

# SETA Policy Report



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## European Perceptions of Turkish Foreign Policy

Talip Küçükcan, Müjge Küçükeleş

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## EUROPEAN PERCEPTIONS OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

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## ABSTRACT

As a staunch ally of NATO whose actions were easy to predict, Turkey did not attract much attention as a foreign policy actor until a decade ago. The increasing activism of Turkish foreign policy and the greater initiative taken by Turkish elites have raised interest in Europe. After overcoming the first wave of bewilderment and irritation at Turkey's independent foreign policy initiatives, Europeans have started to develop a more nuanced approach towards the specifics of Turkish foreign policy. Currently, debates over Turkey are not confined to EU accession discussion alone. Instead, they consider the implications of Turkey's more assertive foreign policy as well.

As Europe has become more familiar with Turkey, AK Party's foreign policy has been more positively received in Europe. Turkey is now considered an essential foreign policy voice by the majority of European intellectuals—one that cannot be ignored in any diplomatic developments within Turkey's greater region. Nonetheless, positive perception of Turkish foreign policy is not without question marks and confusion regarding objectives of Turkish foreign policy.

The study at hand aims to analyze European elites' perceptions of Turkish Foreign Policy under AK Party period. The policy brief is made up of three parts. The first part of the policy report gives a brief introduction to the evolution of Turkish Foreign Policy under the AK Party period. The second part attempts to reveal overall perceptions of Turkish Foreign Policy among European elite. The third part of the policy report places the focus on what European elite think of the main debates that Turkish foreign policy has generated over the last few years: Shift of Axis, Turkish Model, Over-Stretch in Turkish Foreign Policy and neo-Ottomanism.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Objective

- The objective of this policy report is to analyze European elites' perceptions of Turkish Foreign Policy under AK Party period. The policy brief is made up of three parts. The first part of the policy report gives a brief introduction to the evolution of Turkish Foreign Policy under AK Party period. The second part attempts to reveal overall perceptions of Turkish Foreign Policy in Europe. The third part of the policy report places the focus on what European elite think of the main debates that Turkish foreign policy has generated over the last few years: Shift of Axis, Turkish Model, Over-Stretch in Turkish Foreign Policy and neo-Ottomanism.

### Research Method

- The research of this report is based on analysis of 32 in-depth interviews with leading think-tanks, academics and state institutions based in the United Kingdom, France and Germany. The study includes certain biases due to the use of these three countries as a proxy for understanding a broader perception among European elites of Turkish foreign policy. This research does not constitute a statistically significant public-opinion survey. These three countries were selected in large part because they are the major countries guiding European foreign policy.
- Interviewees were selected with a careful eye. The process ascribed much importance to representing a wide spectrum of political opinions in the research. Interviewees were asked standardized questions, in order to grasp the overall perceptions, and answers were grouped by their similarities under four major categories summarized below. This analysis emphasized points of common perception, and singular opinions were either used as representative of exceptional opinions or ignored. The final analysis constructs a framework that reflects the overall perceptions of European elites. This research--due to the limited number of countries studied--strives to reflect these general perceptions but does not claim to deliver a precise verdict.

## FINDINGS

### Overall Perception of Turkish Foreign Policy

- Discussions of Turkish foreign policy in Europe are more subtle and well-informed. The emerging European mind-set among intellectuals regarding Turkish foreign policy is thus a

positive one. European intellectuals are happy with Turkey's constructive role—especially its soft power—in its extended region. The majority of scholars believe that Turkey's increasing multi-regional presence and emerging global vision would be assets to Europe, which exhibits global ambition yet an incomplete vision.

- Nonetheless, positive perception of Turkish Foreign policy is not without question marks and confusion. European confusion is not associated with the intensity of the activity or the degree of independence in the foreign policy realm. European elites are rather confused and uncomfortable with the tune and manner of that activism and independence.
- Europeans observe substantial changes in Turkish foreign policy continuity under the AK Party. Europe perceives Turkish foreign policy as more interests-oriented and independent, ceasing to it's the foreign policy parameters exhibited by its Western allies and seeking a more active foreign policy. Europeans are mostly aware that evolution in Turkish foreign policy is a natural process. It is a natural consequence of the emerging global environment. To this changing international reality, the AK Party added its own style and ideas, speeding up the transition process.
- Most European scholars do not see the Islamization of foreign policy under AK Party rule. European intellectuals do not deny the role of religion in shaping the party's ideology and outlook; also they do not perceive this phenomenon as specific to Turkey. Analysts note that the AK Party ideology cannot be reduced to Islam alone. Religion is only one factor among many—including culture, social experiences and norms, interpretation of history, and international realities—that constitute the AK Party's vision of the world. In this respect, framing religion as the singular factor shaping Turkish foreign policy—especially towards Arab world—is overly simplistic. With respect to the question of what drives Turkey's foreign policy, general European mindset is that economic factors take precedence behind country's new pro-activism in several regions.

#### **Debates over Turkish Foreign Policy**

- European scholars do not agree with the simplistic and selective bases upon which shift of axis arguments have been predicated. In the European mindset, substantial changes in Turkey's foreign policy have taken place during AK Party rule; however, these changes do not reflect a shift in country's foreign policy orientation. Turkey is still seen as part of the Western alliance, but the country is now more eager to develop its own regional approach.
- Among European publics and policy-making circles, however, the view of Turkish foreign policy is less optimistic. Among policy-makers, Turkey's increasing self-confidence is met

with caution—Turkey is perceived as a potential rival. Among European publics, populist and right-wing fears of immigration and Islam are shaping attitudes toward Turkey. Media coverage of Turkey is not helping either—especially in Germany and France. Reports focus predominantly on points of divergence, reinforcing existing ideas about Turkey. European intellectuals urge that modesty and objectivity are needed in analyses of Turkey, which would reduce prejudices and demonstrate Turkey's potential significance to Europe.

- European scholars are not concerned with whether Turkey has shifted its axis or not; the critical questions, where does the West now stand on the country's list of foreign policy priorities? Here, three factors are responsible for the confusion regarding the motivations and objectives of Turkish foreign policy: Turkey's overall foreign policy rhetoric, issues in its Middle East policy and the state of relations with the European Union.
- Turkey's criticism of the West in the non-Western forums of the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucuses leads to a perception of Turkey as a competitive power. Turkish leaders' strong criticisms against Western hegemony, double standards and polices create bitterness in Europe. Also the public expression of friendship with some of the region's most anti-Western figures and groups generate suspicion about what kind of partner Turkey is going to be to Europe.
- European elites' perceptions of Turkey's Middle East policy are generally positive. Europeans see Turkey's regional activism as significant, especially as the West struggles with an entrenched reliability problem in the eyes of both its own people and the Middle East. Contrary to the general perception that Turkey's Middle East policy is driven by ideological parameters such as religious affinity, Europeans believe that common interests between Turkey and Middle Eastern countries are the source of warm relations. Islamist aspirations do not drive Turkey's recent policy shift in the Middle East; rather, economic considerations have driven Turkey's regional relations.
- However, some aspects of Turkey's Middle East policy have upset relations with Europe. Turkish-Iranian relations have been one of the most controversial subjects in Turkey's Middle East policy. Europeans regard Turkey's Iran policy as naïve and perplexing, benefitting only Iran. While there is an understanding that Turkey needs to maintain good relations with Iran for a number of reasons, by striking a deal with Iran, Turkey is thought to have singled itself out, proceeding in opposite direction from the West. Turkey's image as an unpredictable ally seemed clear, especially when Turkey voted against sanctions on Iran at the United Nations Security Council.
- The declining state of relations between Turkey and Israel is another issue of concern among Europeans. Confused by the sudden change in bilateral relations between once-close part-

ners, Europeans are struggling to understand where Turkish-Israeli relations are headed. Thus far, the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations has not substantially affected Turkey-EU relations. There is even some sympathy with, and understanding of, Turkey in Europe in the aftermath of the Mavi Marmara incident, argue scholars. Pro-Palestinian public opinion in Europe and frustration with Israeli decision-making are two important factors that lend nuance to Europeans' understanding of Turkish-Israeli relations.

- Recent Arab revolutions have added another dimension to Turkey's Middle East policy. Turkey's increasing influence in the Middle East is seen as even more critical by Europeans, due to the developments of the Arab spring. Despite some inconsistencies, on balance Europeans perceive Turkey as having been sophisticated in its attempt to navigate regimes and popular demands in the region. Nevertheless, when asked exactly what role Turkey should play, Europeans cannot articulate a clear vision.
- The confusion in Europe with respect to Turkey's ambitions also stems from the uncertain future of Turkish-EU relations. Irrespective of differing analyses, European scholars largely agree a link exists between Turkey's stalled EU accession process and its proactive foreign policy in the Middle East. However, the link is not in the form of causation, it is rather a correlation. On an intellectual level, the plurality of European scholars believes Turkey's strong foreign policy would boost Europe's global profile. The current deadlock in the accession process obliges both parties to develop a new way of engaging on issues of mutual concern—foreign policy, defence, security and energy—in ways that do not fixate on the accession process.
- On Turkish Model debates Europeans acknowledge that the Arab region holds Turkey in high regard, with most of the credit due to Turkish leaders. In little over a decade, they have turned their country into a nation that is perceived positively across the Middle East. However, Europeans do not see Turkey as a model for the Middle East in either of these narratives. The term "model" is seen as very simplistic in that it overlooks fundamental distinctions that render Turkey's democratization process different in kind.
- European analysts widely promote the view that Turkey, with its experience in successfully blending democracy and Islam, could constitute a source of inspiration—rather than a political model—for those countries in the region aspiring for democratic change. Europeans find Turkey's cautious approach to using the term model very clever. If Turkey offers any model at all, Europeans assert, it is the AK Party's own model, the AK Party model could serve as an asset in inspiring broadly-based and powerful Islamist movements across the Arab world to unify under political platforms and express themselves via democratic channels.
- Regarding the question of over-stretch in Turkish Foreign Policy, European scholars with broad consensus believe that Turkey overstretches its resources in foreign policy realm.

Though active engagement in conflicts across diverse regions may have earned Turkey international recognition, it does not necessarily equate with outcomes. The common view of Turkey's mediation diplomacy is that Turkey confuses activity with value. By taking active part in the resolution of thorny and protracted conflicts, Turkish leaders risk investing vast resources and time on diverse issues that are hard to solve.

- European intellectuals find discussions of Turkish neo-Ottomanism in Balkan region irrelevant. They perceive Turkey's foreign policy as exceedingly pragmatic, an approach through which it can rationally foster regional peace and advance its own economic opportunities. European intellectuals are divided in how they understand Turkey's Balkans policy. Some are cautious about Turkey's presence in the region seeing due to perceptions that Turkey harbors biases in favor of Turkish and Muslim communities. Conversely, some scholars see Turkey's diplomatic and economic efforts in the region as constructive. These scholars instead criticize the EU's reservations about Turkish engagement in the region. Though they disagree, these two sets of scholars have one thing in common: they both note EU wariness at Turkey's regional presence and policy.
- Thus, as European observers note, the EU in the next decade will concentrate more intensely on economic and currency-related issues. The significance of foreign policy may well diminish. If Turkey sustains its current economic trajectory in the coming years, its capacity to extend its foreign policy influence into the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East will increase. Europe's declining influence could be ameliorated through constructive and peaceful relations with Turkey. When evaluated from this perspective, Turkey appears to be the most important foreign policy partner for Europe in the coming years, a fact that European policy-makers cannot turn a blind eye.

# EUROPEAN PERCEPTIONS OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

## I. INTRODUCTION

There is a wide consensus among policy makers, journalists, scholars and students of Turkey that the country is going through a period transformation. The New Turkey is being built upon a vision that challenges the old wisdom and questions the legacy of authoritarian interventions. Political stability, economic progress and democratization process of state ideology and its institutions paved the way to initiate transformative policies empowering its citizens whose views and voices are increasingly heard and represented in decision making processes. This process can be summed as the emergence of a New Turkey vis-à-vis the Old Turkey. In this context, not only domestic politics but also Turkey's foreign policy is being re-shaped in the light of new geo-political and geo-strategic realities. While Turkish foreign policy became more diversified, intensive and dynamic to strike a balance between its neighboring countries and Western allies, a new debate started to analyze causes and possible consequences of Turkey's foreign policy directions, ranging from rational criticism to ideological accusations both in and outside Turkey. This report addresses how Turkish foreign policy is perceived by European intellectuals, policy makers and experts who study and observe Turkey.

The research of this report is based on analysis of 32 in-depth interviews with leading think-tanks, academics and state institutions based in the United Kingdom, France and Germany. The study includes certain biases due to the use of these three countries as a proxy for understanding a broader perception among European elites of Turkish foreign policy. This research does not constitute a statistically significant public-opinion survey. These three countries were selected in large part because they are the major countries guiding European foreign policy.

Interviewees were selected with a careful eye. The process ascribed much importance to representing a wide spectrum of political opinions in the research. Interviewees were asked standardized questions, in order to grasp the overall perceptions, and answers were grouped by their similarities under four major categories summarized below. This analysis emphasized points of common perception, and singular opinions were either used as representative of exceptional opinions or ignored.

Furthermore the research also made use a large spectrum of books, academic journals, newspapers, party programs, political texts, legislative debates, public opinion polls, and reports and working papers published by think tanks and research institutes. Additionally statements of the political leaders and officials both from Turkey and Europe were also employed.

The final analysis constructs a framework that reflects the overall perceptions of European elites. This research—due to the limited number of countries studied—strives to reflect these general perceptions but does not claim to deliver a precise verdict.

## A. Turkish Foreign Policy between 1923 and 1990

Turkish foreign policy between 1923 and 1990 may be roughly divided into four periods: an inter-war period (1923-1945), a period of Western alignment (1945-1960), a period of increased autonomy (1960-1980) and a second period of Western alignment and reduced autonomy (1980-1990).<sup>1</sup> Peace, sovereignty and national development constituted the main principles of Turkish foreign policy under Atatürk's leadership. After his death, İsmet İnönü became president and continued to pursue Kemalist principles. Avoiding strict alignment with any of the major powers, Turkey pursued a relatively autonomous foreign policy until nearly the end of World War II. İnönü's attempts to benefit from a balance of power between the major powers kept Turkey out of the war until pressure from the Allied Powers—certain of victory—led to Western alignment.<sup>2</sup>

The end of World War II was a turning point in Turkish foreign policy. Turkey managed to stay out of the war, but the emergence of a bipolar international order with the U.S. and the Soviet Union competing for world leadership made balanced neutrality a near impossibility. Turkey's strategic geographic location made it an appealing ally to the West. Turkey's inclination toward the Western alliance was a natural consequence of its long process of Westernization. This, combined with a menacing Soviet Union demanding post-War territorial concession, made the Turkish choice a relatively easy one.<sup>3</sup>

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By 1947, Turkey was formally part of the Western camp. The U.S., under the Truman Doctrine, provided financial and military assistance to fend off the risk of Turkey falling under communist control. This paved the way for Turkish membership in NATO by 1952. Though these developments were deemed necessary by İnönü's government, they meant reduced foreign policy autonomy for a country that had enjoyed wide latitude in that area since the republic's founding. Turkey could no longer increase autonomy by pitting rival powers against one another.

Turkey's place in this Western global configuration has shaped many features of its political, economic and security system and strategies. The Baghdad Pact and the Balkan Treaty served the interests of the Western powers. Turkey participated in African-Asian Bandung Conference and defended the cause of the Western powers. Due to its Western alignment, Turkey's Middle Eastern relations were detrimentally affected. Middle Eastern countries viewed Turkey as a tool of the West on account of its NATO membership. Turkey supported the Britain and France in the Suez

1. See Baskın Oran ed. (2001), *Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar, Cilt I: 1919-1980*, İletişim Yayınları: İstanbul; Baskın Oran eds. (2001), *Türk Dış Politikası II: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar Cilt II:1980-2001*, İletişim Yayınları: İstanbul.

2. Mustafa Aydın (2000), "Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy: Changing Patterns and Conjunctures during the Cold War", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 36(1), p.105.

3. *Ibid*, pp. 106-109.

crisis of 1956, opposed the 1958 Iraqi Coup and threatened Syria in the US-Syrian crisis of 1957. Relations deteriorated further when Turkey became the first Muslim country to recognize Israel.<sup>4</sup>

However, Turkey became disillusioned with the West during the 1960s. Several factors played a role in Turkey's reconsideration of its Western dependency. The Cyprus conflict was a watershed moment in the cooling of Turkish-American relations. The harsh American response to Turkey's willingness to unilaterally intervene in Cyprus delivered a major blow to Turkey's trust in the Western alliance. The U.S. position on Cyprus revealed divergent Turkish and US interests, urging Turkish politicians to develop a more independent approach to foreign policy, which the public wholeheartedly supported. The public's growing anti-American sentiments and the rising strength of opposition voices in politics spurred Turkish politicians to reconsider the country's undisputed Western attachment.<sup>5</sup>

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With the end of bipolarity and unity of camps, Turkey, as a country who had relied upon Western protection and acted as the West's frontier state against communism during the Cold war, found itself in confusion regarding its once strategic importance for the West.

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International conditions were also favorable for revision of Turkey's one-dimensional foreign policy. Loosening of the bipolar world order towards the end of 1960s produced an opportunity for secondary powers to develop more independent foreign policy line. Turkey took advantage of all these domestic and international factors. Détente in international relations created a favorable environment for Turkey and the Soviet Russia to mend their troubled relations. The cessation of Soviet threats was followed by bilateral visits between Ankara and Moscow.<sup>6</sup>

Another beneficial result of Turkey's new interests-oriented foreign policy was the diversification of the country's foreign relations. Relations with the Third World in general, and the Middle East in particular, were deepened. Turkey's pro-Palestinian position and its establishment of cooperation on development with Pakistan and Iran are two examples of new initiatives undertaken in the Middle East.<sup>7</sup>

Turkey's efforts to fight back against its international isolation after the 1964 Cyprus crisis continued through the 1970s. While relations with the Soviet Union and the Middle East were expanded further, Turkish-American relations deteriorated further. Turkish intervention in Cyprus in 1974 and its subsequent imposition of an embargo on the country strained relations with the U.S. Suffering economic hardship due to expanded defense spending, Turkey turned towards oil-rich Arab countries and the Soviet Union to find new markets. Recession in Europe and the oil crisis in 1973 also hurt the fragile Turkish economy.<sup>8</sup>

Three important developments in the early 1980s altered Turkey's threat perceptions: the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>9</sup> For Turkey, these developments increased the importance of NATO membership and the Western alliance. Internal developments also played a role in Turkey's realignment with the West. The transformation of a state-guided economy to a market economy made trade and commercial relations one of the parameters of Turkish foreign policy under Turgut Özal. Manufacturing sector growth led Özal to

4. "Dönemin Bilançosu" in *Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar, Cilt I: 1919-1980*, Baskın Oran ed., p. 495.

5. Mustafa Aydın, *ibid.*, p. 115.

6. William Hale (2000), *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1774-2002*, Frank Cass Publishers: London, pp.146-147.

7. Cengiz Okman (2004), "Turkish Foreign Policy: Principles-Rules-Trends, 1814-2003", in *Turkish Foreign Policy in the Cold-War era*, Idris Bal ed., Brawn Walker Press: Florida, p. 18.

8. For a detailed analysis of Turkey's foreign policy during 1970s, see Sedat Laçiner (2010), "Turkish Foreign Policy (1971-1980): Ideologies vs. Realities", *Review of International Law and Politics*, 21, pp. 61-100.

9. Cengiz Okman, *ibid.*, p. 18

expand Turkey's economic relations with the countries of neighboring regions, believing creation of interdependency through economic relations is the best way to prevent conflicts. Özal attempted to join the European Economic Community, to establish the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and to build a water pipeline in the Middle East.<sup>10</sup>

In the Middle East, Özal kept Turkey out of the Iran-Iraq War while increasing trade with both countries. After Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, Özal sided with U.S., supported UN intervention and placed an embargo on Iraq. Özal's peace-building efforts through building economic interdependency, however, did not yield their desired outcome, as Turkey was still seen by the region as a Western satellite state.

## B. Turkish Foreign Policy: From the end of Cold War to New Openings under the AK Party

With the end of bipolarity and unity of camps, Turkey, as a country who had relied upon Western protection and acted as the West's frontier state against communism during the Cold war, found itself in confusion regarding its once strategic importance for the West. Whereas Turkey had been accustomed to foreign policy parameters heavily dominated by the demands of the Western security structure, perceived decline in its strategic importance was alarming—particularly at a time when the country's immediate neighborhood was mired in religious, ethnic and sectarian conflicts, and plagued by terrorism and instability. Against this background, Turkey felt more exposed to external instabilities due to decreased economic assistance and growing criticisms of its poor human rights record from the West.

Nonetheless, the perception that Turkey lost its significance for the West did not last long. Occupation of Iraq by the United States in 1991 during the Gulf War, in this respect, necessitated Turkey's return to strategic forefront after decades of passivism during the Cold War. In an attempt to demonstrate to the world that it still had strategic significance for the West, the country participated in the war in search of a more distinguished role in the Middle East. The demise of the Soviet Union, meanwhile, created opportunities for Turkey to reconnect with its *historical geography*.<sup>11</sup> In this respect, the emergence of several newly independent states in Central Asia with which Turkish people share linguistic, religious, ethnic, historical and cultural ties has created an opportunity for broadened foreign policy outreach. In the wake of changing strategic realities, Turkey has quickly become one of the key regional actors in its multi-regional geography stretching from Balkans to Caucasus, to Middle East to Eurasia.<sup>12</sup>

Under the leadership of Turgut Özal, Turkey adjusted its passive foreign policy of the Cold War era and developed a more assertive and multi-dimensional foreign policy in response to emerging international realities. Ethnic conflicts in the Balkans and wars in the Middle East compelled the majority of Turks to accept the historical, cultural and religious legacies of their region's past. Turkey's increased sensitivity to, and awareness of, the developments taking place in the country's immediate neighborhood put Turkish foreign policy makers under pressure to develop bolder policy initiatives for these regions. As a result, increasing economic and political contacts were established with the newly independent Turkic states of Central Asia and the Caucasus. In the Balkans, the country exhibited an active foreign policy, participating in peace-building missions in the region. Furthermore, Turkey attempted to enhance political and economic contact with its Middle Eastern neighbors.<sup>13</sup>

10. Kemal Kirişçi (2006), "Turkey's Foreign Policy in Turbulent Times", *Institute for Security Studies*, Chaillot Paper No.92, September 2006, p.11.

11. A concept employed by Ismail Cem to describe those regions that were once constituents of the Ottoman Empire. For details see Ismail Cem (2001), *Turkey in the New Century: Speeches and Texts Presented at International Fora (1995-2001)*, Rüstem: Lefkoşa, 2nd Edition, p.4-5.

12. For details on Turkey's post cold war geopolitical posture see "1990-2001: Küreselleşme Ekseninde Türkiye" in *Türk Dış Politikası: Kurtuluş Savaşından Bugüne Olgular, Belgeler, Yorumlar*, Baskın Oran ed., Cilt II:1980-2001, İletişim Yayıncılık: İstanbul, pp. 201-587.

13. For Turkish Foreign policy under Özal period, see Sabri Sayarı (2000), "Turkish Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era: The Challenges of Multi-Regionalism", *Journal of International Affairs*, 54(1), pp.169-182; Ziya Öniş (2001), "Turkey and Post-Soviet States: Potential and Limits of Regional Power Influence", *Middle East Review of International Relations*, 5(2), pp. 66-74.

However, Turkey's regional activism was not always benevolent or benign. The intertwined nature of domestic and external politics that resulted from the return of ethnic and religious forces to world politics complicated the country's assertive and active international behavior. Turkey was not only surrounded by ethnic, sectarian and religious conflicts in its region, but also experienced religious and ethnic identities making headway in domestic politics—with supporters questioning the legitimacy of the dominant Kemalist identity that had ruled the country since its establishment. Here, Islamist and Kurdish identities have been the two main dynamic forces at home that have successfully exploited international resurgence of religion, ethnicity and culture. Through critiques of Kemalism's failure to leave any space for alternative conceptions of Turkish identity, Kurds and Islamists demanded greater participation in political processes. While Islamists objected to the Kemalist project of strict orientation toward the West on the basis of renouncing the Ottoman past, Kurds attacked the monolithic conception of nation forwarded by the dominant Kemalist worldview.<sup>14</sup> These differing perceptions of Turkish identity yielded contesting visions of what role the country should play in a rapidly-changing international arena.

Feeling under attack from both of these identities, the dominant state identity responded to the rise of religious and ethnic identities through securitization of the political landscape. Intensification of the conflict in the Southeastern Anatolia gave rise to the military's expanded role in both external and internal affairs. Coupled with the weakness of the coalition governments, Turkey's political atmosphere became greatly militarized. Under the military's great scope of authority, the Kurdish issue was addressed as a matter of terrorism and met with intensive security measures. The fight against the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) at home triggered confrontational and uncooperative behavior in Turkey's dealings with some of its neighbors which were deemed supportive of PKK. Syria's provision of safe haven to PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan to put pressure on Turkey brought the two countries to the brink of war in 1998.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Turkish military operations in Northern Iraq—which endeavored to crush the military and logistical bases of the terrorist groups who had infiltrated Turkey through the region's mountainous terrain—strained relations with Iraq in particular and with the Arab world in general.<sup>16</sup> Relations with Greece were no better; due to Greece's tolerant position towards the PKK.<sup>17</sup>

Securitized logic that militarized political environment did not bypass Islamists too. In a post-modern coup of 28 February 1997, the National Security Council listed Islamist reaction (irtica) along with Kurdish separatism as the greatest threats to the territorial integrity of the state. Entangled in politics of fear, the state equated internal threats with external ones and focused on interrupting the rise of religious appeal in the country. Similar to the Kurdish issue, ideological tensions between the secular Kemalist establishment and Islamist forces went beyond borders, depressing the country's external relations with such neighbors as Iran who did not share the same ideological project as Turkey. Therefore, it was no coincidence that elevation of the threat allegedly posed by religious reaction to the top of the political agenda in February 1997 coincided with one of the serious diplomatic crises with Iran in 1997.<sup>18</sup>

Securitization of domestic politics impacted the country's relations with Europe as well. Restriction of freedoms in the fight against the PKK and increasing militarization of Turkey's domestic and foreign policy making garnered harsh criticisms from the West. Serious concerns expressed over anti-democratic practices of the state were of little effect in encouraging Turkey to create more favorable conditions for different political forces to achieve greater

14. See James G. Mellon (2006), "Islamism, Kemalism and the Future of Turkey", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 7(1), pp. 67-81; Martin Van Bruinessen, "Turks, Kurds and the Alevi Revival in Turkey", *Middle East Report*, No. 200, July-September 1996.

15. For a detailed analysis of Turkish-Syrian relations see Bülent Aras and Rabia Karakaya Polat (2008), "From Conflict to Cooperation: Desecuritization of Turkey's relations with Syria and Iran", *Security Dialogue*, 39(5), pp. 495-515.

16. For a detailed analysis of Turkey's Northern Iraq policy see Bill Park (2005), *Turkey's Policy towards Northern Iraq: problems and perspectives*, Routledge: International Institute for Strategic Studies; Tarık Oğuzlu (2008), "Turkey's Northern Iraq Policy: Competing Perspectives", *Insight Turkey*, 10(3), pp. 5-22.

17. For major areas of problems between Turkey and Greece during 1990s, see Fuat Aksu (2001), "Turkish-Greek Relations: From conflict to detente- the last decade", *Turkish Review of Balkan Studies*, pp.167-201.

18. Aras and Karakaya, *Ibid*.

participation in political processes;<sup>19</sup> rather, such reprimands intensified the country's nationalist backlash by reproducing a new *Sevres Syndrome*—the perception of being encircled by internal and external enemies attempting to divide Turkey.<sup>20</sup> Exclusion of Turkey from European enlargement at the Luxembourg Summit of 1997 was the final blow to already-sour relations, aggravating the sense of abandonment the country experienced.

By the end of the decade, the early-1990s enthusiasm was supplanted by great disappointments. Far from a game setter, Turkey found itself encircled in coercive power politics. The regional power vision—well articulated in the famous motto “from Adriatic to the Great Wall of China”—that the country's political elites established in the early-1990s could not translate into action with the country mired in a Cold War mindset, sluggish in transitioning its foreign and security policies to the new global politics. Moreover, this was the time when European security culture was going through a significant transformation towards gaining a civilian character, one which entailed resolution of conflicts through use of non-military instruments such as economic and diplomatic means.<sup>21</sup> With constant threats of resorting to hard power in the conduct of foreign policy, Turkey looked far from being a civilian power.

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In the beginning of a new decade, however, promising developments began to take place. The capture of Abdullah Öcalan, in 1999 was very critical in this regard. With his arrest, armed conflict between the Turkish army and the PKK in Southeastern Anatolia, which claimed the lives of more than 30,000 people, eventually died down. This development relaxed the political landscape in Turkey, eventually paving the way for conceptualization of the Kurdish issue not as a security-terrorism issue but instead as a structural problem of Turkish democracy.<sup>22</sup> More noteworthy was the conclusion of the European Council to grant Turkey candidate status in 1999 at the Helsinki summit. The decision was a watershed moment in the history of relations between Turkey and the EU in that, for the first time, relations gained a measure of certainty. The decision was predicated on Turkey meeting the Copenhagen criteria for accession negotiations to begin.<sup>23</sup> This meant that Turkey had to go through an extensive process of democratization to bring its political life up to the standards of European countries.

As a result of the Council's decision and the favorable security conditions enabled by the defeat of the PKK, the Democratic Left Party (Demokratik Sol Parti-DSP) coalition government responded more positively to the EU demands which were considered too risky and costly to the territorial integrity of the state during the intense confrontation between the Turkish army and the PKK.<sup>24</sup> In the span of just two years, the government enacted significant reforms in the field of democracy and human rights, amending anti-terror laws, abolishing the death penalty, and permitting

19. See Kerim Yıldız (2005), *The Kurds in Turkey: EU Accession and Human Rights*, Pluto Press: London; Betül Ayse Çelik and Bahar Rumelili (2006), “Necessary but not sufficient: The role of the EU in Resolving Turkey's Kurdish Question and the Greek-Turkish Conflicts”, *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 11, pp. 203–222.

20. For Sevres Syndrome, see Dietrich Jung (2003), “Sevres Syndrome: Turkish Foreign Policy and its Historical Legacies”, *American Diplomacy*, 8(2).

21. Tarık Oğuzlu and Mustafa Kibaroglu (2008), “Incompatibilities in Turkish and European Security Cultures Diminish Turkey's Prospects for EU membership”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 44(6), pp. 945–62.

22. Natalie Tocci (2005), “Conflict Resolution in the Neighbourhood: Comparing EU Involvement in Turkey's Qurdish Question and in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict”, *Mediterranean Politics*, 10(2), pp.126–146; Çelik and Rumelili, *Ibid*, p. 212.

23. European Council (1999), “Presidency Conclusions”, Helsinki, 10–11 December 1999, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hel1\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hel1_en.htm)

24. Frank Schemmelfenning, Stefan Engert and Heiko Knobel (2005), “The impact of European political conditionality” in *the Europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe*, Frank Schemmelfenning and Ulrich Sedelmeier Eds., Cornell University Press: New York, p. 43.

publication in Kurdish, among other reforms. Through these reforms, the country's perceptions of national security began to change. Mobilization around EU membership paved the way for attempts to renew Turkish foreign policy on ideological and conceptual grounds in accordance with present international conjuncture.

International factors also developed to Turkey's advantage. As the 1990s came to a close, the world was no longer willing to assent to the global reconfiguration set up by the American administration in the post-Cold War period. The emergence of a multi-polar world, limits on the American military and Turkish economic strength created wider room for the country to manoeuvre in foreign policy. However, in order to enjoy a more autonomous role and to increase its profile in its multi-regional geography, Turkey needed to come to terms with its history, culture and identity. As a result, a multi-dimensional foreign policy approach that took into account the country's historical and cultural assets was developed. The process slowly began in Ismail Cem's term as Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1999 and 2002. Criticizing Turkey's rigid orientation toward the West and its disregard of Islamic culture, Cem stressed Turkey's Ottoman past and its unique culture and geography. This geography—which integrates traits of both Western and Asian cultures—provides the tools for Turkey to be effective in changing global power balances.<sup>25</sup> According to Cem, Turkey—aware of its unique identity, cognizant of its cultural, religious, historical and strategic assets and liberated of its obsessive identification with the West—could become a world power.

Over a short period of time, concrete policy initiatives reflected Turkey's shift in foreign policy outlook. In an attempt to expand its influence in Central Asia, Turkey concluded joint mechanisms of security cooperation with the countries of the region in 2000. Relations with Greece were improved as a result of Cem's and then-Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs George Papandreu's genuine efforts to settle disputes through peaceful means and diplomacy. Cem's relentless efforts earned Turkey candidate status to the European Union at the 1999 Helsinki Summit. In order to expand its influence in the Middle East, Turkey initiated a peace-making process with Syria after Öcalan's departure from the country. In parallel, Turkey commenced a dialogue with Iran as well.<sup>26</sup>

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Nonetheless, economic hardships constrained Turkey's ambitions to play a decisive role in its region. Turkey suffered the severest economic and financial crises of its republican history in November 2000 and in February 2001. The Economic crises shook the country's political and socio-economic life. A close look at the Turkish economy's macro-economic indicators from 2001 reveals the severity of the crises. GDP shrank by 7.4 percent, the wholesale price inflation rate accelerated to 61.6 percent, and the Turkish Lira lost 51 percent of its value against foreign currencies.<sup>27</sup> Eleven banks were declared insolvent.<sup>28</sup> Banking crises were followed by capital flight: total capital outflow reached \$11.5 billion in 2001—of this amount \$ 10.3 billion were foreign capital outflow.<sup>29</sup> Interest rates rapidly increased, reaching several thousand percent. External debt totaled 78 percent of GNP in 2001, climbing from 59 percent in 2000.<sup>30</sup> Economic hardship forced the government to call in the IMF again. Along with a new stand-by agreement,

25. Cem, *Ibid*, p. 20.

26. For Turkish foreign policy course under Ismail Cem, see Cem, *Ibid*, pp. 63-102.

27. Erinç Yeldan (2006), "Turkey 2001-2006: Macroeconomics of Post-Crisis Adjustments", *Global Policy Network*, November 27 2006.

28. Ergin Hava "Looking back at 2001 crisis best way to see Turkey's economic miracle", *Today's Zaman*, February 20 2011.

29. Korkut Boratav (2004), *Yeni Dünya Düzeni Nereye*, 2nd Edition, Ankara: Imge Kitapevi, pp. 252-253.

30. Mathieu Dufour and Özgür Orhangazi (2007), "The 2000-2001 Financial Crisis in Turkey: A Crisis for Whom?", *MPRA Papers*, No. 7837, University Library of Munich, Germany, p. 30.

the government appointed Kemal Derviş, former vice president of World Bank, as a state minister responsible for implementing the IMF-guided macro-economic adjustment programme. The “transition to the strong economy” programme announced to the public in April 2001 embraced many structural reforms such as privatization, banking reform, transparency in public sector, elimination of barriers to foreign investment, diminution of agricultural subsidies and etc.

Parallel to Turkey’s economic crisis, its political environment turned tense and sensitive again. The democratization reforms undertaken to advance Turkey’s EU accession process deepened the differences among coalition partners. Despite the capture of Öcalan and low security threat levels resulting from the Turkish army’s defeat of the PKK, the Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi-MHP) blocked, upset and slowed down the reform process on sensitive issues such as Kurdish rights, broadcasting in Kurdish, abolishment of the death penalty and the role of the army.<sup>31</sup> Coupled with the health problems of Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit and consequent resignations of some of his ministers, public confidence in the government dropped sharply, and early elections were called for in November 2002.

The 2002 elections drastically changed Turkey’s political environment when all of the former coalition parties— DSP, Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi-ANAP) and MHP—out of the parliament.<sup>32</sup> The Justice and Development Party (AK Party) replaced former coalition government with single party government, and the Republican People’s Party (CHP) entered the parliament as the only opposition in a two-party parliament.<sup>33</sup> This was no less than a rupture in Turkey’s political landscape; the composition of political elites changed in a dramatic way. Immediately after its electoral victory, the AK Party highlighted that it would take over the IMF stabilization programme from the previous government and would assert a political will to continue the programme’s implementation.

The AK Party’s Islamist background raised concerns about the future of Turkey’s nascent reform process.<sup>34</sup> However, these concerns have been appeased by the party’s relentless declarations of its strong commitment to EU membership and to the reforms required to open accession talks as soon as possible.<sup>35</sup> Strong rhetoric regarding the party’s commitment to the EU was followed by active diplomacy pursued by party leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan soon after the elections. During his trips to several European capitals, Erdoğan emphasized his government’s determination to push through the reform process to obtain a date for accession.<sup>36</sup> Government efforts to eliminate concerns over the party’s agenda proved effective both at home and abroad, collecting the support of pro-European forces in the country.

This support was essential for the party to survive in Turkey’s political system against the secular establishment—which had banned some of its more devout Islamist predecessors<sup>37</sup> from the political sphere.<sup>38</sup> In order to gain legitimacy in both the domestic and international arenas, the AK Party rejected being depicted as a religious party. As the AK Party has actively continued the EU reforms for its survival, it has become more exposed to Europeanization, transforming its Islamist identity into one that embraces liberal democracy.

31. “Bağçeli: AB Paketi PKK’ya hizmet ediyor, itiraz edeceğiz”; *Zaman*, 4 August 2002; “MHP AB yasalarının iptalini istedi”; *Zaman*, 10 September 2002; “MHP tepkilere aldırıyor: 6 parti PKK ile aynı cephede”; *Zaman*, 13 August 2002.

32. All of the coalition members of the former DSP government, DSP-MHP-ANAP, could not pass the 10 percent threshold necessary for a political party to enter the parliament in Turkey.

33. AK Party obtained 34,3 percent of the total votes while CHP became second to AK party by winning 19,4 percent of the votes.

34. See Owen Bowcott, “Islamic Party wins in Turkey”, *Guardian*, November 7, 2002, Tom Rachman, “Party with Islamic roots wins Turkish elections”, *Independent*, 4 November 2002, “Landslide win for Islamic Party in Turkey”, *CNN*, 4 November 2002.

35. See Owen Bowcott “Turkey’s Islamist party makes EU entry top priority”, *Guardian*, 4 November 2002; “Leader says Turkey says pro-western”, *CNN*, 4 November 2002; Pelin Turgut, “Turkey’s Islamist victors seek to reassure opponents” *Independent*, 4 November 2002; “Turkey’s government so far so good”, *Economist*, 21 November 2002.

36. Erdoğan visited Greece, Germany, Spain, United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Sweden, Portugal, Belgium, Finland, Denmark, Luxembourg, Netherlands, and Italy. See “Avusturya dışında Avrupa tamam”, *Milliyet*, 25 November 2002.

37. AK Party’s predecessors, which were far more Islamists in nature, were all banned by the Constitutional Court for threatening the secular nature of the Republic. Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) was closed down by the Constitutional Court in 1998 and its successor Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi) could not also escape the closure three years later in 2001.

38. See M. Hakan Yavuz (2009), *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey*, Cambridge University Press, p. 3.

The EU influence was not the only force impacting the transformation of Islamist identity in Turkey; the economic and political impacts of globalization and the establishment of a broad coalition inclusive of globalization's winners and losers have also contributed to the transformation of Islamists into conservative democrats.<sup>39</sup> This transformation helped construct a new identity for the AK Party's coalition—one that emerged out of an Islamist identity combined with the support of liberals, democrats, Kurdish groups. Founded upon reconciliation with the Ottoman past and a form of citizenship that integrates religious and ethnic identities into the political process, the AK Party's collective identity differs from Kemalists and nationalists—who embrace ethnically-defined and exclusionary Turkish identity—and from Islamists—who favor an Islamic, rather than Turkish, identity. It embraces a cosmopolitan conceptualization of Turkish identity in which the multiple identities of modern Turkey could live together harmoniously.<sup>40</sup>

The corresponding new vision of foreign policy is the Strategic Depth<sup>41</sup> Doctrine, the backbone of the AK Party's foreign policy since 2002. Named after the seminal book of Ahmet Davutoğlu—former chief foreign policy advisor to the Prime Minister and currently the Minister of Foreign Affairs—the concept of Strategic Depth rests on two components: geographic and historical depth. Here, Turkey's deep historical connections to the Balkans, the Middle East and the Caucasus dating back to Ottoman times provides a critical reference point for Turkey's contemporary international status. Criticizing Turkey's rigid orientation toward the West at the expense of a multi-dimensional identity stemming from its multi-regional geography and history, the Strategic Depth Doctrine underscores Turkey's need to refocus on its history in order to rediscover its capacity to bridge the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds.<sup>42</sup>

Lying in the midst of Afro-Eurasia's vast lands, Turkey's identity synthesizes multiple civilizations and cultures. Unlike the Islamists, Davutoğlu's outlook is not anti-Western in the sense of opposition to Western civilization; rather, unlike the Kemalists, it does not perceive the West as the most progressive civilization in the world. Turkey's blend of Western and Muslim civilizations, according to this view, has left the influence of both traditions on the construction of Turkish identity. According to Davutoglu, Turkey's unique identity compels it to develop a multi-dimensional foreign policy—one which would not sacrifice tradition at the expense of other.<sup>43</sup>

The AK Party's focus on culture, history and geography is not unique. Attempts at ideological renewal of foreign policy date back to the Özal period. The expansion of Turkey's economic and political relations with as the Middle East, the Balkans and Central Asia under Özal indicates similarities with the AK Party's foreign policy.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, İsmail Cem, then the Minister of Foreign Affairs for the DSP coalition government between 1997 and 2002, criticized the lack of historical and cultural element in Turkish foreign policy. He also stressed the need for "systemic and vigorous addition of a historical dimension to bilateral relations with (those) states which share a common Ottoman past."<sup>45</sup> In this respect, Davutoğlu's vision parallels the intellectual and policy efforts of previous governments.

Davutoğlu's novelty stems from his pioneering efforts to offer a theoretical approach to the practice of Turkish foreign policy that is both systematic and analytical. He bolsters this approach with several novel concepts: zero problems with neighbors, rhythmic diplomacy, multi-track diplomacy and the balance between security and freedom,

39. For transformation of Islamist identity see Ziya Öniş (2006), "Globalization and Party Transformation: Turkey's Justice and Development Party in Perspective" in *Globalizing Democracy: Party Politics in Emerging Democracies*, Peter Burnell ed., Routledge: London, Warwick Studies on Globalization, pp. 122-140.

40. See Ömer Taşpınar, "Turkey's Middle East Policies: between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism", *Carnegie Papers*, No. 10, September 2008; Ömer Taşpınar, "Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalist foreign policy", *Today's Zaman*, 22 September 2008.

41. See Ahmet Davutoğlu (2001), *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu*, Küre Yayınları: İstanbul.

42. For various interpretations of Davutoğlu's Strategic Depth Doctrine see Joshua W. Walker (2007), "Learning strategic depth: Implications of Turkey's new foreign policy doctrine", *Insight Turkey*, 9(3), pp.32-47; Alexander Murison (2006), "The strategic depth doctrine of Turkish foreign policy", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 42(6), pp. 945-64; Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, "The Davutoglu Doctrine and Turkish Foreign Policy", *Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy*, Working Paper, No. 8/2010, April 2010; Ziya Öniş and Suhnaz Yılmaz (2009), "Between Europeanization and Euro-Asianism: Foreign Policy Activism in Turkey during the AKP Era", *Turkish Studies*, 10(1), pp.7-24.

43. Bülent Aras, "Davutoglu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy", *SETA Policy Brief*, No. 32, May 2009.

44. Ziya Öniş (2011), "Multiple Faces of the 'New' Turkish Foreign Policy: Underlying Dynamics and a Critique", *Insight Turkey*, 13(1), p. 49.

45. Cem, *Ibid.*, p.8.

among others. In addition to breaking new conceptual ground, Davutoğlu has found implementation success as well. Where previous attempts under Özal and Cem to reformulate Turkish foreign policy by integrating historical and cultural dimensions were undone by Turkey's tense political and vulnerable economic environment, favorable domestic and international conditions have allowed the AK Party to establish and sustain its progressive foreign policy vision.

EU-related reforms have been very important as well. Despite the fact that the reform process was instigated by the DSP coalition government, the AK Party period has achieved the most comprehensive improvement.<sup>46</sup> The European Council's decision to grant Turkey a conditional date in 2004 to open accession negotiations—dependent on Turkey's meeting political criteria satisfactorily—set off a second wave of intensifying relations between the EU and Turkey. Clear membership prospects helped the AK Party realign pro-EU forces<sup>47</sup> at home with the government, which in turn helped the government undertake breakthrough reforms in such sensitive issues as the role of the army in politics and the Kurdish question. Desecuritization of the political landscape as a result of the decreasing role of the army in external and internal affairs has opened up wider political space for business groups, NGOs, think-tanks and other political parties. This political normalization has strengthened the AK Party's hold on power vis-à-vis the traditional state establishment, allowing it to implement its conceptualization of Turkey's identity. Moreover, economic stability and high economic growth rates that the government has achieved during its three terms have permitted the Turkish political environment to develop into a more civilian, democratic and self-assured one.

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Under Davutoğlu's famous zero problems with neighbors policy, Turkey has concentrated its efforts on normalization and intensification of economic, political and cultural ties with neighboring countries.

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Ironically, Turkey's democratization process coincided with a growing security discourse that came to dominate the American agenda in the aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks on the United States and subsequent War on Terror. That the attack was carried out by al-Qaeda allegedly in the name of Islam transformed relations between the United States and the Muslim world, amplifying Samuel Huntington's well known *Clash of Civilizations* argument. Having placed the fight against terrorism at the top of the U.S. national agenda, American attempts to reassert its authority led to wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The occupation of Iraq soon required greater military means than the United States initially put into the country; Afghanistan looked no better as the US was struggling to draw down forces there.

The limits of American military strength brought Turkey, with its dynamic economy and stability, to the forefront as a partner for the U.S. in constructing peace in the Middle East. The decision of the Turkish Parliament on March 1, 2003 to deny the U.S. permission to use of Turkish territory for the Iraq war was a historic turning point, indicating the collapse of traditional alliances. As a staunch ally of the Western bloc during the Cold War, Turkey's decision demonstrated the potential foreign policy line of an emerging middle power.

Europe, too, has fallen under the influence of the international securitization of political sphere. The perceived link between immigration and terrorism as a result of terrorist attacks on Madrid and London has aggravated Islamopho-

46. For reforms undertaken during AK Party era see Senem Aydın and E. Fuat Keyman, "European Integration and the transformation of Turkish democracy", *Centre for European Policy Studies*, EU-Turkey working papers, No.2, August 2004.

47. See Yavuz, *Ibid.*

bia. The preoccupation with Islamic fundamentalism, triggered by on-going economic problems, has led to adoption of restrictive and discriminatory migration laws, which mainly target Europe's Muslim population.<sup>48</sup> This has not only tainted Europe's liberal image, but has also upset its foreign relations with the Muslim world. While Europe tilted the balance toward security at the expense of democracy, Turkey undertook comprehensive reforms in fields of democracy and human rights. Europe's identity crisis created uncertainty in the membership prospects of Muslim Turkey. At the same time, Europe's cultural self-encirclement has widened Turkey's natural scope to support democracy abroad. Looking at the evolution of Turkish foreign policy over the last decade, we have witnessed the implementation of a more assertive and self-confident foreign policy. Under Davutoğlu's famous zero problems with neighbors policy<sup>49</sup>, Turkey has concentrated its efforts on normalization and intensification of economic, political and cultural ties with neighboring countries. These efforts have yielded successes and the country's relations with Iran, Syria<sup>50</sup>, Russia, Greece and Iraq have improved significantly. Bold steps have also been taken to fix protracted problems with Cyprus and Armenia. In line with the zero problems initiative, Turkey has abolished visa requirements with Russia, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Libya, Georgia, Pakistan, Qatar and Albania, among other countries.<sup>51</sup> Turkey has also set up a free trade zone between Turkey, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon.

The promotion of economic integration and diplomacy as a means to resolve problems helped raise Turkey's soft power profile. As part of its active diplomacy, Turkey has become increasingly visible in diplomatic mediation of different conflicts in regions extending from the Balkans and the Middle East to the Caucasus and Southeast Asia. Among the cases in which Turkey has taken a leading mediator role are the mediation of the Syrian-Israeli peace talks in 2008; the nuclear swap deal between the West and Iran in 2010; the triangle meetings between Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia; and the trust-building talks between Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>52</sup> Turkey's mediation efforts have not been confined to inter-state conflicts alone; the government has also displayed active involvement in intra-state disputes between different groups in Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon.

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Over the last decade, Turkey has shown skill in expanding its political influence in surrounding regions. Beyond the concrete benefits this has afforded the country, it has generated rich intellectual discussion regarding Turkey.

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Turkey's active diplomacy for peaceful settlement of conflicts has drawn positive regional reactions. Turkey's relentless diplomatic efforts during the Gaza conflict and Erdoğan's vocal criticism of Israel at the Davos World Economic Forum have been lauded by the Arab world, and Erdoğan has become one of the most popular political figures in the Middle East.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, the popularity of Turkish cultural products—its films and TV series, especially—in neighboring regions has increased Turkey's regional attraction. In a complimentary manner, improving economic conditions of the country encouraged Turkish politicians to enhance Turkey's profile in economic and humanitar-

48. See Michael Zucconi (2004), "Migration and Security as an Issue in US-European Relations" in *The Maze of Fear: Security and Migration after 9/11*, J. Tirman ed., The New Press, New York, pp.142-154; "Avrupa'nın Müslüman karşıtlığı haritası", *Radikal*, 22 January 2011.

49. For a detailed analysis of zero problems with neighbours principle see Ahmet Davutoğlu (2008), "Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007", *Insight Turkey*, 10(1), pp. 77–96

50. Turkish-Syrians relations took a different turn when Turkey stated that the regime must listen to the demands of its people in 2011 after several meetings with the Syrian authorities.

51. Deniz Devrim and Eduard Soler, "Turkey's Bold New Visa Diplomacy", *Notes Internacionales CIDOP*, 12 March 2010; Ercan Yavuz, "Trade Booming with neighbours as visa requirements abolished", *Today's Zaman*, 30 January 2011.

52. "Turkish foreign policy: The Great Mediator", *Economist*, 19 August 2010.

53. "CNN Arabic readers choose Turkish PM as 'Man of the Year'", *Hurriyet Daily News*, 2 January 2011.

ian field as well. With increasing levels of development assistance delivered through the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) to Afghanistan, Palestine, Central Asian countries, the Caucasus and the Balkans, Turkey has been elevated to the ranks of donor countries by both the UN and the OECD.<sup>54</sup> Multilateral platforms have been another area where Turkey has increased its activism. Turkey attained membership in the G-20, won a seat on the UN Security Council for the 2009-2010 term, gained observer status in the African League and participates in the Arab League. The country's international dynamism has also extended to Latin America, with which Turkey has sought to strengthen relations.

Over the last decade, Turkey has shown skill in expanding its political influence in surrounding regions. Beyond the concrete benefits this has afforded the country, it has generated rich intellectual discussion regarding Turkey. Turkey has become one of the most popular subjects of discussion in Western academic and policy circles. Questions of where Turkey is headed and what will emerge from its activism have filled academic articles, reports and briefs. Some analysts have watched the course of Turkish foreign policy with enthusiasm, while others have approached it more cautiously. A great deal of analysis has been generated on the recent diversification of Turkish foreign policy. The shift of axis; neo-Ottomanism; Turkey's Western-ness; the Turkish Model, its demonstrative effect and source of inspiration; and overreach in Turkish foreign policy are among the issues touched on in debates.

Though these discussions are most common in the U.S., the issues have also been addressed in Europe. This has even led, at times, to simultaneous transatlantic accusations regarding who lost Turkey.<sup>55</sup> Although the American position has been more discussed in these debates, European perceptions of the Turkish foreign policy's evolution have revealed intellectual confusion regarding how Turkey's foreign policy would impact its relations with Europe. Given Turkey's deep connections to Europe and the EU accession process, it is essential to unpack how these discussions find repercussions in Europe and how Turkish foreign policy is understood through European lens.

54. Abdullah Gül "Turkey: emerging donor country" *Hurriyet Daily News*, 25 September 2008.

55. In his visit to London on 9 June 2010 US Defence Secretary Robert Gates stated that "I personally think that if there is anything to the notion that Turkey is, if you will, moving eastward, it is, in my view, in no small part because it was pushed, and pushed by some in Europe refusing to give Turkey the kind of organic link to the West that Turkey sought.", quoted from Doug Bandow, "Who Lost Turkey? Not Europe", *The American Spectator*, 14 June 2010; see ABD ile AB arasında 'Türkiye'yi Kim Kaybetti' Kavgası", *Daily Zaman*, 26 June 2010.

## II. QUESTION OF PERCEPTIONS

In international relations, what actors think they are doing does not determine the types of relations they have with other actors; rather, what other actors believe determines the relationship. Actions are interpreted and judged, to a certain extent, through prisms of beliefs, fixed ideas, prejudices, historically-held images, embedded emotions and cultural mindsets.<sup>56</sup> These ideational and cultural beliefs are formed inter-subjectively through historical interaction and experience. Actors advance their relationships with, and perceptions of, others through normative practices; if these practices are replicated long enough, they produce stable notions of self and other with respect to the issue at hand.<sup>57</sup> However, perceptions are not static; because practices create them, they can be changed too.

Acknowledging the role of perceptions in international relations does not ignore material reality. Yet, though a material reality exists, it only gains meaning through actors' collective understandings.<sup>58</sup> Perceptions thus help actors interpret a situation's material reality as informed by their historical experiences.<sup>59</sup> It is impossible to disentangle the role of actors' perceptions in shaping reality within foreign policy. Therefore, complete objectivity is incredibly hard to realize. Understanding actors' mindsets—how they perceive other actors' motivations—can significantly reduce misperceptions. The gap between actions' motivations and how they are perceived, if widened, could lead to undesirable and ineffective foreign policy conduct.

Turkey seems to suffer greatly from the meanings ascribed to its foreign policy actions. Under the AK Party's leadership, the country has enacted extensive democratic reforms and improved its internal political conditions. Robust economic growth landed Turkey a seat in the G-20 as the world's 16<sup>th</sup> largest economy. In foreign policy, Turkey transitioned from a Western-oriented approach toward a more comprehensive vision, seeking to extend its influence both in its region and globally. Naturally, this transformation has made Turkey one of the most hotly-debated topics in the West.

Turkey's actions have long been interpreted through the lens of Western perceptions as a result of Turkey's NATO membership and EU integration process. With Turkey's increasing influence on, and attention to, the Middle East, the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia, the West has deemed critical its questions of how Turkey will handle its new international position. In this emerging international system, Turkey's burgeoning economy, growing population and strategic geo-political location created opportunities to form new alliances that could rival Turkey's relationship with the West. In other words, a Western-oriented alliance was not Turkey's only option, as it had been during the Cold War. The image of Turkey as a reliable Western ally during the Cold War evolved, necessitating—in the West's eyes—careful observation and analysis.

The relevance of perception in relations between Turkey and the West has increased further with the rise to power in 2002 of a party allegedly with a religious background. The AK Party's ascent to power at a time where the clash of civilizations discourse was prominent in international politics has fueled ideological interpretations by the West of Turkish foreign policy. Turkey's long lasting ideological identification with the West has become something that requires testing.

56. See Glen Fisher (1997), *Mindsets: The Role of Culture and Perceptions in International Relations*, Intercultural Press, 2nd Edition, Yarmouth, Maine, USA.

57. Alexander Wendt (1992), "Anarchy is what States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics", *International Organization*, 46(2), p.405.

58. For more on constructivism see Emanuel Adler (1997), "Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics", *European Journal of International Relations*, 3(3), p.322; John R. Searle (1995), *The Construction of Social Reality*, New York: The Free Press, Chapter 1, pp.1-31; Stephan Fuchs (1992), *The Professional Quest for Truth: A Social Theory of Science and Knowledge*, Albany: State University of New York.

59. Mathias Jopp (2002), "Perceptions of Germany's European Policy—an Introduction" in *Germany's European Policy: Perceptions in key partner countries*, Mathias Jopp, Heinrich Schneider, Uwe Schmalz eds., Bonn, p. 9; for more on perceptions in international relations see Alexander Wendt (1998), *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge University Press; Robert Jervis (1976), *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, New Jersey; Peter Katzenstein ed. (1996), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, Colombia University Press: Colombia; Ted Hopf (2002), *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities & Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999*, Cornell University Press; Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink (1998), "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change", *International Organization*, 52(4), pp.887–917

Careful analysis of discussions about Turkish foreign policy makes clear that it has not always been assessed rationally. Cultural biases and embedded emotions stemming from the historical interaction between Turkey and the West have guided these discussions. For instance, a 2010 nuclear deal that the Turkish government, in cooperation with Brazil, struck with Iran is an indicative of how mismatched perceptions could result in uncooperative behavior among partners. Whereas Turkey opted for diplomatic engagement with Iran as part of its vision of regional stability based on political engagement and economic integration, the West perceived Turkey's position as encouraging Iran and implemented sanctions instead. Thus, the gap between what Turkey thought it was doing and what the West thought Turkey was doing not only rendered Turkey's engagement initiative ineffective, but also amplified anxieties in the West over general trends in Turkish foreign policy.

Far from developing a systemic, analytical approach to Turkish foreign policy, Western attempts to decipher Turkey's foreign policy have mainly employed selective knowledge. Developing foreign policy initiatives by themselves, then, may not be sufficient; Turkey must also better explain its foreign policy logic and goals in order to reduce the damage caused by misperceptions. This is also an important step if Turkey hopes to gain support for, and recognition of, its policies from other actors.

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As Europe has become more familiar with Turkey, AK Party's foreign policy has been more positively received in Europe. Turkey is now considered an essential foreign policy voice by the majority of European intellectuals—one that cannot be ignored in any diplomatic developments within Turkey's greater region.

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Given the ramifications of disparate perceptions, any analysis of continuity and change in Turkey's foreign policy only stands to benefit from a thorough study of Western perceptions. The extent to which Turkey perceives that its actions are recognized by the West both determines the nature of relations and affects trends within Turkish foreign policy itself. Turkey's historical identification with Europe and the country's ongoing EU accession process have made Europe synonymous with the West—more so than the United States. Yet, debates over how the West views continuity and change in the AK Party's foreign policy have mostly focused on American viewpoints. European perceptions of contemporary Turkish foreign policy have been largely ambiguous and confusing. In Turkey, too, discussions of how Turkish foreign policy is perceived in the West have generally focused on American reading, neglecting the European viewpoint and transatlantic differences in perceptions of Turkey. These differences between the European and American approaches to Turkish foreign policy under AK Party must be explored.

Since Turkey aspires to EU membership, analysis of European perceptions of Turkish foreign policy is crucially important for several main reasons. First, as a prospective EU member, Turkey will be expected to align its domestic policies and legal system with the EU's and to support decisions of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. Though Turkey's recent unilateral initiatives have caused concern in Europe that a country as big and globally-ambitious as Turkey may not be able to align with the loosely-defined European foreign policy framework. Second, in the current multi-polar world, no power is able to shape regional and international developments on its own. Resolution of problems requires cooperation and coordinated action. In this respect, Europe is an important partner for Turkey on many regional foreign policy issues.

Also, as a rising power that seeks influence in its region, Turkey needs to understand European perceptions of Turkish policy in order to reduce the damage caused by misperceptions. European support for Turkey's foreign policy would help the country's efforts at recognition as a global player. Finally, better understanding of European perceptions would help repair the problems experienced in bilateral relations with the EU. Turkey's active foreign policy in the

Middle East, the Caucuses and the Balkans is generally tied to Turkey's stagnant EU accession bid. Familiarity with the reasons for European linkage of the two issues would help Turkish foreign policy actors better explain their motivations to Europeans.

### A. Culturalist View vis-à-vis Rationalist Approach Towards Turkey

Analyses of Turkey in Europe are fraught with deeply-ingrained cultural prejudices and ignorance. It is striking to see how little Europeans know about Turkey. For many, Turkey is a country with beautiful beaches and cheap tourism opportunities—it is a country that fills holiday memories. In political debates, Turkey's image is compromised by fear of Islam and immigration. Given the prevailing anti-Muslim vision of the world and the economic crisis sweeping the European continent, Turkey's Muslim identity and large immigrant communities in Europe makes it susceptible to non-rational analyses. The role of foreign policy in shaping the European image of Turkey has, unsurprisingly, remained limited. Given Turkey's EU accession process through which Turkey is expected to align its legal and political system with the *Acquis*, it is normal that domestic developments have nourished the mindset towards the country. However, this is also changing.

As a staunch ally of NATO whose actions were easy to predict, Turkey did not attract much attention as a foreign policy actor until a decade ago. The increasing activism of Turkish foreign policy and the greater initiative taken by

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Turkey's attempts to set its foreign policy in such regions as Middle East, Caucuses and Balkans through criticism of the West and perceived decline of the United States and Europe in world politics, though puzzling for some, do not reflect a shift in foreign policy orientation of the country as often contemplated.

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Turkish elites have raised interest in Europe. After overcoming the first wave of bewilderment and irritation at Turkey's independent foreign policy initiatives, Europeans have started to develop a more nuanced approach towards the specifics of Turkish foreign policy. Currently, debates over Turkey are not confined to EU accession discussion alone. Instead, they consider the implications of Turkey's more assertive foreign policy as well.

As Europe has become more familiar with Turkey, AK Party's foreign policy has been more positively received in Europe.<sup>60</sup> Turkey is now considered an essential foreign policy voice by the majority of European intellectuals—one that cannot be ignored in any diplomatic developments within Turkey's greater region. Turkey's foreign policy investment in diplomatic mediation, soft power and development aid have increased Turkish influence on developments in its neighboring regions.<sup>61</sup> Europeans generally view this as an opportunity, rather than a threat, to their interests—especially in regions such as Middle East, where Europe struggles with perceptions of decreasing influence and reliability. Here, Turkey is seen as a strategic partner with whom Europe must cooperate closely to realize its interests. This is largely the perspective of Great Britain and Germany, who are more content with Turkey's ascendance. France, on the other hand, is more wary of Turkey's increasing foreign policy activism. This skepticism is more evident at the policy-making level, with Turkey being viewed as a rival or competitor to French interests in regions like the Middle East, which France has traditionally considered as under its sphere of influence.

The image of Turkish foreign policy in Europe is not confined to the strategic arena. Traditional images of Turkey as a bridge or a natural mediator between the West and the Muslim world still maintain their attraction to the majority of European intellectuals. More recently, Turkey has been regarded by almost all Europeans as the type of power that could serve as a lesson and source of inspiration for democratic reform in the Middle East. This image of Turkey has become more relevant during the current Arab Spring, in which millions of Arabs took to the streets to demand rights and freedoms.

60. Great majority of scholars interviewed in London, Berlin and Paris in 2011 have expressed their positive opinions on current Turkish foreign policy.

61. SETA Interview, Berlin, 2 May 2011.

## B. Questions on Turkey's Predictability

Although Europe's image of Turkey's recent foreign policy is generally positive, it is not without question marks and confusion. Contrary to expectations, European confusion is not associated with the intensity of the activity or the degree of independence in the foreign policy realm. Turkey's activity does not affect Europe's image of Turkey positively or negatively. Further, European scholars do not see Turkey's pursuit of a more independent regional policy as a threat. Instead, they highlight the need for distinguishing between American hawks, who might be resentful of Turkey's independent foreign policy per se, and Europeans, who are rather confused and uncomfortable with the tune and manner of that activism and independence.<sup>62</sup> Turkish politicians feed European skepticism about a Europe-Turkey partnership with emotional remarks and a stridently autonomous attitude.<sup>63</sup> Turkey's vote against Iran sanctions at the United Nations, its harsh language directed at Israel, its openly warm relations with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and its assertion that NATO has no business in Libya are among the cases that have left Europeans puzzled by Turkey's motivations.<sup>64</sup>

There is a widespread belief in Europe that Turkey's attempts to set its foreign policy in such regions as Middle East, Caucasus and Balkans through criticism of the West and perceived decline of the United States and Europe in world politics, though puzzling for some, do not reflect a shift in foreign policy orientation of the country as often contemplated. The European approach is more sophisticated. Europeans appreciate that Turkish politicians benefit politically from populist expressions of the West's disproportionate economic gains and political control.<sup>65</sup> However, Europeans also think Turkey fails to grasp that this strategy might yield political costs in the long run.<sup>66</sup> In the short term, it has strengthened the position of those who are against Turkey's EU membership.

Meanwhile, Turkey's friends in Europe are finding it increasingly difficult to defend Turkey given their lack of clarity about Turkey's foreign policy objectives and regional goals—policies that are of interest to the EU as well.<sup>67</sup> This ambiguity makes it harder to predict how Turkey, with its more assertive foreign policy, would react to problems that might erupt in nearby regions. As one analyst noted, "we do not know how Turkey would react if the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict intensifies and becomes violent in the Caucasus."<sup>68</sup> Turkey's image—even among pro-Turkish forces in the EU—is evolving from reliable ally to unpredictable partner.<sup>69</sup>

The uncertainty regarding Turkey is compounded by ambiguities surrounding the foreign policy posture of the EU, according to analysts.<sup>70</sup> They are at a loss to articulate what Turkey offers Europe in the foreign policy realm and what kind of cooperation Europe should pursue with Turkey. Moreover, Europeans do not have clear ideas of the role the EU should play internationally, the priorities European foreign policy should adopt or Turkey's role in this arena. The underdevelopment of European foreign policy may lead some to ask why Turkey is blamed for being uncooperative with the EU on foreign policy.<sup>71</sup>

## C. Perceived Degree of Change in Turkish Foreign Policy

Europeans observe substantial changes in continuity in Turkish Foreign Policy under the AK Party. Europe perceives Turkish foreign policy as more interests-oriented and independent, ceasing to it's the foreign policy parameters ex-

62. SETA Interview, London, 23 February 2011; Berlin, 4 May 2011.

63. SETA Interview, London, 25 February 2011.

64. "Several decisions opposing the line of Turkey's Western allies have led to serious concerns over the ultimate ambition of Turks over the past years"; direct quotation from Marietje Schaake, "Zero Problems? Time for a New Policy Narrative", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 24 May 2011.

65. "My guess is Turkey's foreign policy does not have much to do with ideological background of the party of Erdoğan. This is more the old power-play thinking. I have the impression that Turkey is looking for a role in the region, the process of accession in the EU has more or less come to a halt. There is a certain disappointment in Turkey so the development now reassesses other options. To become a regional power, to become a kind of spokesperson for the Arab world seems to be such role.", SETA Interview, Berlin, 4 May 2011.

66. SETA Interview, London, 22 February 2011.

67. SETA Interview, London, 25 February 2011.

68. SETA Interview, London, 25 February 2011.

69. SETA Interview, Paris, 7 June 2011.

70. "We do not have a realistic assessment of what role EU can play in global affairs.", SETA Interview, Berlin, 2 May 2011.

71. "There is no European common foreign policy especially since Arab spring started. There is absolutely no such thing as commonly defined foreign policy. Even Euro-Mediterranean partnership which looked the most sophisticated cooperation framework does not work anymore. All member states are pursuing their own national interests.", SETA Interview, Paris, 7 June 2011.

hibited by its Western allies and seeking a more active foreign policy.<sup>72</sup> This new approach centers on the idea that the region should manage its own affairs. Though some critics argue that Turkey's greater willingness to adopt some positions at odds with the West stands in the way of its commitment to the Western alliance, European intellectuals do not support this view. Turkey is still considered an important part of the West's institutional structures. Turkey's NATO vote to deploy missile shields in its own territory was important in this regard, confirming the country's strong commitment to its alliance with the West. This vote came as a particular relief in light of the resentment some felt over Turkey's vote against imposing sanctions on Iran at the United Nations, which sparked discussions on Turkey's direction. When asked for other features of change in Turkish foreign policy, European analysts also discussed Turkey's increasing visibility and activism in international relations, its growing confidence, its multi-directionality, its pluralization of external affairs, its constricting of the army's role in foreign policy decisions and its prioritization of the economy in foreign affairs. Soft power, mediation and diplomacy deserve mentioned on any list of Turkish foreign policy's major new aspects.

Europeans are mostly aware that evolution in Turkish foreign policy is a natural process. The security structure that emerged in the aftermath of the Cold war provided Turkey with an opportunity to forge a more flexible and more independent foreign policy in its multi-regional environment. Therefore, the dominant European view is that change is not necessarily an AK Party phenomenon; rather, it is a natural consequence of the emerging global environment.<sup>73</sup> To this changing international reality, the AK Party added its own style and ideas, speeding up the transition process.

#### D. Driving Force Behind the Change: Ideology or Rationality?

The question of what drives Turkey's foreign policy has become a controversial subject in its analysis over the last few years. Several arguments have been developed that posit a direct link between the AK Party's Islamic roots and Turkey's opening to the Arab world. The European approach is more nuanced in this regard. European intellectuals do not deny the role of religion in shaping the party's ideology and outlook; also they do not perceive this phenomenon as specific to Turkey. At the same time, analysts note that the AK Party ideology cannot be reduced to Islam alone. Religion is only one factor among many—including culture, social experiences and norms, interpretation of history, and international realities—that constitute the AK Party's vision of the world.<sup>74</sup>

That a comprehensive vision affects Turkey's current foreign policy is reasonable to European scholars. Framing religion as the singular factor shaping Turkish foreign policy—especially towards Arab world—is overly simplistic. Most European scholars do not see the Islamization of foreign policy under AK Party rule. On the contrary, a well-known intellectual from Germany believes that “the AK Party set Turkish foreign policy free of mental restrictions and redlines of the traditional Kemalist ideology that had set the parameters of Turkish foreign policy up until a decade ago.”<sup>75</sup> The AK Party is pursuing a more pragmatic and less ideological foreign policy than previous governments.<sup>76</sup>

Over the last decade, Turkish foreign policy has become more accommodative and pragmatic, with economic factors taking precedence behind country's new pro-activism in several regions.<sup>77</sup> Foreign trade figures of the country con-

72. “Turkish foreign policy is much more interested in getting involved in the global world than seeking an alignment with the western world only,” SETA Interview, Paris, 9 June 2011.

73. “Certainly compared to the Turkish Foreign policy up to 2000, there is tremendous change in Turkey. However, change started with Özal government when he changed Turkey's economic orientation from statist orientation towards market oriented one to better integrate Turkey into the world economy. When you consider relations with Iran, Russia, Georgia and Syria the major factors that have been driving Turkey to pursue active policy are economic factors. Economy's impact has always been important in Turkey's relations over the last two decades. So, speed and manner may be AK Party's phenomenon, but it'd started before,” SETA Interview, Berlin, 2 May 2011.

74. “I think there is always an element of ideology in foreign policy. But that is not only in Turkey. Ideological viewpoints play a big part in Chinese and Russian foreign policy too. However, this divide between secular and ideological foreign policy is a bit of false argument. They are intermixed. Each country sees the world in part through its historical, cultural and economic background. So yes there is an ideological element but it's not unique to Turkey. However, Turkish foreign policy is not Islamist,” SETA Interview, London, 25 February 2011; “Ideological component is an important dimension of foreign policy, but it's not the basis of Turkish foreign policy. Turkey's foreign policy is not Islamic, it is very realist,” SETA Interview, Paris, 9 June 2011.

75. SETA Interview, Berlin, 2 May, 2011.

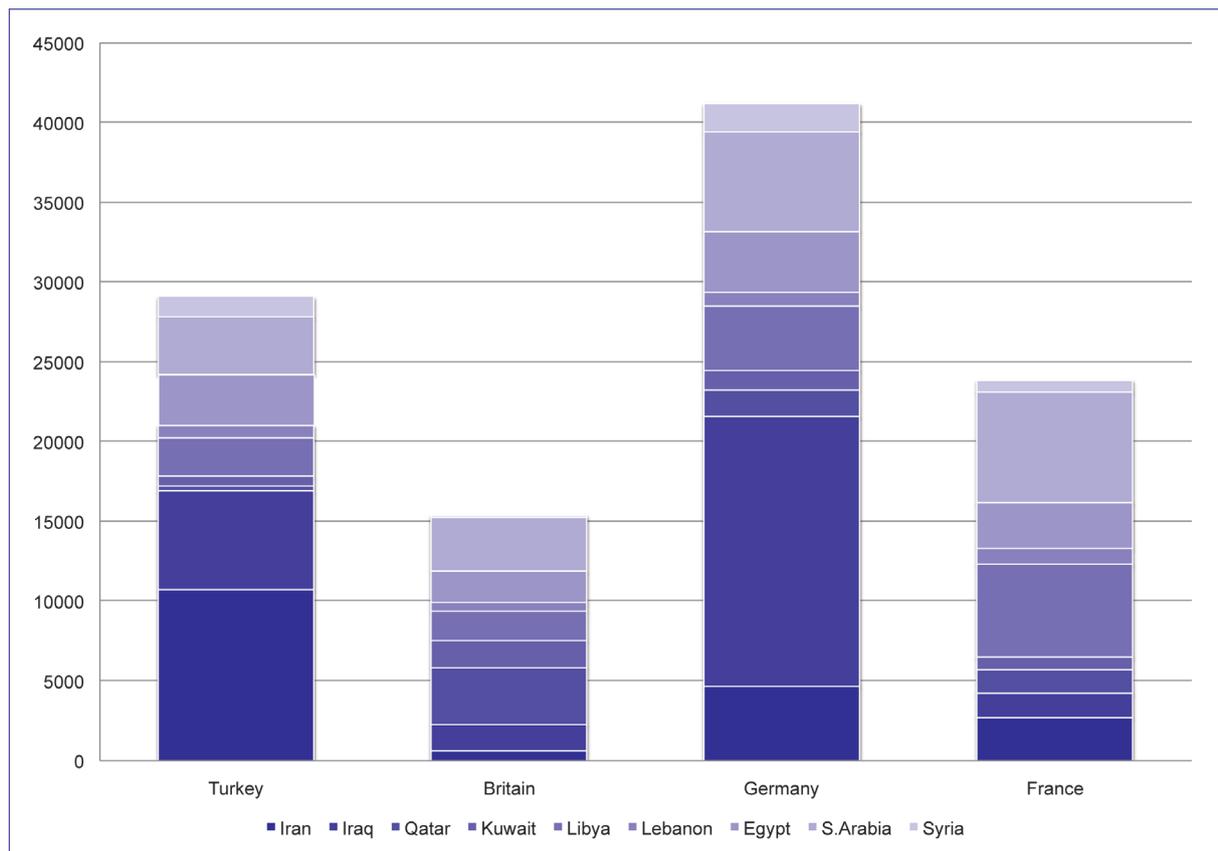
76. “I don't see evolution of Turkish foreign policy as ideological re-positioning. On the contrary, current Turkish foreign policy is quite rational and wise. Geopolitical considerations and economic factors are the main rationale behind Turkey's external relations, it is not Islam,” SETA Interview, Paris, 9 June 2011.

77. “Turkish foreign policy reflects the practical capacity that Turkey has. I'm a bit more skeptical about grand strategy here, Turkey is doing what many people say it should have done a long time ago- which is to manage its affairs on its borders rather than looking in

firm this perception as well. Turkey, under AK Party era, has diversified its trade and commercial relations with several countries in order to address the urgent demands of its economy. The total export volume of the country rose from 36 billion US dollars in 2002 to 132 billion US dollars in 2008. These amounts experienced some decline in 2009 due to global financial crisis; but export rates still proved above the formerly targeted amount of the government in the Mid-term economic program (2010-2012).<sup>78</sup>

While the main destination of trade is still Europe during the AK Party period, Turkey has engaged in trade with new partners from Middle East, Latin America, Asia and Africa and established visa-free trade zones with a wide range of countries over the last decade. Under shift of axis debates, however, increasing trade with the Middle Eastern countries has drawn particular attention, paving the way for ideological accounts of Turkish foreign policy. Especially on particular issues such as Iran and Israel European perceptions get more fluid. This is particularly the case in media reading of Turkish foreign policy where the adjective 'Islamist' is often emphasized to describe and qualify the Turkish prime minister or his party's roots. Nonetheless, reality on the ground documents that Turkey's trade with the Middle Eastern countries hovers at lower levels compared to trade volume between European economies -Britain, France and Germany- and the same countries in the region. The tables below provide a meaningful comparison of trade volume of Turkey, France, Germany and Britain with nine Middle Eastern countries.

FIGURE 1. THE TOTAL TRADE VOLUME OF BRITAIN, GERMANY, FRANCE AND TURKEY WITH THE COUNTRIES LISTED ON THE LEFT SIDE OF THE COLUMN.



Source: Statistics were gathered from Euro-stats.

one direction, but not looking in other directions. Economic issues have certainly become more important over the last 30 years.", SETA Interview, Oxford, 24 February 2011.

78. For detailed analysis on the evolution of Turkey's economic relations see Mehmet Babacan, "Whither an Axis Shift: A Perspective from Turkey's Foreign Trade", *Insight Turkey*, 13(1), pp. 129-157.

### III. DEBATES OVER TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

#### A. Shift of Axis

Over the last few years, Turkey's foreign policy has given rise to heated debates in the West. One of the most controversial subjects of these debates has been the alleged shift of axis arguments voiced by some analysts in the West to explain new trends in Turkish foreign policy. Interpreting Turkey's recent foreign policy activism in the Middle East as reflecting a shift of the country's foreign policy alignment, some scholars argue that Turkey's AK Party is orienting away from the West and towards an ideological alignment with Muslim countries. Shift of axis allegations are not new for Turkey. Attempts to develop good relations with its eastern neighbors have at times produced similar debates in the West.<sup>79</sup> However, the extent and ubiquity of these speculations in recent years have outpaced those of previous decades.<sup>80</sup>

Turkey signaled a first wave of change in its policy towards the Muslim world when it refused deployment of American forces to Turkey in advance of their attack on Iraq in 2003. The Turkish Parliament's decision garnered different reactions in the Muslim world and in the U.S. While it earned Turkey sympathy in the Arab world, it caused concern in some Western circles over how Turkish foreign policy under the AK Party would evolve in the future. Nonetheless, Erdoğan's walkout at Davos after his clash with Peres, the President of Israel, over the Gaza was the main fuel for speculation about an eastward drift. Further deterioration of bilateral relations with Israel after the Mavi Marmara incident and improvement of relations with Iran have been cited as additional evidence for Turkey's realignment with the Islamic world.

While discussions on Turkey's shift of axis have been more intense in the United States, they have found wide coverage in Europe as well. The European understanding of these debates is more nuanced—especially at the policy making and intellectual levels. European scholars do not agree with the simplistic and selective bases upon which these arguments have been predicated. In the European mindset, substantial changes in Turkey's foreign policy have taken place during AK Party rule; however, these changes do not reflect a shift in country's foreign policy orientation. Turkey is still seen as part of the Western alliance, but the country is now more eager to develop its own regional approach. Put differently, a formerly Eurocentric foreign policy has been transformed into a more interest-oriented and autonomous one. Given the splendid economic growth rates of the country, it is not surprising that Turkey now feels more confident in taking initiative, even if it is at odds with European policies. This, in the European mind-set, does not suggest a total disconnection or departure from the West, but a determinacy to attain relative independence in foreign policy.<sup>81</sup>

European observers are not concerned with whether Turkey has shifted its axis or not; the critical question is where the West now stands on the country's list of foreign policy priorities.<sup>82</sup> The intensity of Turkey's involvement in the Middle East and the stalled EU process create confusion in Europe concerning whether Turkey is still devoted to the multi-regional foreign policy it established. Reflecting this viewpoint, a British analyst notes, "it is not a question of

79. See "1960-1980: Goreceli Ozerklik-3" in Baskin Oran eds., pp. 653-808.

80. On shift of axis debates see Cengiz Çandar, "Turkey's Axis Shift: A Western Dilemma", Conference paper submitted at the International Conference *Turkey as a new regional power: Perspectives of Turkey's Foreign and Security Policy*, Berlin, 29-30 June 2010; Mehmet Ali Birand, "Shift the Axis but Dont Exaggerate", *Hurriyet Daily News*, 25 October 2010; Mensur Akgün, "Turkey: What Axis Shift", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, July 2010; Soli Özel, "The Back and Forth of Turkey's Westernness", *German Marshall Fund of the United States*, 29 January 2009; Ariel Cohen, "Washington Concerned as Turkey leaving the West", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 20 December 2010; Katinka Barysch, "Turkey and Europe: a Shifting Axis", *OpenDemocracy*, 14 April 2010; Mehmet Babacan, "Whither Axis Shift: A Perspective from Turkey's Foreign Trade", *SETA Policy Report*, No:04, November 2010; Kılıç Buğra Kanat (2010), "AK Party's Foreign Policy: Is Turkey Turning Away from the West", *Insight Turkey*, 12(1), pp. 205-225; "A Country's Welcome Rise: Is Turkey turning its back on the West", *Economist*, 21 October 2010; Bernhard Zand, "The Anatolian Tiger: How the West is losing Turkey", *Der Spiegel*, 15 June 2010; Nick Danforth, "How the West Lost Turkey", *Foreign Policy*, 25 November 2009; Philip Stephens, "The West must offer Turkey a proper seat", *Financial Times*, 17 June 2010; Joschka Fischer, "Who Lost Turkey", *Project-Syndicate*, 1 July 2010.

81. SETA Interview, Paris, 8 June 2011.

82. "First Turkey needs to clarify its position and priorities and decide who are its partners", SETA Interview, Berlin, 4 May 2011; also see Marietje Schaake, "Zero Problems? Time for A New Policy Narrative", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 24 May 2011; "First Turkey needs to clarify its position and priorities. I think Turkey needs to decide where it wants to go, who are its partners", SETA Interview, Berlin, 4 May, 2011.

whether Turkey is departing from the West; it is rather a question of whether Turkey is departing from the regional hub idea it instigated a few years ago".<sup>83</sup>

The perception that Turkey seems to be choosing one or two vectors of its once proclaimed multi-dimensional foreign policy is widespread in Europe.<sup>84</sup> Three major factors are responsible for the question marks regarding the extent to which Turkey is now willing to cooperate with the West: Turkey's overall foreign policy rhetoric, issues in its Middle East policy and the state of relations with the European Union.

### i) General discourse

Turkey's increasing activism and visibility in the international sphere does not cause anxiety and concern in Europe. On the contrary, given both internal and external changes that have taken place over the last decade, Europeans perceive Turkish foreign policy's increased assertiveness as a natural and reasonable development. However, the rhetoric and style of Turkish politicians, to some extent, creates bitterness in Europe.

Seen from Europe, Turkey's criticism of the West in the non-Western forums of the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus is worrying. A leading British analyst maintains that Turkey—as a country that has been a beneficiary of Western exposition and history—undermines its reliability when it manifests itself as a non-Western actor.<sup>85</sup> European scholars widely acknowledge that Turkey acts pragmatically in making use of its unique geographic position, with its cultural and historical bonds to both Eastern and Western identities. However, manifestations of its eastern identity that appear confrontational to the West create a perception that a shift of balance might be happening.

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Turkey's increasing activism and visibility in the international sphere does not cause anxiety and concern in Europe. However, the rhetoric and style of Turkish politicians, to some extent, creates bitterness in Europe.

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Turkey's image as a competitive power appears to be confirmed when Turkish leaders level strong criticisms against Western imperialism, hegemony, double standards and polices, while highlighting the West's at times destructive impact on development in formerly colonized regions.<sup>86</sup> The criticism is delivered in the forms of Muslim solidarity in the Middle East, historical kinship in Balkans and third world unity in the third world. Turkey, in doing so, portrays itself as an alternative actor to the traditional Western powers, while it also presents itself as a guardian of the formerly-colonized, the third world, Muslims and Turks against outside interference. European observers warn that the anti-Western undertones in Turkish leaders' rhetoric may benefit Turkey in the short run in the non-Western world, where there is already deep suspicion against the West. Nevertheless, in the long run, this approach may lead Turkey to weaken its ties with the West.<sup>87</sup>

83. "The question to my mind is not whether Turkish leadership is focusing more on Middle East but whether it is still desirer of a set of axis to have a multi-vectoral foreign policy which also involves anchoring in the west or whether it is primarily interested in one or two of the vectors like Russia, Balkans and Middle East. That's the question to me. Sometimes it feels like they are interested in multi-vectoral foreign policy with rational arguments and sometimes you see language used by the leadership suggesting that they are not interested in multi-vectoral policy, rather primarily interested one or two of the vectors.", SETA Interview, London, 22 February 2011.

84. SETA Interview, London, 23 February 2011.

85. SETA Interview, London, 22 February 2011.

86. Prime Minister's criticism of the West over issues of Israel-Palestine conflict, Iran and Africa have received wide coverage in Europe. Regarding Israel-Palestine conflict, for instance, Prime Minister Erdoğan said that if the sanctions implemented against Iran were to have been imposed on Israel, the Palestine-Israel dispute would have long been settled. (TRT English, 12 October 2011) Opposing any military attack on Libya, Erdoğan lamented that "The west should not make designs on Libyan oil wells". (speech at River Flowing Westward Conference at Bahcesehir University, 17 September 2011) His statements during his visit to Somali also targeted the West; Erdoğan held that Somalia is a litmus test for the values of the West. ("Somalia real test for civilization, says PM", *Hurriyet Daily News*, 19 August 2011).

87. "I think there is perhaps misreading of the extent to which the West is in decline, misreading of the rate of decline of the US and the

While the debates over the anti-western language of Turkish foreign policy have intensified in last few years, some argue that this tone is not unique to AK Party era. A German expert on Turkish politics argues:

“Turkey has always considered itself a leading state in its region; but conditions for playing that role are only acquired recently. During the early Republican period, Turkish elites regarded Turkey as the natural leader of the third world. Nationalist Movement Party of 1970s took up a lot of early Republican period’s views and considered Turkey as the leading race by nature. Islamist movements, on the other hand, led by Necmettin Erbakan, saw Turkey as the leading state in the Muslim world. Revitalization of Turkey as the leading state with strong Turkish-Islam coloring during 1980s evolved into new enthusiasm of the 1990s expressed in well-known motto ‘from Adriatic to the great wall of China’. Unchanging argument in all these views is that Turks are state builders and leaders, substantiating the same assertiveness of today: one which benefits from country’s Western credentials while confronting the West at the same time. Therefore, although overt criticism of Turkish policy makers of the West in non-Western forums is perceived confusing among Europeans, it is not necessarily an AK Party phenomenon, rather represents a deep continuity in foreign policy discourse of the country.”<sup>88</sup>

The style of Turkish foreign policy is another aspect of confusion in Europe. The invitation of Sudan’s leader Omar Hassan Al-Bashir who is accused of being a war criminal to Turkey to attend the Organization of the Islamic Conference’s 2009 meeting was met unfavorably in Europe. Erdoğan’s statement that Muslim cannot commit genocide fuelled ideological accounts of Turkish foreign policy.<sup>89</sup> The public expression of friendship with some of the region’s most anti-Western figures and groups—such as Ahmadinejad and Hamas—has also been a constant irritant to EU leaders.<sup>90</sup>

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Contrary to the general perception that Turkey’s Middle East policy is driven by ideological parameters such as religious affinity, Europeans generally believe that common interests between Turkey and Middle Eastern countries are the source of warm relations.

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Some feel that Turkey, intentionally or not, puts itself diplomatically in a difficult position.<sup>91</sup> Some of Turkey’s acts at NATO are emblematic in this respect. Turkey resisted Rasmussen’s appointment as the head of NATO, rejected explicitly naming Iran as the target of NATO’s missile defense shield and opposed NATO intervention in Libya. In the European mind-set, however, adoption of a different position in NATO does not signal a strategic reorientation of country. It is instead a symbolic attempt on the part of Turkish leaders to assert that Turkey is an actor that must be taken into account and recognized in decision-making.<sup>92</sup> In spite of the strong opposition rhetoric Turkish leaders displayed in the abovementioned cases, Turkey did not hinder these decisions’ adoption.

irrelevance of the European Union. Sometimes there is judgment that these multilateral structures either NATO or EU are on the way out and the US being on the verge of decline. That is a common misreading of what is certainly a moment of retraction of the Western community and what is Turkey and other nations think they get by criticizing the West. Turkey, for very valid reasons, has foreign policy which is orientated 360 degrees; because of historical, cultural and human factors it has a card to play on business in the Middle East and Balkans. Turkey would probably be the country, making the most economic profit out of post-Iraq. There is a clear view that US hasn’t got anything else. Economic benefits outweigh the political cost. Turkey is trying to be seen as non-Western actor. But Turkey is already a Western actor in many ways. To turn its back on its allies too quickly is not positively seen in Europe. This has its costs. Having gone so far in raising its stakes in criticizing the West is creating uncertainty. The cost is there when you try to win points against your team and that’s certainly the view many Europeans would share.”; SETA Interview, London, 23 February 2011.

88. SETA Interview, Berlin, 2 May 2011.

89. “Sudanese President Bashir’s visit to Turkey in limbo”, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 8 November 2009.

90. SETA Interview, Paris, 7 June 2011; Berlin, 4 May 2011; London, 23 February 2011.

91. “To what extent this represents religious sensitivity of AK Party and its leadership is hard to tell, but I think it is just a diplomatic show of Turkish leaders implying ‘I’m here’”; SETA Interview, London, 23 February 2011.

92. “With its growing economy Turkey wants to play a big role; it wants a recognition; it is hardly a shift of axis”; SETA Interview, Berlin, 2 May 2011.

Ambiguities stemming from the rhetoric and style of Turkish foreign policy necessitate several questions. Does Turkey want to cooperate with Europe? How relevant to Turkey are the issues on which Europe finds cooperation important? What kind of partner is Turkey going to be to Europe? Many assert that these questions arise mainly because of Turkey's ambiguous foreign policy objectives. Some scholars counter that the ambiguities surrounding Turkey-EU cooperation in foreign policy originate with the EU itself. One British analyst argues, "the main problem is that EU foreign policy is weak in many regions Turkey operates; even if Turkey wanted to align itself to EU policy, it would not work at the moment—so why blame Turkey?"<sup>93</sup>

## ii) Turkey's Middle East Policy

Turkey's Middle East policy—and its meaning for Europe—is another dimension of confusion. European perceptions of Turkey's Middle East policy are generally positive. Europeans see Turkey's regional activism as significant, especially as the West struggles with an entrenched reliability problem in the eyes of both its own people and the Middle East. Contrary to the general perception that Turkey's Middle East policy is driven by ideological parameters such as religious affinity, Europeans generally believe that common interests between Turkey and Middle Eastern countries are the source of warm relations. Islamist aspirations do not drive Turkey's recent policy shift in the Middle East; rather, economic considerations have driven Turkey's regional relations.

However, some aspects of Turkey's Middle East policy have upset relations with Europe. Turkish-Iranian relations have been one of the most controversial subjects in Turkey's Middle East policy. Over the last decade, Turkey not only intensified its diplomatic relations with Iran, but also expanded economic contacts to the country. Trade volume between the two countries has grown to \$10.6 billion in 2010 from \$4.3 billion in 2004.<sup>94</sup> Energy constitutes a significant portion of the bilateral relations. Iran is the second largest natural gas supplier to Turkey after Russia. In early 2011, both countries agreed on a roadmap to boost energy ties.<sup>95</sup> Officially, Turkey opposes Iran's nuclear activities; however, in contradistinction to the West, Turkey senses less risk from Iran's nuclear program than do European countries. As a result, Turkey prefers diplomatic engagement to economic sanctions and military action as a solution to the problem. Ahmet Davutoğlu said his country was willing to act as a mediator in the diplomatic standoff over Tehran's nuclear ambitions.<sup>96</sup> In line with this position, Turkey and Brazil struck a deal with Iran in 2010. Known as Tehran Declaration, the deal stipulated that Iran give 1,200 kg of its 3.5 percent enriched uranium to Turkey in exchange for 20 percent uranium to be used as fuel in the research reactor in Tehran. The deal came as a surprise to the West; meanwhile, international consensus to impose sanctions on Iran was attained between the U.S., Europe, Russia and China.<sup>97</sup>

Europeans regard Turkey's Iran policy as naïve and perplexing, benefitting only Iran.<sup>98</sup> While there is understanding that Turkey needs to maintain good relations with Iran for a number of reasons, the nuclear swap deal is considered by some a step too far on the part of Turkey.<sup>99</sup> This perception prevails in Britain and Germany particularly, where the majority of observers believe that the Tehran Declaration undermined the existing process of negotiations on Iran's nuclear activity among the West, Russia and China.<sup>100</sup> By striking a deal with Iran, Turkey is thought to have singled itself out, proceeding in opposite direction from the West.<sup>101</sup> "This greatly damaged Turkey's image in Europe," ex-

93. SETA Interview, London, 23 February 2011.

94. "Turkey's Israel messages well conveyed, US businessman says", *Hurriyet Daily News*, 3 October 2011.

95. "Turkey, Iran boost energy, trade ties despite growing US pressure", *Hurriyet Daily News*, 4 May 2011.

96. "Davutoğlu: Turkey opposed to sanctions on Iran since 2006", *Today's Zaman*, 11 June 2010,

97. On Turkey's Iran policy see Kadir Ustun (2010), "Turkey's Iran policy: between Diplomacy and Sanctions", *Insight Turkey*, 12(3), pp. 19-26.

98. "It is said that Turkey has two track policy towards Iran 'stick and carrot', but I think Turkey's two track policy is composed of carrot and two carrots", SETA Interview, London, 24 February 2011.

99. SETA Interview, London, 23 February, 2011.

100. "The fact that Turkey voted against the imposition of sanctions was a logical conclusion for Turkey of the fact that it had initiated with Brazil a second track. So for Turkey it makes sense to vote no otherwise it would have damaged its honest broker image. I think there was a genuine desire on Turkey's behalf to be useful. But it was somehow vote no in UN was a vote against course of action decided upon by other nations in the West, China and Russia", SETA Interview, London, 22 February 2011.

101. "From the Western policy makers point of view, Turkey's different position on Iran was perceived as Turkey going in opposite direction, as a strong NATO ally, of course they were not happy to see it", SETA Interview, Berlin, 3 May 2011.

plains one German scholar.<sup>102</sup> Turkey's image as an unpredictable ally seemed clear, especially when Turkey voted against sanctions on Iran at the United Nations Security Council. Turkey's "no" vote, according to one British analyst, "reinforced the impression of divide between Turkey and the West."<sup>103</sup>

To no one's surprise, Turkey's "no" vote in the UN amplified debates over the Islamization of Turkish foreign policy. Why did Turkey vote against? To what extent is the government's Islamic background a factor in Turkey's recent amiable policy towards Iran? In responding to these questions, confusion abounds. Most Europeans understand that Turkey did not want to taint its image as an honest broker; however, Europeans do not understand why Turkey chose to vote "no" instead of abstaining. Some felt that a "no" vote was "where Turkey has gone somewhat too far in its Iranian policy."<sup>104</sup> For the majority of observers, Turkey has not gone to great enough lengths in explaining its political approach.<sup>105</sup> There is a significant gap between European and Turkish perceptions of Turkey's mediation process. From the Turkish perspective, despite having provided information to, and cooperated with, the West in advance of signing the deal, Turkey could not garner Western support.

By contrast, Europeans generally view the Turkish approach as uncooperative. There is a feeling that Turkey does not work hard to align its policies with those of the EU. "Turkey's approach is more 'take or leave it,' in the sense that it simply asserts its policies and then says that the EU should support them."<sup>106</sup> In fact, Turkey's Iran policy—and its position on sanctions in particular—are under constant pressure due to Europe's deep antipathy toward Iran. Though Europeans understand Turkey's foreign policy as genuinely concerned with contributing, Europeans also see naiveté in Turkey's belief that it could arrange successful mediation between two sides that harbor suspicions toward, and prejudices about, each other.<sup>107</sup>

Europe also expresses confusion at the extent to which Turkey's Iran policy is Islamist. The public manifestation of friendship with Ahmadinejad (including an invitation to Turkey and a congratulatory message after his controversial re-election), explains one diplomat, might have created the perception that a shift of balance is happening in Turkey's foreign policy.<sup>108</sup> Still, this does not indicate a clear Islamist element in Turkey's Iranian policy. Some argue that Turkey's Iran policy is driven by politics of interests rather than religion. In this understanding, Turkey's "no" vote is seen as a declaration of independence in foreign policy.<sup>109</sup> A leading French scholar expresses this clearly:

"People have been speaking for a long time of the decline of the West, now you have two middle powers coming out, playing an active role in reshaping the world, making peace and proposing alternatives that the West has not been able to offer."<sup>110</sup>

The declining state of relations between Turkey and Israel is another issue of concern among Europeans. The first blow to relations came when Israel initiated the 2008 Gaza War while Turkey was mediating peace talks between Israel and Syria. Israel's unexpected attack on Gaza drew harsh criticism from Prime Minister Erdoğan. Erdoğan's subsequent walk-out of a panel at the 2008 World Economic Forum in Davos over a dispute with Israeli President Shimon Peres demonstrated to the international community how deep the crisis was between the two former allies. Relations soured further when Ahmet Davutoğlu cancelled his trip to Israel after Israel denied his request to meet with Hamas authorities in Gaza. The following month, Turkey responded to Israel by excluding the Israeli Air Force from

102. SETA Interview, Berlin, 4 May 2011.

103. SETA Interview, London, 22 February 2011.

104. "I think Turkey has gone too far with Iran in two areas. The vote no in UN Security Council was a step too far. Abstaining would have done it if Turkish leaders didn't want to support sanctions. Secondly I have some sort sympathy with Turkish position saying we are neighbors, it is a country we need to get on and so on. Maybe Turkey would be useful in that respect. But by doing it as a public manifestation of friendship we can not really use these strong links. Then Erdoğan just looks too close with Iranians. He doesn't look like a mediator; he looks like being in one camp or another.", SETA Interview, London, 22 February 2011.

105. SETA Interview, Berlin, 4 May, 2011.

106. SETA Interview, London, 23 February 2011.

107. "Turkey may have underestimated the seriousness of the mutual antipathy between the West and Iran which does go back over 40 years", SETA Interview, Oxford, 24 February 2011.

108. SETA Interview, Berlin, 4 May 2011.

109. "The deal Turkey struck with Brazil or with other countries in the future shows that Turkey can now take initiatives without having to wait for the permission of the West", SETA Interview, Paris, 9 June 2011.

110. SETA Interview, Paris, 9 June 2011.

participation in the Anatolian Eagle exercise. The rift deepened after bickering over Turkish TV series<sup>111</sup> to Israel's "low seat" incident<sup>112</sup>. The relationship then exploded after the Mavi Marmara incident in which Israeli soldiers boarded a boat carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza, killing nine Turkish citizens and wounding many others.

The killing of nine Turkish citizens by Israeli soldiers in international waters was met with strong criticism, which emphasized Israel's disproportionate use of force and the way in which it addressed the issue with the international community. Several European leaders publicly invited Israel to agree to the establishment of an independent investigative commission.<sup>113</sup> Turkey's reaction was harsh. Diplomatic efforts to bring the incident before international organizations in order to condemn Israel were at full speed. Turkey conditioned repairing relations with Israel on three major demands: an apology from Israel, removal of the Gaza blockade and compensation for the victims. Israel refused to accede to Turkish demands, and the publication of a United Nations report increased the tension in Turkish-Israeli relations. The report accepted the legality of the Gaza blockade, and Turkey downgraded relations with Israel to the Second Secretary level, expelling Israel's ambassador and suspending the countries' military ties.<sup>114</sup>

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The relationship between Turkey and Israel will never be as close as it was in the 1990s. Yet, the extent to which the Turkey-Israel divergence will lead to a split between Europe and Turkey is hard to know. Thus far, the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations has not substantially affected Turkey-EU relations.

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Confused by the sudden change in bilateral relations between once-close partners, Europeans are struggling to understand where Turkish-Israeli relations are headed. Is the deterioration permanent or temporary? Is the change in the nature of relations between Israel and Turkey a direct result of the AK Party's changes to Turkish foreign policy? What is the role of religion in the Turkish leaders' harsh rhetoric against Israeli actions? In answering these questions, Europeans are highly pessimistic about the future of Turkish-Israeli relations. Although many Europeans expect some repairs to bilateral relations, they argue that the relationship between Turkey and Israel will never be as close as it was in the 1990s.<sup>115</sup> Yet, the extent to which the Turkey-Israel divergence will lead to a split between Europe and Turkey is hard to know. Thus far, the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations has not substantially affected Turkey-EU relations.<sup>116</sup> Nor has it damaged European perceptions of Turkey as much as Turkey's Iran policy has. There is even some sympathy with, and understanding of, Turkey in Europe in the aftermath of the Mavi Marmara incident, argue scholars.<sup>117</sup>

When compared with the United States, European views of Turkey's Israel policy are less critical. Pro-Palestinian public opinion in Europe and frustration with Israeli decision-making are two important factors that lend nuance to

111. The clips of the concerned TV series, broadcasted by Turkey's state-owned TRT television channel, portrayed criticism from Israel for portraying Israeli soldiers committing murder and killing Palestinian children. The program was perceived as anti-Semitic by Israel.

112. In protest of the Turkish soap-opera, Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon received Turkish Ambassador Ahmet Oğuz Çelikkol seating him on a lower seat than himself. He was photographed in that position, making it look like Çelikkol was speaking to a superior.

113. "EU demands inquiry after Israeli raid on ships, Turkey outraged", *Deutsche Welle*, 31 May 2010.

114. "Turkey expels Israeli diplomats after UN report", *Hurriyet Daily News*, 2 September 2011.

115. "Relationship between Turkey and Israel will never be what they were in the past. But I don't think they are heading to this sort of end destination that a lot of people talk about. I don't think the path will go like V-shape out, I think what they will do is that path is going to go out to different level and then they will continue in parallel but not as closest as they used to. That's my sense.", SETA Interview, London, February 23 2011.

116. "Turkish-Israeli relations created some differences between Turkey and EU but there is nothing lasting which has long run negative impact on relations between EU and Turkey", SETA Interview, Berlin, 2 May 2011.

117. "Turkey's harsh reaction to Israel particularly after Mavi Marmara incident is more understandable in Europe than Turkey's dealing with Iran, this is associated with pro-palestinian public opinion in Europe. There was a lot of outrage over Gaza conflict", SETA Interview, Oxford, 24 February, 2011.

Europeans' understanding of Turkish-Israeli relations. The German Marshall Fund's most recent transatlantic trends survey confirms the U.S.-Europe divergence on the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. According to the survey, the plurality of European respondents (38%) favor putting more pressure on Israel, while in the United States, the majority of respondents favored putting more pressure on the Palestinians to resolve the conflict.<sup>118</sup>

That being said, Europeans commonly oppose the demonization of Israel.<sup>119</sup> The main aspect of concern regarding Turkish-Israeli relations is not Turkey's reaction to the Mavi Marmara incident and its following demands, but instead Turkish leaders' intense criticism of Israel. Europeans understand the influence of pro-Palestinian public opinion on the Turkish government; however, Europeans also think that harsh rhetoric employed against Israel creates the impression that Turkey seeks to present itself as a spokesperson for the Arab world. Europeans believe Turkey has weakened its hand by losing ties to Israel. What made Turkey and its foreign policy interesting, in this view, was its close links to both Arab countries and Israel.<sup>120</sup> Weakened relations with Israel have diminished Turkey's role as broker—and, consequently, its sizeable influence in the Middle East.

Recent Arab revolutions have added another dimension to Turkey's Middle East policy. Popular uprisings for freedom and dignity across the Arab world have raised questions both in the East and West about the role Turkey could play in the region. No one in Europe denies that the Arab Spring has created both opportunities and challenges in Turkish foreign policy. As a country which enjoys significant popularity among Arab populations, these people expected much of Turkey—even calling on Turkish leaders to side with their democratic demands against their autocratic leaders. Turkey's political and economic experience has also been presented as a source of inspiration for the region's countries in transition.

Nevertheless, there are also challenges. Under Davutoğlu's ambitious zero problems with neighbors policy, Turkey expanded relations with Arab regimes in the region, many of whom are now facing democratic challenges mounted by their people. These uprisings have spread from one country to the next, unseating the decades-old regimes of Tunisia's Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Egypt's Hosni Mubarak and placing many others in jeopardy. As the Arab Spring spread to Turkey's immediate neighborhood, it became clear that Turkey's zero problems with neighbors policy would require serious revision in consideration of people's aspirations for rights and freedoms.<sup>121</sup>

Europeans are both skeptical and hopeful regarding Turkey's response to the Arab Spring. Prime Minister Erdoğan acted boldly when he became the first leader in Europe in the Middle East to call on Mubarak to step down, heeding the demands of the Egyptian people. This move increased Turkey's profile as the most sensible power broker in the region. However, Europeans then found Turkey's position on Libya inconsistent.<sup>122</sup> By opposing NATO intervention in Libya, Turkey found itself at odds with the West's liberal interventionist policies. As NATO discussions amplified on a no-fly zone over Libyan airspace and intervention to protect civilians from Qaddafi forces, Erdoğan clarified Turkey's position, stating, "what would NATO do in Libya?...We oppose it, such a thing cannot even be discussed."<sup>123</sup> Turkey was subsequently compelled to change its position on intervention and made significant contribution to the imposition of no-fly zone and sanctions.

Some in Europe believe Turkey's Libya policy represented an inconsistent double standard. Not unlike other Western powers, Turkey found itself caught between oppressive regimes and people's demands.<sup>124</sup> Erdoğan's demand on

118. "Transatlantic Trends 2011" *German Marshall Fund* 2011, p.36.

119. A term used by Slovak Zizek in an interview with *Radikal*, "Avrupa'nın geleceği Osmanlı gibi olmalı", *Radikal*, 2 October 2011; SETA Interview, Berlin, 2 May 2011; SETA Interview, London, 22 February 2011.

120. Brokering was much smarter than harshly criticising Israel almost every day", SETA Interview, London, 23 February, 2011.

121. For more debates on Arab Spring and Turkey, see Ibrahim Kalin, "Turkey and the Arab Spring", *Al-Jazeera*, 25 May 2011; Nuh Yilmaz, "New Turkey and Arab Spring", *OpenDemocracy*, 20 April 2011; Ömer Taşpınar, "Arab Spring a mixed blessing for Turkey and Iran", *Today's Zaman*, 18 April 2011; Anthony Shadid, "Unrest around the Arab World Endangers Turkey's Newfound Influence", *The New York Times*, 4 May 2011; Amanda Paul and Demir Murat Seyrek, "Turkish Foreign Policy and the Arab Spring", *European Policy Centre*, 15 July 2011; Burak Bilgehan Özpek, "Arab Spring or Turkish Winter", *Near East Quarterly*, 7 September 2011.

122. "Turkey sent unclear messages to Libya", SETA Interview, Paris, 7 June 2011; SETA Interview, Berlin, 4 May 2011.

123. "NATO'nun Libya'da ne işi var", *Hurriyet*, 1 March, 2011.

124. "Turkey, just like western states, was typically torn between its interests and its principles and values, or between short term and longer term considerations. Perhaps Turkey has now joined the real world. You can't be friends with everyone, there can't be zero problems in a neighborhood where there are so many antagonisms, you can't embrace dictators and support democratization – or rather, you can,

Mubarak was uncomplicated, as Turkey did not have strong relations with his regime; however, when it came to Libya—a country with which Turkey had close economic ties—the decision was far more difficult. The Turkish leadership's cautious approach with Libya sent mixed messages to the region.

Some observers view Turkey's hesitations about intervention by hastily-formed coalitions as reasonable.<sup>125</sup> With visible disagreements among European partners, Turks were not the only ones to voice reluctance toward military operation to Libya.<sup>126</sup> Germany's abstention from the Security Council vote authorizing the establishment of a no-fly zone over Libya and its election not to participate in the military operation highlighted material differences among European partners. So was there a real European unity from which Turkey diverged? Turkey, in this sense, acted just like other countries, forming its Libyan policy in light of how it perceived the emerging reality.

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Despite some inconsistencies, on balance Europeans perceive Turkey as having been sophisticated in its attempt to navigate regimes and popular demands in the region. Nevertheless, when asked exactly what role Turkey should play, Europeans cannot articulate a clear vision.

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On Syria, the Turkish approach is very much in line with Europe, committed to gradual democratization and opposed to sectarian and ethnic civil conflicts. Having maintained good relations both with Bashar Assad's regime and the opposition, Turkey hoped to use its influence with both sides to promote gradual democratization. Nevertheless, when Ankara's calls on Assad to accede to opposition demands did not stop his brutal crackdown, Turkey adopted sanctions on the Syrian regime and lent its hand to the peaceful protestors. With Russia and China opposing sanctions at the United Nations, Turkey's unilateral sanctions aligned Ankara more closely with the West.

Reluctance of Assad regime to listen to Ankara's warnings has spurred another wave of debate in the West over lack of results that Turkish foreign policy delivers. It has been debated in some circles that Turkey has over-estimated its soft power over Damascus regime meaning Ankara was not as influential as it thought it was. In this respect, Europeans also found Turkish leaders' assumptions naïve in believing they could persuade noncompliant autocratic rulers to heed the legitimate demands of their people and pave the way for democratic transition.<sup>127</sup>

Nevertheless, given the mind-boggling pace of the events concerning Syria, that debate proved short-lived. Strong stance taken by Ankara against the Assad regime – which includes such steps as giving overt support to Syrian opposition, basing Syrian National Council in Istanbul, welcoming the Arab League decision to suspend Syrian membership, denouncing Syrian regime for the blood shell at every opportunity and etc.-, once more, put Turkey a relatively advantageous position vis-à-vis other western actors. With its Syria policy, Turkey, once more, is considered to signal to the world that it has a big stake in the future of the Middle East that the West needs to reckon and cooperate with.

but you will be hypocritical and inconsistent', SETA Interview, London, 23 February 2011; 'The message Turkey sent to Libya was very unclear; first Turkey was against intervention, so why ask them what to do in intervention. We did not understand what Turks wanted in France, Turks went out the door but came back from the window', SETA Interview, Paris, 7 June 2011.

125. 'Libya is a catch 22 situation. Not to intervene would have also been problematic Qaddafi would have used its influence to destabilize Egypt and Tunisia because he never accepted revolution. Intervention would also have been problematic, then people are enthusiastic about Arab revolution because it was a home-grown revolution with no foreign intervention not like Iraqi case where people come from distant geographies and tell you that they bring you democracy. And secondly we don't know much about transitional council in Libya, and most of the guys are former associates of Qaddafi for decades. I think Turkey took absolutely the right decision, Brazil and Germany also', SETA Interview, Paris, 8 June 2011.

126. For instance, Italy and France clashed over NATO takeover of the military operation; while France opposed to the NATO takeover of the Libyan intervention, Italy threatened to withdraw from the military operation if NATO did not take control of the intervention. Moreover, Belgium opposed to arming of the Libyan rebels, idea considered by Britain and France.

127. 'It was naïve on the part of Turkish elites to believe that they could persuade Qaddafi to push for political reforms and mediate between the regime and rebels', SETA Interview, Berlin, 4 May 2011.

Overall, European observers acknowledge Turkey's growing role and influence in the Middle East. Turkey's increasing influence in the Middle East is seen as even more critical by Europeans, due to the developments of the Arab spring. Despite some inconsistencies, on balance Europeans perceive Turkey as having been sophisticated in its attempt to navigate regimes and popular demands in the region. Nevertheless, when asked exactly what role Turkey should play, Europeans cannot articulate a clear vision.<sup>128</sup>

### iii) Turkey's European Union Membership Project

The confusion in Europe with respect to Turkey's ambitions also stems from the uncertain future of Turkish-EU relations. The blockage of several chapters in response to the Cyprus problem and France's unilateral rejection have stalled the accession process, engendering skepticism among Turkey's leaders and population about the EU's objectivity. As EU membership seems more distant than at any other point in recent years, a new discourse has been added to Turkey-EU relations. European intellectual circles have considered the possibility that Turks are no longer interested in EU membership. These scholars wonder whether Turkish politicians seek the process more than the actual membership.<sup>129</sup> This perception is strengthened by less-than-enthusiastic statements by Turkish leaders about EU membership<sup>130</sup> and the slow pace of political reform process.

Turkey's recent emphasis on the accession process rather than the eventual membership reflects Turks' declining trust in the EU. The blunt opposition of France and Germany to Turkey's full membership played a role in Turkey's alienation from the organization. According to a significant number of European observers, frustration with the way negotiations unfolded compelled Turkey's leaders to pursue an active foreign policy that cast Turkey as a regional power in the Middle East.<sup>131</sup> Further, the economic hardships sweeping the European continent might have diminished Turks' trust in the future of the EU, spurring the country to diversify its relations with neighbors.<sup>132</sup> However, some still contend that Turkey's active foreign policy is mainly motivated by a desire to make the country more interesting to the EU. In this view, Turkey still seeks full integration in the EU and uses its increasing regional influence to attract European attention.

Irrespective of differing analyses, European observers largely agree a link exists between Turkey's stalled EU accession process and its proactive foreign policy in the Middle East. An analyst from Britain argues that a distinction should be made between correlation and causation.<sup>133</sup> The overt position of Germany and France could have fuelled Turkey's pursuit of an increasing role in the Middle East instead of waiting for EU membership; yet, the stalled EU bid alone cannot explain Turkey's shift in focus. A more analytical approach that takes into account systemic, regional and domestic changes that have induced Turkey towards multi-directional foreign policy should be developed in this regard.

Turkey's increasing involvement in the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus triggered another debate over whether Turkey's regional power ambitions contradict its EU integration process. The answer given to this question is closely related to one's position on Turkey's EU membership. Those in support of Turkey's membership believe Europe would benefit from Turkey's increasing influence in these regions, while those who oppose Turkey's bid feel

128. "We do not have a realistic assessment of what role Turkey could play in the region especially in the post-Arab spring", SETA Interview, Berlin, 2 May 2011.

129. "For the time being both sides are comfortable with the way negotiations go, in a way they like status-quo", SETA Interview, Berlin, 2 May 2011.

130. In his last visit to Berlin in September 2011, President Abdullah Gül implied that Turkey might also need to reconsider its decision to join the EU once accession negotiations are over. See "Turkey will be fine if its EU bid fails, says Gul", *Hurriyet Daily News*, 19 September 2011.

131. "Turkey-EU relations have certainly lost momentum. Turkey now says we have looked towards the West a lot, but now it's the time to make the investment we haven't made in the past to the East. In the absence of that then Turkey realized it has a lot of gains to make, a lot of new friendships to establish, therefore looking East and South and North makes a lot of sense. Turkey has more options than the option to wait for Europe. I think that's a mature position to have, it is a realistic position to have and good position to have because today Germany and France are against Turkish accession and there is nothing Turkey can do about that", SETA Interview, Oxford, 24 February, 2011.

132. "Turkey and the Middle East: Ambitions and Constraints", *International Crisis Group*, Europe Report No: 203, 7 April 2010, p. 6.

133. "While opposition of Germany and France may have strengthened the hands of those who believe Turkey should look elsewhere, I am not convinced that it has effectively casued it; we have to draw a distinction between causation and correlation", SETA Interview, 23 February 2011.

discomfort at Turkey's more independent approach to foreign policy. On an intellectual level, the majority of European observers believe that Turkey's strong foreign policy would boost Europe's global profile. "We have Britain and France in the EU with global aspirations, so why would Turkey's be a problem," challenges one British scholar.<sup>134</sup>

In the recent analysis by Isabelle Ioannides for the European Union for Security Studies (EUSS) on the Arab Spring titled *Transformations in the Arab World: What's Next?*, the EUSS recommends cooperation with Turkey. Ioannides—who also serves as a policy adviser to the EU commission—concludes that "regardless of the results of its EU accession process, Turkey is a major player to reckon (and cooperate) with."<sup>135</sup> The current deadlock in the accession process makes it exceedingly unlikely that Turkey will be granted membership any time soon. This obliges both parties to develop a new way of engaging on issues of mutual concern—foreign policy, defense, security and energy—in ways that do not fixate on the accession process. A great many European intellectuals believe that today's key foreign policy issues cannot be dealt with through the prism of the highly bureaucratic and technocratic accession process.<sup>136</sup> In this regard, Catherine Ashton's, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, attempt to encourage a strategic dialogue mechanism between the EU and Turkey is a welcome initiative, though it remains uncertain how this mechanism would work. European observers warn against it being an alternative to the accession process, instead believing it should complement that process.<sup>137</sup>

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As seen from Europe, debates over Turkey's potential to inspire change in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have been covered extensively and have been met with great interest. European observers acknowledge that the Arab region holds Turkey in high regard, with most of the credit due to Turkish leaders.

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## B. Turkey as a Source of Inspiration: Model Debates

Turkey has recently become a reference point for its neighbors on account of its political and economic ascent. Under AK Party rule, the country has witnessed sweeping democratic reforms. With the support of EU, the government has—in a short period of time—improved the country's human rights record, expanded its democratic elements, reduced the army's role in politics and ameliorated the conditions of minorities. Parallel to these political developments, the AK Party government has made massive economic strides. Between 2002 and 2007, Turkey experienced strong economic growth with annual growth rates hovering around six percent. The banking regulations adopted by the government in the aftermath of 2001 economic crisis helped the Turkish economy withstand the pressures of the recent global economic crisis. Turkey continued to grow at an astonishingly rapid rate: 8.9 percent growth in 2010<sup>138</sup> followed by 11.6 percent and 8.8 percent in the first two quarters of 2011, respectively.<sup>139</sup> Turkey's ascent has extended to the foreign policy realm as well. A more independent and assertive tone on such vexing issues as the Israel-Palestine conflict and Iran's nuclear program has been met favorably in the Middle East, increasing Turkey's regional profile.

With the Arab Spring, Turkey's increasing regional profile has entered a new phase. Though Turkey was previously the subject of debates over shifting axes, the country has been upheld as a role model for countries in the Middle

134. SETA Interview, London, 23 February 2011.

135. Isabella Ioannides, "Transformations in the Arab World: What's Next", *European Union for Security Studies*, 28 September 2011.

136. Katinka Barch, "Why the EU and Turkey need to cooperate their foreign policies", *Commentary, Carnegie Endowment*, 31 August 2011.

137. Natasha Wunch, "EU-Turkey: Asymmetric relationship" in *Crossing Borders: Rethinking the European Union's Neighbourhood Policies*, Almut Moller eds., DGAPAnalyse 2, August 2011, pp. 39-42.

138. "Türkiye 2010'da yüzde 8.9 büyüdü", *Hürriyet*, 31 March 2011.

139. "Türkiye dünya ikincisi", *Gazetevatan*, 12 September 2011.

East and North Africa. More interestingly, just as the term “shift of axis” is an American coinage, so, too, the term “model country” originated in the United States. Yet, debates over the Turkish model’s relevance in the democratization process of the Arab and Muslim worlds have moved beyond the United States, sparking heated discussions both in Europe and Middle East. Furthermore, this does not mark the first time Turkey has been upheld as a model country for the Middle East.<sup>140</sup> The Bush administration, in the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>, declared Turkey a model country—a good example for Muslims around the world with its modern and secular democracy.<sup>141</sup> Despite Bush’s pronouncement causing some heated debates in Turkey, these did not extend much beyond ready-made clichés—that Turkey sets an example for the coexistence of Islam and democracy. Only in 2011, after the Arab Spring’s emergence, has the term has been the focus of in-depth discussions about the Turkish model: of what does it consist, and what does it mean for the Middle East and the West.

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On the question of what the Turkish model consists of, the European approach is cautious and fluid for two major reasons.

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As seen from Europe, debates over Turkey’s potential to inspire change in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have been covered extensively and have been met with great interest. European observers acknowledge that the Arab region holds Turkey in high regard, with most of the credit due to Turkish leaders. In little over a decade, they have turned their country into a nation that is perceived positively across the Middle East.<sup>142</sup> Turkey’s soft power, active diplomacy and economic and political development have all played a role in changing the country’s negative image into a positive one in the Arab world. Separate polls conducted by The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV)<sup>143</sup> and the Arab American Institute in Washington<sup>144</sup> also reveal the positive perception of Turks by Arabs, who see Turkey as a genuine regional power committed to democratic values and political reform across the Arab world.

However, on the question of what the Turkish model consists of, the European approach is cautious and fluid for two major reasons. First, there is a feeling that defending the Turkish experience as a model of democratic transition could be understood as a Western imposition or outside management of Muslim affairs.<sup>145</sup> This could damage the potential of Turkey to inspire positive change in the region. Second, European hesitations regarding the Turkish model also stem from the ambiguities surrounding the model’s content itself. This view sees the Turkish model as open to more than one interpretation. Reflective of this general European perspective, one scholar asks, “which model can Turkey offer: is it Turkey of military takeovers or is it rather Turkey of 2000s, where the country has performed great political and economic progress?”<sup>146</sup>

One implied meaning of the Turkish model for Europeans is a state where the military assumes a dominant position in political life and where the transition to democracy is controlled, limited and interrupted by military interventions. Although a political model with military supremacy might interest some Europeans as a way to put checks and balances against Islamist movements in short run, the general perception among European intellectuals is that central-

140. For a detailed analysis see Meliha Altunisik (2005), “The Turkish model and democratization in the Middle East”, *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 27(1-2) (Winter-Spring), pp. 45-63.

141. “Türkiye İslam ülkelerine örnek olmalı”, *Milliyet*, 30 June 2004.

142. “Reflective of general European view” Thinking the long resentment, changing Turkey’s perceptions in the Arab world in last few years was a great success. Erdoğan’s strong stance against Israel helped improve the image of Turkey. Arabs also see consistent economic growth and stable democracy which has been able to integrate conservative Muslim party to the political system. So they are very impressed with Turkey”, SETA Interview, Paris, 8 June 2011.

143. Mensur Akgun, Sabiha Senyuçel et al, “Perception of Turkey in the Middle East 2010”, *Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation*, 2 February 2011.

144. James Zogby, “Arab Attitudes toward Iran”, *Arab American Institute Foundation, Analysis*.

145. “We have two ways of seeing Turkish model. One way is promoting Turkish model as a model of transition and other way is regarding it as a Western imposition of a certain political model. These are two completely contradictory ways of seeing it.”, SETA Interview, Paris, 7 June 2011.

146. SETA Interview, Paris, 7 June 2011; “Which model are we talking about, is it secular democracy or military guardianship?” Bill Park, SETA Panel on the New Middle East and Turkish foreign policy, Ankara, 13 October 2011.

izing the military will cause problems for Middle Eastern countries in the long run.<sup>147</sup> On the other hand, if model is meant to convey a country in which political Islam is integrated into a modern and democratic framework, then the Turkish experience might offer insight into the evolution of political Islam in MENA.<sup>148</sup>

However, Europeans do not see Turkey as a model for the Middle East in either of these narratives. The term “model” is seen as very simplistic in that it overlooks fundamental distinctions that render Turkey’s democratization process different in kind. European intellectuals warn against exaggerating the commonalities between the political experiences of Turkey and Middle Eastern countries.<sup>149</sup> Turkey’s unique experience with secularism, its history and socio-political conditions and its long-standing relationship with the West are commonly viewed as not replicable in the Arab world today. Also, given the great differences in political and economic development levels between Turkey and Middle East countries, when Turkey talks about democratization, it appears as a Western country more than as a country experienced in comparable scenarios in the Arab world.<sup>150</sup>

Instead, European analysts widely promote the view that Turkey, with its experience in successfully blending democracy and Islam, could constitute a source of inspiration—rather than a political model—for those countries in the region aspiring for democratic change.<sup>151</sup> However, Turkey’s potential as a source of inspiration is very much tied to Turkey’s own internal developments.<sup>152</sup> Not coincidentally, debates over Turkey as a model have arisen alongside the reform process and democratization under AK Party rule. It would have been difficult for Turkey to be labeled a source of inspiration if it had not undertaken the reforms it did, one analyst explained.<sup>153</sup> Another analyst from Germany warns that the intensification of the Kurdish problem, the problems with long arrests and press freedom and the detention of journalists create ambivalence regarding whether Turkey could in fact help Middle Eastern countries transition to democracy.<sup>154</sup>

If Turkey offers any model at all, some European observers assert, it is the AK Party’s own model.<sup>155</sup> The evolution of the AK Party from an Islamist movement to a pragmatic and moderate party, well-integrated into the secular and

147. “When people talk about Turkey being a model they often do not know what they mean. Is it about military being guardian-some say military council emerging as in Egyptian case- or Tunisia where military was decisive in bringing street demonstration to a hold, that is a sort of Turkish model that many people would horror with the idea of this being a model whether home or abroad”, SETA Interview, Oxford, 24 February, 2011.

148. More on model debates see Nuh Yilmaz and Burhanettin Duran, “Whose model? Which Turkey?”, *Foreign Policy*, 8 February 2011; Ömer Taşpınar, “Arab Spring and the duality of the Turkish Model”, *Today’s Zaman*, 7 August 2011; Razmig Shirinian, “Arab Spring and the Turkish Model”, *OpenDemocracy*, 14 August 2011; “Turkey and the Arab Spring: a Flawed Example”, *Economist*, 24 September 2011; Victor Makerov and Eldar Mamedov, “The Turkish Model for the Arab world? Think Twice”, *Turkish Policy Center*, 1 April 2011; Ömer Taşpınar, “Uneven Fit: the “Turkish Model” and the Arab World”, *The Brookings Institute*, Analysis Paper, No. 5, August 2003; Emad Y. Kaddorah (2010), “The Turkish Model: Acceptability and Apprehension”, *Insight Turkey*, 12(4), pp. 113-129.

149. “Turkey’s experience is valuable. But there are key differences, one key difference is the strength of tarikats in Turkey, tarikat tradition in Turkey goes back hundreds of years. Egypt does not have such organized groups, you have Muslim Brotherhood but it is nowhere as organized, disciplined and internationally engaged as tarikats in Turkey. That is a big difference. Secondly, Turkish military, in a way, guided the democracy process for years, one of their viewpoints was copying institutions of the West. Egyptian military does not share the Western view of Turkish army. Other fundamental difference is that Turkish economy is much more vibrant. Turkish economy has a strong industrial and manufacturing base, growing services sector and growing export strategy. Region’s economies, on the other hand, are far much underdeveloped. So there are strong fundamental differences for Turkey to be a model”, SETA Interview, London, 25 February, 2011; “Elements of Turkish experience are different; for one thing Turkey is rather a homogeneous country which is not the case for several Arab countries who are deeply split along sectarian lines”, SETA Interview, Paris, 8 June 2011.

150. Bill Park, SETA Panel on the “New Middle East and Turkish foreign policy”, Ankara, 13 October 2011.

151. “Turkey presents lessons to be learnt, and how to adopt and change, not a model to follow. Turkey is an experience that Arab people inspire to”, SETA Interview, London, 25 February, 2011; “I think we are talking about analogies rather than models like interesting aspects which could be borrowed from and could be explored. We are not talking about a fully form, blueprinted transforming other country. You would not expect it to work. So source of inspiration is a nice way of putting it because it is a way of giving more positive esteem as well. I think countries if they change beyond the leader, the actual process of government will need to be quite different in the future. Then the Middle East needs a lot of inspiration. Different countries depending on their different circumstances will need different kind of source of inspiration. So if Turkey is part of that inspiration, that is a good thing, but we should not confine it to Turkey, we may find different variations.”, Oxford, 24 February 2011.

152. “Turkey is not a stabilized democracy, so there is still a lot to do, the way journalists are dealt with hurts Turkish model debates, so Turkish model is very much depended on internal politics”, SETA Interview, Paris, 7 June 2011.

153. SETA Interview, Berlin, 3 May 2011.

154. SETA Interview, Berlin, 4 May 2011.

155. “AK Party itself is an example of a party that has had to negotiate constraints of democratic institutions and diversity of opinion in Turkish society. AK Party has pushed forward institutional changes many of which could be interpreted as strengthening Turkish democracy. Therefore the party is quite an interesting model for anyone who might have a dichotomy of Western democracy versus Muslim state. In that sense AK party provides a challenge to that simplistic idea”, SETA Interview, London, 24 February 2011.

democratic system, offers insights into the future of political Islam in the Middle East. By acting within the confines of the law and by pushing for an impressive list of reforms in human rights and democratization, the AK Party has demonstrated that a party with Islamic background can also embody and strengthen democratic order. According to the majority of European scholars, the AK Party model could serve as an asset in inspiring broadly-based and powerful Islamist movements across the Arab world to unify under political platforms and express themselves via democratic channels. Any system that fails to earn the support of Islamist movements or excludes them entirely is bound to fail. Europeans' understanding of the Turkish model is similar to Turkey's own understanding. Some observers find Turkey's cautious approach to using the term model very clever. The concept implies a sense of superiority, where the role model is emulated by others. Turkish leaders have declared at times that Turkey does not claim to be a model, but instead a source of inspiration.<sup>156</sup> Characterizing Turkey's role as an inspiration provides a more nuanced frame than does the model country concept, which entails a reductionist, fixed and imposing meaning.

Some believe the debate over terminology ascribes Turkey a passive role. Turkey's role as an example is immaterial; rather, as one German analyst explained, the important question is, can Turkey affect the future of the region on a concrete, practical level.<sup>157</sup> The relevance of a "Turkish model" will depend on what kinds of regimes are formed from popular revolutions in the Arab world. If these regimes cannot develop into thriving Muslim democracies, then the Turkish model would bear little significance.<sup>158</sup>

### C. Turkey's Foreign Policy Capacity: Question of Overstretching

Turkey's quest for increasing political, economic and cultural influence on its neighbors in the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus has brought along ambitious foreign policy activism in recent years. While improving its relations with neighboring states through political and economic integration under its zero problems policy, Turkey also raised its profile as a mediator by actively taking part in resolving several inter-state and intra state conflicts in its multi-regional environment, even extending its reach to South Asia. The mediation of the Syrian-Israeli peace talks in 2008; the nuclear swap deal between the West and Iran in 2010; the triangle meetings between Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia; and the trust-building talks between Afghanistan and Pakistan are among the conflicts in which Turkey has enhanced its visibility as an emerging mediator. Turkey's mediation efforts have not just been confined to inter-state conflicts. Turkey has also displayed active involvement in intra state disputes between groups within Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon, severally.

Turkey's peace-building attempts have garnered international praise; however, they have also fuelled debates over whether Turkey extends beyond its central capabilities. Evidence of this debate in Europe has also been vivid, with broad consensus among European observers that Turkey overstretches its resources in foreign policy realm.<sup>159</sup> Though active engagement in conflicts across diverse regions may have earned Turkey international recognition, it does not necessarily equate with outcomes. The common view of Turkey's mediation diplomacy is that Turkey confuses activity with value.<sup>160</sup> By taking active part in the resolution of thorny and protracted conflicts, Turkish leaders risk investing vast resources and time in diverse issues that are hard to solve.

What is Turkey's motivation then? Why is the country dealing with these conflicts knowing that resolving them on its

156. "Erdoğan: Türkiye'nin model olma gayreti yok", *Hürriyet*, 30 June 2011.

157. SETA Interview, Berlin, 4 May 2011.

158. "The model AK Party set up is a very important reference point for Arab revolutionary movements. Now the main question what will happen with Arab revolutions. I believe that Arab revolutions are social revolutions coming from societies with no political ideology, programs or leaders. There is uncertainty with respect to the question of whether these revolutions would turn to political revolutions to create new regimes. If they are able to do so, I'm quite convinced that AK party's model in particular and Turkish experience in general would be very efficient. But if these revolutions are not able to transform themselves to political revolutions then Arab Spring will only be a spring like French May 68 revolution and Turkish experience would not make sense", SETA Interview, Paris, 9 June 2011.

159. "Engaging in every conflict will not necessarily promote Turkey's international position.", SETA Interview, Berlin, 2 May 2011.

160. "I think Turkey, to some extent, has overestimated its mediator role. Turkish leaders should be a bit more cautious in its mediation in terms of not trying to mediate every conflict in the region, because some of the conflicts are just transitory like dispute between Syria and Iraq.. That's where Turkey has to be a bit more careful as conflicts that suddenly appear in the Middle East can quickly disappear so Turkey should not try to mediate every tiny disputes, conflicts in the region but choose very carefully which conflicts to mediate. Engaging in every conflict will not necessarily promote Turkey's international position.", SETA Interview, London, 25 February 2011.

own is a challenge? Is Turkey really interested in resolving arduous conflicts? From a European perspective, Turkey's mediation diplomacy is a mix of pragmatism and romanticism. It is pragmatic in the sense that Turkey uses mediation as a means to increase its regional and international visibility. Though Turkish leaders understand they cannot solve intractable problems such as the Israel-Palestine conflict themselves, their presence enhances Turkey's international role, according to one British scholar.<sup>161</sup> Another scholar from France adds that Turkey sees mediation as a platform where it can market its foreign policy.<sup>162</sup> Turkey's mediation diplomacy is also romantic in that Turkish leaders naively believe their close relationships with the involved parties could help them enact solutions. Although close links and personal relations may be helpful to a certain extent, they are not enough to yield tangible outcomes on their own. Another reservation expressed about Turkish foreign policy is the question of whether Turkey can sustain its current level of activism given the financial and diplomatic resources required. Although the Turkish economy is the fastest growing economy in Europe—and the second fastest growing in the world—European scholars doubt whether Turkey's growth is fast enough to sustain its current commitments. Turkey's positive regional image is significant in increasing country's soft power, but affecting the situation on the ground requires material support as well.

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Actually, Turkish development aid has increased in recent years. As an emerging donor country, Turkey has increased its development aid from \$66.63 million in 2003 to \$966.82 million in 2010.<sup>163</sup> Turkey's foreign aid is not limited to official development assistance alone. In an interview with the daily newspaper *Zaman*, the Turkish Development Agency (TIKA) president noted that Turkish foreign aid from both private and public sources reached a total of \$3 billion in 2008.<sup>164</sup> Serving over 100 countries, Turkish aid mainly goes to Central Asia, the Caucasus, Afghanistan and Palestine. Recently, Turkey boosted its donor profile through the aid campaign it launched for famine-stricken Somalia with the total raised amounting to \$495.1 million.<sup>165</sup> Moreover, in the wake of the Arab Spring, Turkey was one of the first countries to allocate aid to Libya, which received a total of \$300 million—\$200 million as a loan and another \$100 million as a donation.<sup>166</sup>

However, despite increasing levels of Turkish foreign aid, European observers doubt whether Turkey's current economic resources can sustain this level of activism in multiple regions. The country's diplomatic resources, meanwhile, remain limited despite Turkey's recent foreign policy expansion. Therefore, investment in too many issues runs the risk of yielding ineffective use of resources. Turkey should more carefully consider which issues represent priorities in order to allocate its economic and diplomatic assets in an appropriate manner.

While European observers demonstrate general consensus that Turkish foreign policy is overstretched, some see this as an inevitable feature of being a rising power. All rising powers tend to overestimate themselves by affecting higher status in the world than actual capacity dictates, explains one French scholar.<sup>167</sup> In this sense, Turkey's foreign

161. "Davutoğlu knows that he cannot solve Nagora-Karabakh conflict or he cannot deal with Lebanon alone. The mere fact that he is present in each of all shows that he insists to enhance Turkey's role." SETA Interview, London, 23 February 2011.

162. "One thing that's interesting about Turkey's mediation diplomacy is that it is done in a very overt way. It was the case during mediation between Israel and Syria, especially. Turkey made it so public that you have the feeling that Turks are extremely proud of their successes so they market it. But foreign policy is not about marketing", SETA Interview, Paris, 7 June 2011.

163. For Turkish Official Development Aid see [http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=ODA\\_DONOR](http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=ODA_DONOR)

164. TIKA boosts Turkey's International standing through aid projects", *Today's Zaman*, 22 May 2009.

165. Turkish aid to Somalia reached 495.1 million dollars", *TRT-English*, 23 September 2011.

166. "New help on the way for Libya", *Hurriyet Daily News*, 26 August 2011.

167. "All rising powers are over-stressing themselves. The very meaning of concept of rising power is to say I was in the second class and now I plan to be in the first one. This is a common denominator of all rising powers", SETA Interview, Paris, 9 June 2011.

policy overreach is not unique. At the same time, Turkey's overreach is a product of its regional environment. Turkey's rough and conflict-riddled neighborhood compels the country to address several conflicts simultaneously. Turkey cannot stay silent and passive in the face of challenging regional problems, according to another leading French scholar. Turkey needs to be actively involved in resolving these diverse conflicts—which, in turn, feeds the problem of foreign policy overreach.<sup>168</sup>

#### D. Question of Neo-Ottomanism

As noted earlier, Turkey's multi-regional foreign policy activism has focused on the Middle East, the Balkans and the Caucasus—all former Ottoman territories—which has refueled an old debate in the West: is Turkish foreign policy neo-Ottoman in character? The concept was first used to depict trends in Turkish foreign policy during the administration of Turgut Özal. The concept lacks clear definition; In foreign policy, a neo-Ottoman foreign policy might refer to an active and dynamic diplomacy in which Turkey takes strong interest in proximate regions — including the Balkans, the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia — that were historically part of the Ottoman Empire. During Özal's tenure as Prime Minister, Turkey's opening toward Central Asia—with which Turkey shared linguistic, ethnic and religious ties—was assessed within the framework of neo-Ottomanism.

The debate has re-emerged under the AK Party government. Some scholars have situated Ahmet Davutoğlu's *Strategic Depth*—the Minister of Foreign Affairs's book which details the AK Party's foreign policy doctrine— within the broader neo-Ottoman framework for understanding what drives Turkey's interests in its broader region. Yet, as noted above, the meaning of neo-Ottomanism is ill-defined. There is little agreement about what the indicators of neo-Ottomanism are or of what the approach consists. While some see it as a political project that Turkey seeks to achieve, others see it as merely an emotional longing that has no political content. However, whether it is political or nostalgic, the term has a strong religious connotation. Just like in losing Turkey debates, Islam is an integral part of the concept. The AK Party government is re-engaging with territories once ruled by the Ottoman Empire across Turkey's broader region in order to cast Turkey in a leadership role in the Muslim world. In this sense, it poses as a counterweight to Turkey's traditional Western alliance. In addition to the strong Islamist undertones, the concept, in this understanding, may also have imperial underpinnings.

Neo-Ottomanism in Turkey's foreign policy is debated most heatedly in the Balkans. This is mainly due to Turkish leaders' emotional statements highlighting the common Ottoman heritage between Turkey and the Balkans. Foreign Minister Davutoğlu's 2009 speech in Bosnia-Herzegovina<sup>169</sup> in which he praised the Ottoman era in Balkans as a success story engendered intense discussions in Europe on whether Turkey's contemporary Balkans policy is Neo-Ottoman or not. Debates have not subsided, despite Davutoğlu's repeated clarifications that he did not mean the reestablishment of an Ottoman-style foreign policy, but instead was emphasizing the shared Ottoman heritage of Turkey and the Balkans.<sup>170</sup>

European intellectuals find discussions of Turkish neo-Ottomanism in Balkan region, irrelevant. They perceive Turkey's foreign policy as exceedingly pragmatic, an approach through which it can rationally foster regional peace and advance its own economic opportunities. One leading analyst notes that “establishing contacts in parts of the world where Turkey has historically had a presence is much easier and logical than trying to establish emotional, cultural and business bonds with parts of the world where it has never been.”<sup>171</sup> Religious, cultural and ethnic bonds are thus merely a means to make inroads in different regions. In the Balkans, the common link is Ottoman heritage. In the Middle East, the emphasis is more on the common religion, due to the Arab World's different perception of

168. “Turkey is being criticized for taking many initiatives and not achieving much. But the problems Turkey deal with in its complex geography are very complicated and difficult to solve. Turkey cannot solve all these problems alone;; how could you blame Turkey for not having resolved these protracted problems that have been there for decades? It is always easy in the West to criticize Turkey. We have to be modest on Turkey. These problems need common initiatives. And I ask those who criticize Turkey for not achieving much what is your position then? What have United States, Britain and France achieved so far?”, SETA Interview, Paris, 9 June 2011.

169. Davutoglu said “Ottoman centuries of Balkans were success stories. Now we have to reinvent this”, speech made at his 2009 visit to Bosnia-Herzegovina, see “Turkish economy in the Balkans signal a comeback”, *Hurriyet Daily News*, 14 March 2011.

170. Altin Raxhimi, “Davutoglu: I am not a Neo-Ottoman”, *Balkan Insight*, 26 April 2011.

171. SETA Interview, London, 22 February 2011.

its Ottoman period. In the Caucasus, ethnic links prevail over religious ties. Turkey's shifting emphases in its regional relationships are essentially pragmatic—playing different cards in accordance with differing regional conditions.<sup>172</sup>

European disregard of the neo-Ottomanism charge does not mean that Turkey's foreign policy approach to the Balkans raises no concerns. Since the early 1990s, Turkey, has engaged actively in the region through multilateral efforts, yet its current engagement is viewed as a return to the region. The novel aspects of the AK Party's Balkans policy may explain this understanding. Over the last decade, Turkey has not only enhanced its economic relationships but also intensified its contact with regional non-state actors. Further, Turkey's mediation efforts in the Balkans have received wide international coverage, increasing the visibility of Turkey's Balkan policy. Trilateral meetings in 2010 between Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia that Turkey hosted in Istanbul conveyed to the world that Turkey considered itself a stakeholder there.<sup>173</sup>

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One thing is certain regarding Turkey's Balkan policy: mutual suspicions abound. The EU sees the Balkans as its region—which is hard to reconcile with Turkey's belief that it knows the region better.

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European intellectuals are divided in how they understand Turkey's Balkans policy. Some are cautious about Turkey's presence in the region due to perceptions that Turkey harbors biases in favor of Turkish and Muslim communities. Given the region's multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition, these critics express concern that Turkey's non-inclusive Balkans policy might deepen religious and ethnic conflict.<sup>174</sup> Conversely, some observers see Turkey's diplomatic and economic efforts in the region as constructive. These observers instead criticize the EU's reservations about Turkish engagement in the region. Rather than seeing Turkey as a potential partner, the EU believes that Turkey's involvement threatens its interests, creating a rival to Europe's own Balkans policy.<sup>175</sup> Though they disagree, these two sets of scholars have one thing in common: they both note EU wariness at Turkey's regional presence and policy. Though, from a Balkan perspective, the improving relations between Turkey and Serbia might have allayed fears that Turkey is supportive of Muslim Bosnians at the expense of others, the European position has changed little. Europe's lack of understanding regarding the nature and objectives of Turkey's Balkan policy reinforces the EU's cautious approach.

One thing is certain regarding Turkey's Balkan policy: mutual suspicions abound. The EU sees the Balkans as its region—which is hard to reconcile with Turkey's belief that it knows the region better. While the EU does not appreciate other players seizing a role in its backyard, Turkey endeavors to increase its influence in the region. Although cooperation has yet to develop in Balkans between different actors, it will keep its significance in relations between the EU and Turkey. Mutual wariness complicates the prospects for future cooperation in the foreign policy realm.

172. "Turkey uses its different links to different regions in a logical manner. It is very pragmatic, they are just trying to get the most both in terms of economic gain and political influence through stressing these commonalities", SETA Interview, Berlin, 3 May 2011. See also Hajrudin Somun, "Neo-Ottomanism: the return of Turkey to the Balkans", *Today's Zaman*, 6 October 2010.

173. For more on Turkey's Balkan policy see Inan Ruma, "Turkish Foreign Policy Towards the Balkans: The New Activism, Neo-Ottomanism or/so What?", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 9 March 2011; Loic Poulain and Akis Sakellariou, "Western Balkans: Is Turkey Back?", *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 25 April 2011; Hajrudin Somun (2011), "Turkish Foreign Policy in the Balkans and "Neo-Ottomanism": A Personal Account", *Insight Turkey*, 13(3), pp. 33-41;

174. "Turkey has been strong supporter of Bosnian community; Turkey and USA project a picture of Bosnia to be Muslims which is a little bit of a misunderstanding. Bosniaks call themselves Bosniaks or Muslumans, but not at all are all of them Muslims. More than 60 percent are not practicing Muslims, they come from Muslim cultural tradition, but these people live a completely secular life. Turkey and USA are kind of protective power for Bosniaks, but also projecting them into something they are not. Bosnian political community is strongly aligned with Ankara, describing Ankara as older and wiser brother. But when you say this to Croats, Serbs and other secular they do not agree with this.", SETA Interview, Berlin, 2 May 2011.

175. "EU has a fear of what Turkey is doing there. This is very revealing of the position of the EU seeing Turkish engagement in the region as rivalry. It is also followed up by significant investment of Turkey in key industries. So EU feels like its interests are somehow threatened by that. So the EU knows Turkey is there but does not really like it.. From the EU perspective few people in Europe are aware of the nuances of Turkish Foreign Policy, so the EU is still wary of Turkey's involvement in the region. What also created this fear is not knowing", SETA Interview, Berlin, 3 May 2011.

## IV. CONCLUSION

Turkey is changing, and so are Europe's perceptions of it. Though Turkish domestic developments are a major factor in shaping perceptions of Turkey, its economic success and active foreign policy have solidified Turkey's presence in the European intellectual and policy discourse. This is evident in the increasing number of conferences, seminars and publications across Europe devoted to Turkey and its foreign policy. As a historical ally of the West, Turkey's foreign policy orientation had been taken very much for granted. Whereas Turkey's actions were once predictable, now, for the first time, people have looked at Turkey's assertive foreign policy and formed more nuanced opinions.

Changing mind-sets is not an easy process. It takes time, and it creates many ambiguities along. Turkey's assertive foreign policy initially spurred anxiety over changes in Turkey. As former Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt observes, "for some, it has been difficult to digest the change of Turkey from a passive partner to the more active role Turkey is playing now."<sup>176</sup> After overcoming initial surprise at Turkey's rapid shift of vision, Europeans developed deeper understandings of Turkey, with discussions of its foreign policy becoming subtler and better-informed. The emerging European mind-set among intellectuals regarding Turkish foreign policy is thus a positive one. European intellectuals are happy with Turkey's constructive role—especially its soft power—in its extended region. The majority of scholars believe that Turkey's increasing multi-regional presence and emerging global vision would be assets to Europe, which exhibits global ambition yet an incomplete vision.

Among European publics and policy-making circles, however, the view of Turkish foreign policy is less optimistic. Among policy-makers, Turkey's increasing self-confidence is met with caution—Turkey is perceived as a potential rival. Among European publics, populist and right-wing fears of immigration and Islam are shaping attitudes toward Turkey. Media coverage of Turkey is not helping either—especially in Germany and France. Reports focus predominantly on points of divergence, reinforcing existing ideas about Turkey. European intellectuals urge that modesty and objectivity are needed in analyses of Turkey, which would reduce prejudices and demonstrate Turkey's potential significance to Europe.

It is true that foreign policy activism has not hastened the EU accession process; however, this activism has facilitated cooperation on parallel initiatives such as security, defense, energy and greater foreign policy alignment. Turkey—with its valuable political experience that blends Islam, democracy and secularism—could inspire positive democratic developments in its region. Though Europeans do not believe Turkey is changing its foreign policy axis, they are uncertain both about Turkey's foreign policy priorities. Turkey's relations with Iran, Hamas and the Republic of Sudan—among the most anti-Western actors—have necessitated several questions: What objectives does Turkey hope to achieve in its foreign policy? What are Turkey's priorities? How may we characterize its global vision? What values does its foreign policy uphold? What is Europe's role in Turkey's evolving vision? Who are Turkey's key partners? To what extent does Turkey intend to cooperate with Europe, in particular, and the West, in general? European scholars express widespread agreement that Turkey has not conveyed its foreign policy priorities with adequate clarity.

However, the confusion does not move in a single direction. European observers also express ambivalence about the role Turkey should play and about what Europe wants from Turkey. Despite general agreement that intense cooperation between the EU and Turkey is needed, only recently has dialogue been established between the two—with no clear program or outcomes to date. Why has Turkey not secured its rightful place in European policy planning? The global financial crisis that has swept the European continent obviously contributed to European inertia. In the past two years, Europe has been struggling to find a way out of its debt-crisis. After the long-debated Greek bailout, fears have grown that other EU member states with large debt-to-GDP ratios—Ireland, Spain and Italy—might also collapse.

The financial crisis that hit the Eurozone has already yielded far-reaching internal and external consequences for Europe. First, statism returned to the policy conversation. There is growing skepticism of the concept of Europe among

176. See "Interview with Carl Bildt: EU, Turkey and Neighbours Beyond", *Turkish Foreign Policy Quarterly*, 10 July 2010.

European publics, with the popularity of European Union institutions declining. Studies of transatlantic trends conducted by the German Marshall Fund reveal that Europeans favor national policies to regulate economic and budgetary policies over strategies enacted in Brussels. Second, economic crisis has ignited nationalist and far-right movements in Europe. The return of a Christian vision of European identity—complete with anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments re-entering the political discourse—troubles those who see the EU as a political project that transcends nation-states and is founded upon normative values such as freedom, equality and democracy. Third, the resurrection of the old essentialist and exclusionary culture-centered nation-state model creates an introverted European Union. This EU's ability to influence global affairs would decrease dramatically.

The consequences of the economic crisis affect Turkey as well. In the European view, the financial crisis presents both challenges and opportunities for Turkey. As a Muslim country with EU candidate status, the rise of nationalist and far-right movements complicates Turkey's membership prospects. These developments increase skepticism that is prevalent among the European public, making less favorable the conditions for Turkey's accession less favorable. Nevertheless, Turkey also has opportunities, according to European intellectuals. In contrast to Europe's unimpressive economic performance, Turkey's economy has fared relatively well during this period of global economic turbulence. While European economies stagger under debt burdens and the average 2010 GDP growth rate in the EU stood at 1.7 percent, Turkey's economy boasted a robust 8.9 percent growth rate in 2010. Turkey's dynamic economy and international visibility are major elements stimulating European countries' interest in strengthening cooperation with Turkey.

Thus, as European observers note, the EU in the next decade will concentrate more intensely on economic and currency-related issues. These entail tackling the debt crisis and enacting sorely-needed economic reforms and regulations. The significance of foreign policy may well diminish. Turkey stands as a leading potential EU partner in this new era. If Turkey sustains its current economic trajectory in the coming years, its capacity to extend its foreign policy influence into the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East will increase. Europe's declining influence could be ameliorated through constructive and peaceful relations with Turkey. When evaluated from this perspective, Turkey appears to be the most important foreign policy partner for Europe in the coming years, a fact that European policy-makers cannot turn a blind eye.

As a staunch ally of NATO whose actions were easy to predict, Turkey did not attract much attention as a foreign policy actor until a decade ago. The increasing activism of Turkish foreign policy and the greater initiative taken by Turkish elites have raised interest in Europe. After overcoming the first wave of bewilderment and irritation at Turkey's independent foreign policy initiatives, Europeans have started to develop a more nuanced approach towards the specifics of Turkish foreign policy. Currently, debates over Turkey are not confined to EU accession discussion alone. Instead, they consider the implications of Turkey's more assertive foreign policy as well.

As Europe has become more familiar with Turkey, AK Party's foreign policy has been more positively received in Europe. Turkey is now considered an essential foreign policy voice by the majority of European intellectuals—one that cannot be ignored in any diplomatic developments within Turkey's greater region. Nonetheless, positive perception of Turkish foreign policy is not without question marks and confusion regarding objectives of Turkish foreign policy.

The study at hand aims to analyze European elites' perceptions of Turkish Foreign Policy under AK Party period. The policy brief is made up of three parts. The first part of the policy report gives a brief introduction to the evolution of Turkish Foreign Policy under the AK Party period. The second part attempts to reveal overall perceptions of Turkish Foreign Policy among European elite. The third part of the policy report places the focus on what European elite think of the main debates that Turkish foreign policy has generated over the last few years: Shift of Axis, Turkish Model, Over-Stretch in Turkish Foreign Policy and neo-Ottomanism.

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