for getting Hamas to accept a cease-fire with Israel (upsetting the Egyptians, who were the primary brokers). The Turkish government now runs the risk of believing its own rhetoric and of dangerously overreaching itself.<sup>57</sup> Some also fear that Turkey's leaders might not be able to divorce the country's foreign policy aims from their own cultural (and perhaps religious) sensibilities. Erdoğan and Davutoğlu sometimes appear to be divided between being practitioners of realpolitik and representatives of an Islamic culture.

To sum up, although many criticisms have been put forth for the AKP's new design of Turkish foreign policy, it is undeniable that it has achieved historical success for Ankara, including the start of Turco-Armenian and Turco-Syrian diplomatic relations and confirmation by the EU of the Nabucco gas pipeline project. However, whether this new eastward dimension in Ankara's international affairs also means a notable disconnection from the West remains to be seen.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> Morton Abramowitz & Henri F Barkey, "Turkey's Transformers: the AKP Sees Big", *Foreign Affairs*, December 2009

<sup>55</sup> Michael Allen, "Erdoğan's Turkey: 'Refreshing' Pluralism or 'Authoritarian Democracy'", *Democracy Digest*, 9 December 2009

<sup>56</sup> "Cin-Turkiye İlişkilerinde Yeni Donem" (New era in Turco-Chinese relations), *Yeni Safak*, 27 January 2010

<sup>57</sup> Morton Abramowitz & Henri F Barkey, "Turkey's Transformers: the AKP Sees Big", *Foreign Affairs*, December 2009

### **3 Relations with the West**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Since Turkey was established as a republic in 1923, under the leadership of Ataturk, it has pursued a westward-orientated foreign policy. Turkey is a founding member of the OECD (1945) and the G-20 major economies, of the UN (1945), OIC (Organisation of the Islamic Conference-1969), the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe—1985), the Council of Europe (1949), the ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization 1985), and in 2009 was elected non-permanent member of the UNSC on behalf of the Western European and Others Group (together with Austria).<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, Turkey became an associate member of the EEC in 1963 and of the Western European Union in 1992, and officially began formal accession negotiations with the EU on 3 October 2005. Relations with Europe have for decades been given priority in the Turkish foreign policy above other matters. However, with the introduction of the 'strategic depth' Turkey seems to be exploring other orientations available to it.

#### **3.2 Relations with the US**

Turkey has notably co-operated with the US in economic, military, political and social matters. Besides taking an active role in all NATO missions including Bosnia, Turkey has closely engaged with the US in regional matters. The US remains one of the biggest trade partners of Turkey, and has been politically supportive of Ankara in regional matters. Although Turkey did not take part in the 'coalition of the willing' and declined the bill allowing American troops to pass through the Turkish soil for their Iraqi mission, the bilateral relationship did not take long to recover.

Following his election as US President, Barack Obama emphasised the importance of Turkey as a bridge country between the East and the West, and stated that the unique Turkish synthesis of Islam and democracy will help Ankara to broker important agreements.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Obama argued that Ankara will play a key role in resolving Iranian nuclear crisis.<sup>60</sup> He used a trip to Turkey very early in his Presidency as a vehicle for reaching out to the Muslim world.<sup>61</sup>

The US has been one of the biggest supporters of Turkish accession to the EU.

#### **3.3 Relations with the EU**

##### **Introduction**

After the foundation of Council of Europe, Turkey applied for associate membership of the EEC (European Economic Community, later the European Community) in 1959 and eventually obtained it in 1963. It reached a Customs Union agreement with the EU in 1995, abolishing all bilateral restrictions between the two entities for trade. On 3 October 2005 Ankara officially started formal negotiations with the EU for full membership status. However, there has not been much progress in the accession process since then. As a result of this stagnation in the accession period, public opinion in Turkey has shifted considerably away from the EU. The mood has not been helped by negative comments from some European leaders. The French president Nicolas Sarkozy, for example, has vocalised his discontent

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<sup>58</sup> "Turkey in the UN Security Council", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 11 No.4 2009

<sup>59</sup> "Restoration of US-Turkey relations?", *Daily News Egypt*, 16 April 2009

<sup>60</sup> "Obama: Turkey Important partner in resolving Iran crisis", *Plus News Pakistan*, 8 December 2009

<sup>61</sup> "[Obama reaches out to Muslim world](#)", *BBC news*, 6 April 2009

with the possible Turkish full membership on numerous occasions and strongly advocated that Turkey should ultimately be granted the status of strategic partner instead:

I do not believe that Turkey belongs to Europe, and for a simple reason: because it is in Asia Minor. What I wish to offer Turkey is a true partnership with Europe, but not integration into Europe.<sup>62</sup>

In addition, it has been argued by the president of the EU Herman Van Rompuy that Turkey might negatively affect the EU's cultural harmony due to its Muslim nature. During a meeting at the Belgian parliament in 2004 he stated that "The universal values which are in force in Europe, and which are also fundamental values of Christianity, will lose vigour with the entry of a large Islamic country such as Turkey".<sup>63</sup> Moreover, the Republic of Cyprus has stated that Turkey's stance on the Cyprus problem will result in a Cypriot 'no' vote for Turkish accession. In November 2009 Greek President Karolos Papoulias stated that he would not support Turkey's accession "as long as Ankara behaves as an occupying force in Cyprus."<sup>64</sup>

These comments made a notable impact on Turkish foreign policy and public opinion vis-à-vis the EU, contributing to an eastward turn in Ankara's foreign affairs.

### **Public opinion among the EU citizens about Turkish accession**

Whilst most EU Members States' governments support (or at least do not oppose) Turkish accession, public opinion varies widely and tends to be less positive. For instance, in 2009 polls, 67% of the Austrian population opposed Turkey's membership, in Germany the figure was 66% and in France 63%.<sup>65</sup> John Redmond's 2007 summary of the situation still appears valid today, and it is not very encouraging for Ankara:

The lack of any strong supporter (other than Britain) and the opposition of France and Germany make full Turkish membership an unlikely prospect in the immediate future. Nor can the Turks take much encouragement from the stances of the EU institutions. To the hostility of the EU's Council of Ministers [...] should be added that of the European parliament, which has repeatedly condemned Turkey for human rights violations and related issues, and the longstanding scepticism felt in the Commission about the feasibility of Turkish accession. As for popular opinion in the EU, if referendums in Turkish accession were held in all 27 member states, a vote for in favour of Turkey joining could not be anticipated with any confidence anywhere: not even Britain, its most consistent supporter at government level.<sup>66</sup>

According to Eurobarometer polls, public support for Turkish accession across Europe has remained stable albeit at a low level: 30% in 2000, 28% in 2006 and 31% in 2008.

Furthermore, the spring 2009 Eurobarometer Standard Poll suggested that a 47% of the EU's current member states' population tend to agree with the statement "the presence of people from other ethnic groups is a cause of insecurity", while only 37% disagreed. Eurobarometer recorded a 3% increase in this response compared with autumn 2006 figures.<sup>67</sup> This suggests that cultural arguments play a very large role in the public opinion about Turkish accession.

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<sup>62</sup> "Sarkozy: La France et l'Asie Mineure", *Turquie Européenne*, 16 January 2008

<sup>63</sup> "Keeping Turkey out of Europe", *the Guardian*, 6 January 2010

<sup>64</sup> "Greek President: We Cannot Support Turkey's Membership to the EU", *Turkish Weekly*, 19 November 2009

<sup>65</sup> Figures based on [Eurobarometer Public Opinion 71](#) findings, 2009

<sup>66</sup> Wilton Park Conference, *Turkey's accession process to the European Union*, 31 March – 3 April 2008

<sup>67</sup> Figures based on [Eurobarometer 71](#), Spring 2009

## Turkish public opinion about accession

In 2004, when the EU officially recommended that Turkey should begin talks to join the EU, the Turkish newspaper Sabah exclaimed: “Yes! A New Turkey”, while Milliyet declared, “Today is a more beautiful day”.<sup>68</sup> The former, Turkey’s biggest-selling paper, featured a piece by its chief columnist Oktay Eksi who said Turkey had taken a huge step towards fulfilling the will of Kemal Ataturk:

It is a day that the great Ataturk should have been among is. He should have witnessed the most concrete result so far of the revolution he carried out 80 years ago.<sup>69</sup>

The Turkish papers tended to praise Prime Minister Erdoğan for accomplishing reforms that ensured the favourable opinion of the EU. Turkish popular opinion was overwhelmingly behind membership for their country in the EU. According to 2005 Eurobarometer reports, 73% of Turks believed that EU membership would benefit the Turkish Republic.

Five years from the official start of accession talks, Turks do not seem as enthusiastic about accession as they were before. According to Eurobarometer’s 2009 poll, only 45% of the Turks chose a good thing as the answer to the question “Generally speaking, do you think that your country’s membership of the EU would be a good, a bad or neither good or bad thing?”.<sup>70</sup> This reflected a growing feeling that the EU accession process had become a ‘never-ending’ story as more and more countries started to make demands over various issues. Even secular Turks have started to question the process, reluctantly admitting that “Turkey’s western vocation has been a waste of time, because Europeans will never look on Turks as equals”.<sup>71</sup> Negative comments such as those of Nicolas Sarkozy and Herman Van Rampuy that Turkey created a cold shower effect on Turks who were eager for EU membership. Turks have expressed their disappointment with the process, arguing that the EU has become a form of leverage for member countries that have historical demands from the Turkish Republic. The Cypriot Republic has already made clear that it would block the Turkish membership before the island is unified and Turkish troops are withdrawn. Another blow came from Bulgaria, a new member of the EU, as one of its Ministers suggested it would block Turkish accession unless it received \$20 billion for compensation for the property and land lost by the 250,000 Bulgarians expelled by the Ottoman Empire during the Balkan Wars in 1913.<sup>72</sup> For Turks, the picture looks discouraging, and there is a sense that Ankara’s efforts are too costly for a membership that might be less-than-full.

## What is the EU’s assessment of Turkey’s progress?

The EU considers that one of the main blocks to progress is Turkey’s refusal to open its ports and airports to Cypriot vessels, in contravention of the Ankara Association Agreement. In December 2006 the EU decided to freeze eight chapters of the negotiations, but to continue with the other chapters. Turkey has now opened 11 out of 35 accession chapters.

According to the EU Commission’s [Turkey 2009 Progress Report](#), Ankara continues to sufficiently fulfil the Copenhagen political criteria for accession, though further progress on political reforms is expected. Turkey’s human rights record with respect to its minorities is still unsatisfactory for the EU criteria. The EU has severely criticised Turkey for its treatment

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<sup>68</sup> “Turkish press jubilant over green light for EU accession talks”, *Agence France Presse*, 7 October 2004

<sup>69</sup> Ibid

<sup>70</sup> Figures based on [Eurobarometer 72](#), Autumn 2009

<sup>71</sup> “A Make or Break Year for Turkey-EU ties”, *Turkish Daily News*, 19 December 2008

<sup>72</sup> “Bulgaria Aims to Speed Up \$20 bln Claims on Turkey”, *Reuters*, 5 January 2010

of political parties: the incumbent AKP barely escaped being banned, with five against four votes in the constitutional court, whereas the Kurdish DTP<sup>73</sup> was not so lucky. Thus the EU considers that Turkey still has a lot to achieve in political terms.

As for the economic criteria, the EU recognises Turkey as a functioning market economy which is able to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union in the medium term, provided that it implements its comprehensive reform programme. Macroeconomic stability remains weak and Turkey's considerable external financing needs make it vulnerable to changes in investor sentiment, but despite this Turkey has achieved one of the highest growth rates in the global economic crisis, surpassing some EU member states including Spain, the UK, Greece, Portugal and Ireland.<sup>74</sup> Thus the EU recognises that the Turkish economy is reasonably strong, and that with further reforms and full compliance with the provisions on the free movement of goods (currently blocked by Turkey's refusal to implement the customs union with respect to Cyprus) it will be able to adapt completely to the Union's economic expectations.

In the legal area, it has been reported that Turkey has improved its ability to take on the obligations of membership, but still not enough progress has been made. The Turkish legal system is under inspection by the EU for its ability to adapt fully to the *acquis communautaire*. Further alignment needs to be pursued, in particular in areas such as agriculture, fisheries, veterinary and phytosanitary policies, state aid, justice and home affairs, social policies and employment.

Based on this picture, Turkey technically stands at a point familiar to other accession countries: progress is detected and recognised, but more is demanded by the EU. However, it has been argued that it is the non-technical issues that complicate the application. Turkey, visibly very keen on improving its domestic situation in order to achieve full membership, has been told by several different European authorities that it will never fit into the EU due its geographical and cultural traits. In order to prevent further disconnection between the Turkish public and the EU, Ankara has looked for other solutions, including abandoning a solely westward-looking foreign policy.

#### **4 Where is Turkey going?**

For the past 60 years, Turkey has prioritised its relationship with the West, as is manifest in its membership in almost every western multilateral organisation. However, recent statements and policy initiatives by the Turkish authorities indicate that it will not continue in this way. The three most important Turkish political institutions in foreign policy making—the Prime Minister, the President and the Foreign Minister, who share a similar perception of the world—agree that a new chapter has started and that this will include more than one scenario.

The unbalanced historical relationship favouring the West over all other partners in Turkish foreign policy should be understood in the relevant historical context. It has been argued that after the break-up of the Ottoman Empire, the new Turkish state learnt from its past mistakes. As opposed to the Ottoman sultanate, the new republic saw the West as an example to follow rather than a power to challenge and dominate. This trend continued during the Cold War for security reasons. Stalin's aggressive moves on the Turkish straits and Eastern Anatolia during the early stages of the Cold War brought Turkey and the West

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<sup>73</sup> DTP-Demokratik Türkiye Partisi—Democratic Turkey Party

<sup>74</sup> [IMF, Members' Financial Data by Country](#)

even closer as their interests converged in containing the influence of the Soviet Union.<sup>75</sup> The East, at that point, presented nothing more than a threat for the then newest member of NATO.

Post-Cold War international relations were established in the form of a status quo by the West and its affiliated institutions such as NATO and the UN.<sup>76</sup> Davutoğlu has argued that for the last several decades, Turkey, with its strict adherence to maintaining stability and the status quo in its region, has been trying to adjust to a world where conditions for traditional foreign policy making have been undergoing a radical change:

Today Turkey stands at the threshold of all major trends within its neighborhood and is actively seeking to harness the assets that its geography and historical experiences afford it in its foreign and national security policy.<sup>77</sup>

With the fall of the iron curtain, Turkey recognised a growing need to connect the East to the West, two poles with which Turkey arguably has a lot in common. Therefore Turkey found itself a new role during 1980s and 1990s, bridging between these civilisations. Thawing Turco-Russian relations, increasing cooperation with both Israel and the Arab partners simultaneously, customs agreement with the EU and growing alliance with the US while developing relations with the Islamic Republic are only a few examples of how Turkey reached out to both sides during 1990s. However, these were limited by the weakness of Turkish governing coalitions in that period, and relations with the West still had priority over other partners, with Turkey considered a guaranteed ally by the West.

Today the story is different. Ankara is standing at a crossroads where its relations with both sides continue, just not in a hierarchical order. In his book Davutoğlu argues that Turkey could no longer carry on a partnership favoring the West, especially Europe, over others.<sup>78</sup> Ankara's new foreign policy initiative therefore implies that the focus on Europe will be matched by the same focus on other countries. At this point, there are two scenarios for the future of Ankara.

The first scenario assumes that the new Turkish elite perceive international affairs from a strict *realpolitik* view. According to this assumption, Turkish foreign policy goals are governed by purely practical rather than ideological considerations and Ankara's moves in the international arena are logical steps to reach these goals. In this view, the growing eastward turn in Turkish foreign policy is not due to strong cultural or religious affiliations of the AKP with Turkey's eastern partners but thanks to its abundance of alternatives to the West. Firstly, in economic terms, the East has as much to offer as the West. Endowed with valuable non-renewable energy resources and a rich population of consumers, the Middle East and some parts of the Caspian including Azerbaijan present a large market for Turkey. Rebuilding infrastructure in Iraq, economically developing Syria and starting economic relations with Armenia are therefore very relevant to and necessary for Ankara's future markets in addition to or instead of the European one. Secondly, the AKP is aware of the fact that accession would extend the EU's border to the edge of unstable yet important regions including the Middle East, the Caucasus etc. This is expected to have a mixed effect on EU foreign policy. Being adjacent to unstable countries such as Syria, Iraq and Iran would push the EU to adopt a more active foreign policy, if it was to present an alternative to

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<sup>75</sup> Joshua W Walker, "Learning Strategic Depth: Implications of Turkey's New Foreign Policy Doctrine", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 9 No. 3, 2007

<sup>76</sup> Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History and the Last Man", *Penguin*, 1992

<sup>77</sup> "Learning Strategic Depth: Implications of Turkey's New Foreign Policy Doctrine", *Insight Turkey*, July 2007

<sup>78</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 10 No. 1 2008

American and Russian policies for the region. In the meantime, the EU would have to engage in a more efficient and organised defence and military policy in order to secure its borders. Given that Turkey currently is one of the strongest military powers in the NATO, and one of the few capable of establishing operational headquarters, Turkish full-membership would provide the EU with the ninth<sup>79</sup> biggest army in the world. Turkey is very much aware of how important its military contribution could be for the EU and it will ensure that this is not taken for granted. Thirdly, Turkey is capable of using European fears in energy security to its own advantage. The EU has twice found itself on the brink of serious natural gas shortages in winter due to a price disagreement between Russia and Ukraine, and sees Turkey as central to its plans for alternative gas routes.<sup>80</sup> Turkey has already guaranteed its future gas supply from Russia thanks to the South Stream pipeline. Therefore, by engaging in the Nabucco project to bring Caspian gas to Europe, Ankara is both creating price competition for its domestic market and presenting a unique alternative to the EU, something that the Union has to consider for its future. Lastly, Turkey's recent adventures in peace-brokering in the Middle East and the Caucasus are also working in Ankara's favour in this west-east debate. Each positive step by Turkey in these arenas puts pressure on the EU. On the one hand, Ankara is improving its international image and is engaging in peace processes, an area which the EU sees as tremendously important. On the other hand, Turkey's tangible steps in the Middle East could be seen as surpassing European efforts in the region and presenting it with a rival.

In this scenario Turkey's eastward turn appears to be a step by Ankara to build up leverage for the EU accession process. Divided between the negative Turkish opinion of the EU and the advantages of the EU accession, the AKP has realised that it can no longer take a passive attitude towards accession. Having understood that the EU needs Turkey as much as, if not more than, Turkey needs the EU,<sup>81</sup> the AKP is playing the waiting game. While it is improving its domestic situation to be compatible with the *acquis communautaire*, it engages in foreign expeditions in order to become a stronger player in the region. If this plan succeeds for Ankara, it will be offered member status; however, whether it will be in Ankara's best interest to join is a different matter.

The second scenario assumes that the new Turkish elite is Islam-oriented more than anything else and that Ankara's engagement in the eastward project symbolises a drift away from the West. The diplomatic crises involving the AKP are one of the biggest indicators of this trend. Although the AKP has been self-claimed broker of the Middle East peace, it has now lost this chance by alienating some of its partners in the region. By shouting at Shimon Peres and excluding Israel from NATO war games exercise, Ankara has started to reverse its very important strategic partnership with Israel. Turkey, the first Muslim to state to recognise Israel, has enjoyed a unique position of being heavily engaged in cooperation with Jerusalem while having good relations with Arab countries, and thus has had a very important role in keeping the balance between Iraq, Iran and Israel in the Middle East. After the Iraq-Iran and Gulf Wars, Iraq was eliminated from the picture, but Iran has gradually injected itself to regional politics, defiantly challenging the US, Israel and other Western powers. Turkey has in the past kept a similar peaceful distance from Israel and Iran, but this trend seems to be disappearing as Ankara displays a closer relationship with Iran. Moreover, having recently improved its diplomatic and economic partnership with Syria, calmed relations with Iraq and engaged in projects with Lebanon, Ankara looks as if it is turning pro-Islamic in its foreign.

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<sup>79</sup> "The Military Balance 2009", *The International Institute for Strategic Studies*, January 2009 pg 447-452

<sup>80</sup> See Library Standard Note SN/IA/5301 "[Turkey's Energy Politics](#)"

<sup>81</sup> "[No Way to Treat a Friend](#)", *The Guardian*, 17 October 2007

Further examples include Erdoğan's warm welcome to Sudan's war crimes-charged president and snubbing all ideas that a genocide is taking place in Darfur, the Danish cartoon crisis, rapprochement with Hamas and criticisms of Russia for its treatment towards its Muslim Circassian minority.

In this scenario Turkey, under the AKP, is expected to drift further and further away from the West. This is compatible with the populist attitude of the AKP that is displayed in Turkish domestic politics. Erdoğan's efforts to protect the Muslim world in the international arena are reminiscent of his persistence in including lower socio-economic classes of the Turkish public. Thus his policies in the international arena can be seen as an extension of his domestic politics. In this view, consolidating domestic support seems to be the top priority of the AKP and therefore international crises are used for bonding with the majority of the Turkish population who are Muslim and Middle-Eastern.

## **5 Conclusion**

Turkey has undergone notable changes in the last decade. The change in the domestic political elite, moving from its long tradition of being Kemalist-orientated, secular and westward-looking to being religious, traditional and Anatolian, has signaled changes for the future of Turkey. With the arrival of the AKP in government, the elite formulating Turkish foreign policy has also changed, bringing forth a set of new approaches to Ankara's international relations. The new foreign minister Davutoğlu's 'strategic depth' concept has allowed Turkey to be active in more than one area and to enjoy its alternatives to West, an ally that had been favored by Ankara over other partnerships. Breaking the long-standing animosity with Armenia, thawing relations with Russia, brokering peace in the Middle East and the Caucasus and starting relations with Syria and Iraq have been components of the new Turkish foreign policy. However, the change in the course of traditional Turkey-West partnership ultimately left Europeans with the question of whether Turkey is leaving the Western camp completely.

So far, Turkey's moves can be interpreted as going either way. It can be argued that, apart from a few diplomatic crises, Ankara has been building leverage on the EU at a time when its accession bid is stagnating. Accordingly, Turkey wants to prove that Europe needs Turkey more than Turkey needs Europe and that Ankara has a lot of options, Europe and/or the EU being only one of them.

However, focusing on the diplomatic crises paints a totally different picture in which Turkey is in fact moving away from Europe. Here, Turkey is argued to have lost faith in EU accession, and to be seeking new partnerships in which the attitude towards it will be friendlier.

It is nonetheless too early to make any judgments yet, as Turkey has only recently started explaining its alternatives to Europe and it may be some time before it reveals its true intentions.