

Europe as Seen from Turkey: From a Strategic Goal to an Instrumental Partnership?

ATILA ERALP AND ZERRIN TORUN

Abstract: This article explores whether Turkish preferences regarding the relationship with the EU have moved away from seeing the EU accession as a strategic goal towards seeking an instrumental partnership in foreign and security policy during the Justice and Development Party's tenure in government since 2002. While the analysis tries to cover the opinions of different segments of the Turkish elite, particular emphasis is put on how current policy-makers define their strategic vision and the EU's role in it as well as their foreign policy goals, including the accession to the EU. It finds out that as citizens of an EU candidate country, a majority of the Turkish elite define the EU as a transformative but unfair institution. However, seeing Turkey as an emerging regional power and a European actor, current Turkish policy-makers define the EU as an unaware and reticent partner which may face decline in the future. The final section explores the prospects of an improved strategic cooperation between Turkey and the EU.

Keywords: Turkey, EU, perceptions, foreign and security policy

INTRODUCTION

This article analyses Turkish elite perceptions of the EU by asking whether Turkey now prefers an instrumental partnership with the EU, while before, it saw cooperation and integration with Europe as a strategic goal which the Turkish policy-makers, civil society and public all shared. The answer to this question is highly relevant and interesting for both academics and policy-makers, as Europe goes through a financial crisis while Turkey's economy seems to be doing well; as Europe's ability to act as an actor in the realm of foreign and security policy is still being discussed, Turkey is increasingly being defined as a 'regional' or 'rising' power both in the West and in the current geopolitical vision promoted by the current foreign policy-makers. The answer is also important in assessing the possibilities for an improved strategic cooperation between Turkey and the EU as Turkey's accession negotiations have been stalled since 2010 and the issue of how to sustain the relationship is high on the agenda of informed analysts. The analysis here relies on opinions of different segments of Turkish politics and society, such as politicians, diplomats, academics

and journalists, in order to answer the question. As the definition of Turkey as a 'regional power' comes during the period of the Justice and Development Party's (JDP) tenure in government, which also represents the rise of a new elite, particular attention is paid to how current foreign policy-makers and opinion leaders define Turkey's foreign policy goals, the EU's role in international relations and Turkey's relationship with it.

For the sake of analytical clarity, the article begins with a section on perceptions of the EU within the framework of Turkey's EU membership goal. This section demonstrates that a majority of the Turkish elite, including academics, politicians from different parts of the political spectrum and opinion leaders, see the EU as a transformative actor.¹ On the other hand, the current policy-makers' perception of the stagnation in the accession negotiations and of the reasons behind it highlights the EU as an unfair organization. Moreover, this perspective seems to be shared by a majority of the public, given the decreasing level of trust towards the EU as shown by the results of recent public opinion polls.²

The second section focuses on Turkey's strategic vision as defined by its current policy-makers and explores the definition of Turkey as a regional power, which is another analytical category accompanying that of Turkey as an EU candidate country. It becomes apparent that in this new vision the EU membership is still defined as a strategic goal. However, for the current policy-makers or opinion leaders, and for Turkey as a regional power, given the enhanced prospects of power or fields of engagement in other areas of international relations, the finalité of the EU accession process seems to be more important for the EU than for Turkey. In such a context, the EU accession happens to be yet another pillar of a multi-dimensional foreign policy, albeit it is still important and beneficial for various purposes, such as signifying an alliance of civilizations. This section also presents critical perspectives on the EU in view of the financial crisis, globalization and developments within its member states. While these critical perspectives do not seem to be undermining the significance of the EU membership as a strategic goal for Turkey, they do seem to exacerbate the perception that the EU is not particularly successful in terms of problem-solving or enacting a strategic vision. Thus the image of the EU through the lens of Turkey as a regional power, which is promoted by current Turkish foreign policy-makers, can be summarized by saying that it is an image of the EU as an unaware and reticent partner which may face decline. The final section then investigates possible avenues for improved relations and cooperation in foreign and security policies between the two sides and finds that the prospects do not seem positive. It concludes that despite Turkey's expressed support for improved cooperation, attempts to improve the strategic cooperation between Turkey and the EU are highly likely to fall victim to the problems that haunt the Turkish EU accession negotiations, un-

less a major change occurs in the positions of the parties due to a crisis or change of government.

TURKEY AS AN EU CANDIDATE COUNTRY: THE EU AS A TRANSFORMATIVE BUT UNFAIR INSTITUTION

The Turkish perception of the European Union is naturally filtered through the history of Turkey's aim and attempts to become an EC/EU member state. A big majority of Turkish analysts, opinion leaders and politicians from both the right and the left side of the political spectrum agree on the benefits of the process of candidacy and accession negotiations as well as the importance of the continuation of this process. In this sense, the EU appears as a transformative actor which has a crucial role in consolidating democracy, human rights and rule of law in the country with positive implications for foreign policy as well. The Europeanization of Turkey is seen as bringing important benefits to all segments of the society in political, economic and social areas of life. To illustrate, for Yaşar Yakış, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs in the first JDP government, the Turkish EU membership is Turkey's second biggest modernization project after the establishment of the Turkish Republic (Yakış, 2010: 304). Another former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hikmet Çetin, from the left side of the political spectrum, also defines the goal of the EU membership as a modernization project (Çetin, 2010: 93). For Cengiz Çandar, a liberal journalist, the EU functions as the engine of transformation in Turkey and it is useful for setting specific goals towards this transformation (Çandar, 2010: 123). Ali Babacan, another former Minister of Foreign Affairs from the JDP, uses a slightly different wording, defining the steps taken during the process of the EU accession negotiations for improved democratization, human rights and rule of law as 'a silent revolution'. For Babacan, these steps are all part of what increases Turkish soft power, since even the start of the accession negotiations per se has made Turkey a center of attraction for international investment and facilitated high economic growth rates (Babacan, 2008). For another observer, a 'Turkish spring' with increased democratization, individual freedoms and economic development has started taking place long ago due to the harmonization process with the EU (Keneş, 2011).

Thus, the process is seen to have important implications for Turkish foreign policy and for what Turkey is in the international arena. In other words, for a majority of the Turkish elite, the process of accession to the EU and the modernization or Westernization which precedes it provide the country with its unique identity. For instance, Zeynep Dağı, an academic and a former JDP MP, highlights that the EU has contributed to Turkey's foreign policy by facilitating the restructuring of its economy, politics and legal system (Dağı, 2010: 130). For Şaban Çalış, another academic,

if Turkey is today a prestigious country in the Arab world, this is closely related with its being an EU candidate. Furthermore, for Çalıř, the pursuit of the EU membership is not a tactical policy; it reflects a strategy on the part of Turkey which goes back almost 150 years (Çalıř, 2010: 84–85). In addition, for a significant majority of academics, journalists and politicians interviewed by the International Strategic Research Organization of Turkey in 2010, development of relations with other countries or regions, such as the Central Asian Republics, Middle Eastern countries, Russia or China, would not constitute an alternative to Turkish EU membership. The process of accession to the EU is first and foremost beneficial for the Turkish people and Turkey's democracy, and it strengthens Turkey's standing in the world. While increased cooperation with other countries and regions is desirable and necessary, this and the Turkish EU accession process are complementary to one another. To sum up, the fact that Turkey is both an active actor in the Middle East and a democratic, economically developed and secular country with a predominantly Muslim population has positive implications for its relations with both the EU and the USA. What makes Turkey strong and different is its ability to balance all of these relations and identities (Altunışık, 2010: 7–8).

However, accompanying this majority view on the necessity and benefits of the EU accession process is an equally widespread acknowledgement of the problems in the relations. At the extreme end of the spectrum is the current minority position of the nationalists, which are mostly represented by the Nationalist Action Party, although nationalism cuts across party politics in Turkey. To illustrate this line of thought, according to Ümit Özdağ, an academic and a nationalist politician, the history of the Turkey-EU relations since the establishment of the Customs Union can be summarized as 'Turkish subordinative politics in response to the EU's policies based on double standards, unethical politics and violations of *pacta sunt servanda*.' For Özdağ, in the aftermath of the Helsinki Summit in 1999, which accorded Turkey candidacy status, the EU has 'started the process of interference in Turkey' in order to control it and succeeded in doing so by utilizing a 'virtual' full membership policy which is 'open-ended' (Özdağ, 2010: 207). Özdağ thinks that the EU membership is theoretically possible for Turkey if the EU decides to continue as a confederation of nation-states. However, there is a need to situate the Turkish relations with the EU outside the membership context. According to Özdağ, the Customs Union, which is an expression of the EU's exploitation policy, should be annulled and a healthier economic partnership should be established. In addition, political reforms in the name of the EU membership have to stop, as the EU never stops adding new requirements while the open-endedness remains as a constant in the relations (Özdağ, 2010: 211–112).

Thus, one major problem which most Eurosceptics cite as evidence that the extent of the reforms Turkey undertakes is not relevant for the finalité of the negotia-

tions is the EU's official emphasis on the open-ended nature of the process since 2005. Another related and commonly observed problem in the country is the fact that the issue of Turkish EU membership has increasingly become part of the EU member states' domestic politics and subject to opposition on the grounds of essentialist (culturalist/religious) definitions of identities. Calls for arrangements short of full membership, i.e. calling for a privileged partnership or the incorporation of opposition to Turkish membership into the political campaigns against the EU's Constitutional Treaty in Austria and France in 2005, increased the level of the Turkish elite's distrust towards the EU. The French government and the former President Sarkozy later on decided to block the accession negotiations in chapters which they believed would put Turkey in line for full membership, arguing that the EU should offer Turkey an arrangement short of full membership, i.e. a privileged partnership. A further complication in the Turkish-EU relations has emerged after the accession of the Republic of Cyprus to the EU without the resolution of the conflict on the island. This was because the EU subsequently insisted on the opening of Turkish ports and airports to ships and aircraft from Cyprus in order to expand the Customs Union to cover all the new EU member states (implementation of the expanded Additional Protocol). The Turkish government, in response, asked for a reciprocal start of direct trade between the EU and Northern Cyprus (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus) in line with the previous EU decision to end the isolation of Northern Cypriots.³ However, the EU could not come to an agreement that would enable engagement in direct trade with Northern Cyprus despite the Commission's attempts to realize such an agreement. Moreover, in 2006 the European Council decided to suspend eight chapters in the Turkish accession negotiations which had direct relevance to the issue and agreed not to provisionally close any chapters until the Commission had confirmed that Turkey expanded the implementation of the Additional Protocol fully. Finally, Cyprus decided to unilaterally block an additional five chapters in 2009, which caused further mistrust towards the EU in Turkey.⁴

From the perspective of Turkish decision-makers and opinion-leaders, during this process, first and foremost the EU reneged on its principle to require resolutions of conflicts before a candidate country becomes a member and ceased to be a neutral party able to exert influence on both parties on the island. Furthermore, the Greek Cypriots were rewarded with the EU membership although they rejected the United Nations' Annan Plan (2004) for the resolution of the conflict, and the EU pledge for direct trade with Northern Cyprus never materialized. Therefore, according to a widespread view, this issue is another example of the unfair treatment of Turks on the part of the EU. A good summary of the official response to both the Cypriot issue and the proposals for an EU-Turkish relationship short of full membership, i.e. a privileged partnership, is the following statement by Egemen Bağış, the

Minister for European Union Affairs and Chief Negotiator, which is worth quoting at length:

'The decision of Turkey and the EU to have a common future is a mutual commitment based on existing treaties, agreements and unanimous EU decisions... It was Turkish Cypriots who gave an equivocal "yes" to the Annan Plan to reunite the island, while Greek Cypriots, abusing their EU membership, chose to say "no"... Despite some disappointing voices from European leaders and the unfair approach to the Cyprus issue, we are not giving up. We expect the EU to stand firm on its commitments, just as we are doing, without backtracking from our mutual commitments. As for any reference to "privileged partnership", it is clear to us that such a relation has no place in EU law and cannot be sustained economically or politically because it is not based on the balance of four fundamental freedoms and equal membership rights. It is neither a privilege nor partnership for any side. Therefore, we consider such an unacceptable offer as an insult. The question is not if, but when and how we should make Turkey a full member of the EU to the benefit of all' (Bağış, 2010: 18).

Although confirmations that Turkey is not going to back down on its goal of EU membership abound at the governmental level, so do the expressions of frustration. For instance, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that blocking accession negotiations 'is turning into the sort of byzantine political intrigue that no candidate country has experienced previously' (Erdoğan, 2011a). He reportedly also argued that 'the behind-the-scenes reason was obvious to all', and added that 'we know this, but we do not think it right to voice this. I tell them openly: If you are not a Christian club, you are obliged to accept Turkey. For the only thing that can express that you are not a Christian club is having Turkey there, as a country with a Muslim public.' Moreover, according to Erdoğan, 'today, we are a country that is compatible with the EU *acquis* in a way that cannot even be compared to the compatibility of the last 10 countries accepted.' Therefore, for him, the decision is 'political' (Today's Zaman, 2010; Anatolian Agency, 2011b). The image of an unfair EU is also confirmed by a statement by the Prime Minister's chief advisor, İbrahim Kalın: 'Turkey will press ahead with its bid to join the European Union despite frustrations with delays it sees in part as a byproduct of anti-Muslim prejudice'. In this interpretation, the EU has laid out certain principles at the beginning of the game and Turkey has accepted these, but 'now in the middle of the soccer game', they are 'changing the penalty rules' (Birnbaum, 2011: 8). The current Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu, on the other hand, points to the ongoing debate on Turkey's European vocation despite the passing of fifty years since the start of the contractual relationship between Turkey and the EU and argues that this disregards Turkey's well

established place in European history since 'both the transformers in the Ottoman Empire and the founding fathers of modern Turkey were influenced by the cornerstones of European history like the Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment and the French Revolution.' For Davutoğlu, 'the next stop in this journey of transformation and modernization is Turkey's membership in the EU.' In parallel with the majority view on the issue, for Davutoğlu, the EU membership is 'Turkey's strategic objective' and 'one of the most important projects of the Republican era' (Davutoğlu, 2009: 15, 13).

To conclude this section, there is a consensus among the Turkish elite, including academics, politicians from different parts of the political spectrum and opinion leaders, on the image of the EU as a transformative actor. On the other hand, particularly the current policy-makers' perspective of the stagnation in the accession negotiations and of the reasons behind it highlights the EU as an unfair organization, and this perspective is no doubt shared by the majority of the public. The following section will present in detail the contours of the current Turkish government's strategic vision of itself as a regional power and the role of the EU in this by focusing on the policy-makers' perspectives.

TURKEY AS A REGIONAL POWER AND EUROPEAN ACTOR: THE EU AS AN UNAWARE OR RETICENT PARTNER WHICH MAY FACE DECLINE

Recent years saw incidents in Turkish foreign policy which led to questions about whether Turkey is turning East and pursuing Neo-Ottomanism or what went wrong in Turkey's relations with the West.⁵ Turkish-Israeli relations faced a crisis after Israel's attacks on Gaza in 2009, the subsequent blockade of Gaza and the intervention against the Turkish flotilla in the international humanitarian convoy to Gaza, which resulted in the death of nine Turkish citizens in May 2010. Turkish policy makers have also engaged in dialogue with Hamas, which was labelled as a terrorist organization by the West, worked for Palestinian unity and embraced a position in favour of recognition of Palestinian statehood. Furthermore, together with Brazil, the Turkish government tried to secure an agreement on the issue of Iranian nuclear capabilities, and when the UN Security Council found this agreement unsatisfactory and decided to increase sanctions on Iran, Turkey did not vote in favour of these sanctions. This section will first try to show how these events reflect the new thinking behind the recent Turkish foreign policy, and then it will focus on the EU's role in this new thinking or strategic vision.⁶

For current Turkish policy makers, peace in the Middle East requires the 'normalization of Israel as a nation-state'. This includes Israel accepting its accountability for its intervention in the high seas, which are free to everyone by law, and lifting the

blockade which causes the suffering of 1.5 million people in Gaza (which is defined by the JDP's members as an open-air prison due to this blockade). As for Iran, the issue here is about preventing another costly intervention in a neighboring country with which Turkey has an enormous economic and energetic interdependency – as has been the case with Iraq in 2003. Iran is Turkey's land corridor to Asia and it is the second source of energy for the country. Moreover, for Turkish policy-makers in the JDP governments, the world should be totally free of nuclear weapons, but at the same time every country should be free to develop capabilities for nuclear energy (Fletcher–Erdem, 2010: 1, 4; Davutoğlu, 2010b). As can be seen, the current Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu and other foreign policy-makers think that Turkish foreign policy should actively seek to shape the regional order around the country. For them, Turkey has a unique strategic depth which it has failed to utilize in the past.

In Davutoğlu's conceptualization, which he published in a book as an academic in 2001, long before he became the Minister of Foreign Affairs, a long-lasting and comprehensive strategy for any country should draw on the intersection of two pillars, the historical depth and the geographical depth. For Turkey, the issue is the political will and planning that is going to enable an effective use of the opportunities presented by its history and geography, and maximizing its economic, military and technological capacity (Davutoğlu, 2001: 552–553). Moreover, Turkey needs to improve its self-confidence in order, for instance, to ward off the pressures of exclusion that emerged after the Cold War. Such pressures come from, for example, the integration of those countries who were the losers of the Cold War with the EU, the risk of NATO becoming hollow or Turkey being presented as responsible for genocide (Davutoğlu, 2001: 559). Turkey, as a country that was established on the basis of the Ottoman experience, should be able to weave together different geopolitical, geo-economic and geocultural features and use these to increase its regional and global role (Davutoğlu, 2001: 556). This can change Turkey's position from that of a flank country to that of a central (core) country (Davutoğlu, 2001: 563). For Davutoğlu, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the vision for Turkey in 2023 is also about reaping the benefits of the implementation of this thinking. In his words, 'the Turkey of 2023 is part of the EU as a member who completed the requirements for this, is integrated with neighbouring countries in common security and economic spaces, is able to have taken an order-instituting role in areas where Turkish interests are directly affected, is active in the global arena, is playing a significant role in international organizations, has become one of the first ten economies of the world and became just as important as the other nine countries, and makes authentic contributions to the global culture; it is a Turkey which is strong and respected' (Davutoğlu, 2010a).

The resulting policy is multi-dimensional, including social, cultural and economic sectors, and directed at increasing interaction and cooperation with different re-

gions, such as the Balkans, Eurasia, including the Middle East, and Africa.⁷ The goal is to be the 'locomotive' that works for development of 'peace, stability and democracy as well as regional economic development and integration' (Babacan, 2008). A distinct way to put this perspective into action has been to work through High Level Strategic Cooperation Councils, where the prime ministers, 10–12 ministers and top bureaucrats of Turkey and the neighboring countries get together and work on as numerous as 50 agreements on topics such as health, education, culture, trade, transportation and energy. This has been accomplished to a certain extent with Iraq and Syria,⁸ as well as Russia and Greece. An instrument for realizing these goals is facilitation of visa-free travel, and agreements for this have been completed with 61 countries as of January 2011 (Erdoğan, 2011a). Complementary to this instrument is the establishment of free-trade zones, as has been agreed upon between Turkey, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon in 2010. The same goal is pursued in the Economic Cooperation Organization with a focus on projects for constructing different railway routes to ease trade between its members, including Turkey, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Utilizing Turkey's geography as a transit country and turning it into an energy hub, with an increasing number of pipeline projects across different regions and routes, is another instrument of this foreign policy.⁹

Increased development assistance and aid through the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TİKA) and within the framework of international organizations is another highlighted aspect of the way this foreign policy is put into action. In line with this, in the areas where Turkey is part of a crisis management mission or expeditionary operation, investments to build and operate schools and hospitals accompany this activity, as has been the case in Lebanon and Afghanistan. In the diplomatic sphere, other activities include increasing the number of embassies and consulates throughout the world, but particularly in Africa, acting as a host for international summits in order to increase the country's visibility, and taking on facilitator or mediation roles in regional conflicts, as Turkey took on such roles in the 2008 conflict between Syria and Israel, in the 2009 conflict between Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina and, as was mentioned above, in the Iranian uranium swap agreement in 2010 (Traub, 2011: 32). Seeking new venues for increasing interaction and cooperation either by establishing the venues or by participating in existing regional institutions is another instrument that Turkey utilizes. Thus, a strategic dialogue mechanism was launched with the Gulf Cooperation Council; the Turkish-Arab Cooperation Forum was created in 2007 together with its economic, parliamentary and media forums; and finally a strategic partnership between Turkey and the African Union was initiated in 2008.

One may argue that the underlying motive of this activism in Turkish foreign policy is seeking new markets, expanding the trade volume and attracting new

foreign direct investment, and these activities are necessitated by reasons of *realpolitik* at a time when the European market is contracting. Besides, Turkish foreign policy has traditionally sought stability and security through establishing regional mechanisms, which is exemplified by the institution of the Balkan Pact or the Sadabad Pact in the early days of the Republic or the opening towards Central Asia in the 1990s. However, framing and accompanying these wide-ranging activities, which may be seen as *realpolitik*, is a new discourse which claims to raise Turkey's voice in calling for justice and eliminating inequalities and prejudice in the world.¹⁰ Despite the inconsistencies in practice, such as the government's uncritical attitude towards the Sudanese leader Omar Al-Bashir, who has been widely accused of genocide, a notable example of this new discourse in the Turkish foreign policy is the position against associating 'terrorism' with the Islamic belief, which has been rampant after the September 11 attacks and the war on terror. The promotion of the idea that 'Islam, secularism and democracy can co-exist' in Egypt and Libya, though, particularly after the autocratic regimes in these countries have been toppled, is another example. The lead Turkey took together with Spain for organizing the Forum on Alliance of Civilizations under the framework of the United Nations since 2005 is another illustration of this overall idea of calling for justice for the disadvantaged, be they the Muslims or underdeveloped countries.¹¹ Calls for reforming the international organizations such as the UN so that they would be more legitimate, effective and representative, the recent aid campaigns to Somalia and Myanmar, and the 2011 economic and technical cooperation package for the Least Developed Countries all help build up the government's claim to being the 'voice of conscience' or representing a 'wise country' (Davutoğlu, 2010b).

With the emphasis on the need for a more inclusionary politics at regional and international levels, the Turkish EU membership remains a strategic objective, and its realization is not only desirable but also necessary in this outlook. Turkish policymakers have traditionally pointed out that the Muslim world is closely following Turkey's efforts to join the EU and that it is anxious to see whether the EU will accept Turkey as one of its own. But for Davutoğlu and other current foreign policy-makers, the Turkish EU membership is not only important for both Turkey and Europe in the sense that it would make them stronger and more effective, but it is also important for enacting an alliance of civilizations in today's world. In other words, for the new ruling elite who define themselves as conservative democrats and who are widely defined by others as representatives of political Islam, the EU has the capacity and opportunity to enact multiculturalism and answer a need in this sense. In Davutoğlu's words, 'If we are to eradicate all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or creed, to promote a democratic and equitable international order, to obtain robust economic growth and to achieve sustainable development,

then Turkey's membership in the EU will only help render the latter a leading global player in the 21st century' (Davutoğlu, 2009: 14).¹²

On another level, for policy-makers, this surge of Turkish activism (particularly towards the Middle East), together with Turkey's domestic democratization process, which acts as a 'source of inspiration' in different countries, has also been about 'promoting Western values in a region largely governed by authoritarian regimes.' In addition, 'Turkey's engagement allows it to act as mediator and messenger in an area generally hostile to the West' (Fletcher-Erdem, 2010). In the words of an academic, Turkey does not pursue policies in its region that would compete with the EU; on the contrary, Turkey acts with 'the maturity of a full EU member state', and in a way, 'without becoming a full EU member, it transmits the EU culture' to its neighbourhood (Laçiner, 2010: 10). A peaceful resolution of the conflicts in the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia, the integration of the Balkans with the Euro-Atlantic community, enhancing the energy supply and security for Europe and strengthening security in Afghanistan and South Asia are all goals shared by the EU and Turkey. Turkey and Europe seek to use similar instruments with a vision of solidarity and increased cooperation 'as a response to the multifold challenges such as the financial crisis, energy security, illegal migration, epidemic diseases, climate change, organized crime, cross cultural and religious intolerance, extremism and terrorism' (Davutoğlu, 2009: 14). Therefore, according to İbrahim Kalın (2010), the chief policy advisor to the Prime Minister, the 'new Turkish foreign policy' as defined by Turkish policy-makers and recent activism rests on a 'new geopolitical imagination', which 'no longer thinks in terms of oppositional identities and binary oppositions.' In this view, there is not a 'contradiction between Turkey's aspiration to become a full member in the European Union and increasing trade and diplomatic ties with our eastern and southern neighbours' (ibid.). Kalın also states that just as Europeans enact their neighbourhood policy, 'we seek to minimize problems and maximize cooperation with all of our neighbours from Bulgaria and Greece to Iran, Iraq and Syria.' (ibid.)

As a corollary to this strategic vision which informs recent foreign policy activism, a new argument on the Turkey-EU relations has been increasingly expressed at the official level in 2011. In this view, 'the European Union's need for Turkey has been increasing day by day while Turkey's need for the European Union has been decreasing' (Anatolian Agency, 2011a). In the words of Prime Minister Erdoğan, 'In the past, Turkey's EU vocation was purely economic... We are no more a country that would wait at the EU's door like a docile supplicant. Some claim that Turkey has no real alternative to Europe. This argument might be fair enough when taking into account the level of economic integration between Turkey and the EU – and, in particular, the fact that a liberal and democratic Europe has always been an anchor for reform in Turkey. However, the opposite is just as valid. Europe has no real alterna-

tive to Turkey. Especially in a global order where the balance of power is shifting, the EU needs Turkey to become an ever stronger, richer, more inclusive, and more secure Union. I hope it will not be too late before our European friends discover this fact' (Erdoğan, 2011a).

Thus, notably since 2011, members of the Turkish government have started speaking with greater confidence on the issue of Turkish EU membership due to several indicators. From the perspective of current policy-makers, Turkey has become the sixth biggest economy of Europe and one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Turkey and Europe's relations in trade, investment and industry are more or less well-functioning. The younger generation of the Turkish people offers the dynamic demographic element that Europe will need. However, the fact that thousands of Turks have returned to Turkey as a result of Turkey's fast economic growth while the EU is going through a financial crisis seems to refute the arguments that Turkish EU membership will result in a Turkish immigration wave to Europe. Coupled with these assets, Turkey has the biggest army of Europe and strong relations with the Islamic world. As stated by Egemen Bağış, the Minister for EU Affairs, 'Turkey offers Europe the opportunity to increase its influence and perform a stronger role globally.' Since it is advantageous for countries to come together, and 'the EU is a success story of partnerships overcoming differences', the call from Turkey is for 'our European partners to continue Turkish accession negotiations in sincerity' and work together to realize the vision of 'a more open, tolerant, dynamic and better-off Europe' (Bağış, 2011).

A more critical opinion on the European Union can also be observed in the Turkish views of the financial crisis Europe is going through. In the opinion of Ahmet Davutoğlu, Europe is increasingly facing a democracy test which involves a choice between 'technocratic governments', which are to deal with the economic requirements, and 'democratically elected governments', which will answer 'the demands of their people'. In such a context, the question of who is going to pay for the problems resulting from the economic crisis is a major concern, since if this economic crisis deepens and widens and a new wave of xenophobia spreads, European values will be undermined (Davutoğlu, 2011). Similarly, for Ihsan Bal (2012), an academic and a member of the Council's Scientific Committee of the International Strategic Research Organization, the economic crisis in the EU, which the EU seems unable to overcome, brings in a political deadlock as well and results in some of the EU member states seeking refuge in 'othering policies'. Bal argues that the wave of racist killings in Germany, the increased xenophobia and the fact that some mainstream political parties are adopting the discourses of the extreme right, such as in France, is a reflection of Europe's crisis. From this perspective, Europe seems to be defending insults against the prophet of Islam in the name of freedom of expression while trying to outlaw the discussion of the Armenian issue even when it is carried

out by historians, as in France. For Bal, these acts undermine the understanding of plurality and integration in Europe and show that Europe is unable to come up with solutions to its problems.

Leaving aside the images that are reflected in the European Union mostly as a result of problems within individual member states, there seem to be genuine doubts about the viability of the Union in the face of globalization and problems in economic and political integration. According to İlhan Uzgöl, an academic, one should question whether in the age of globalization there is a need to head towards 'a single state logic'. Therefore, the problems within the EU may be bigger than the problems that Turkey faces in its relations with the EU, since European societies need to decide on what kind of a Union they want (Uzgöl, 2010: 287–288). On the other hand, Kerem Aydın, the deputy secretary general of TUSKON, a recently established confederation of Turkish businessmen and industrialists, thinks that in the future, Turkish businesses will be indifferent to whether Turkey is an EU member or not, since their European markets are stagnating and there exist more opportunities for growth in the countries to the east and south (Hill, 2011: 1). The counter-argument to these arguments is advanced by another academic, Gökhan Çetinsaya, who is currently the head of the Higher Education Council in Turkey. Çetinsaya argues that Turkey 'has already fully embraced liberal economy; it is completely open to the whole world with its media and civil society and under the attack of constant globalization any way'. For Çetinsaya, under these conditions, it is wiser to go through this process 'under the umbrella of the EU' in order to 'reap the benefits of globalization' (Çetinsaya, 2010: 113).

To conclude this section, the benefits of the current economic relations with the EU are not disputed by the majority of people in Turkey, whereas no significant segment of the Turkish elite or society appears to be a major supporter of changing the Turkish position on Cyprus in order to gain a breathing space in the accession negotiations with the EU. In addition, with regard to political reforms in the country, such as those related to the Kurdish issue, civil-military relations or constitutional changes, a significant decoupling from the EU accession process can be observed. These reforms are not advanced in the name of the EU membership goal, as has been the case with the reforms of the previous governing parties in the 1990s. Nonetheless, both the governing and the opposition political parties still seem to be sensitive to opinions on the state of democracy in Turkey which come from the European Commission and the European Parliament, whereas the issue of enhanced strategic cooperation with the EU does not seem to be high on the agenda of any segment of the Turkish political spectrum. Overall, although the EU membership is still defined as a strategic goal in this new geopolitical vision, from the perspective of current policy-makers or opinion leaders, for Turkey as an emerging regional power, the finalité of the EU accession process does not seem to be more important

for Turkey than it is for the EU. In such a context, the EU accession becomes just one of the pillars of a big foreign policy world, albeit it is still important and beneficial for both Turkey and the EU, even if it serves a different purpose for each side. Turkish critical perspectives do not seem to be undermining the significance of the EU membership as a strategic goal for Turkey, but they do exacerbate the perception that the EU is not that successful in terms of problem-solving or enacting a strategic vision. Thus, the image of the EU through the lens of Turkey as a regional power can be summarized by stating that the EU is an unaware and reticent partner which may face decline. The final section investigates possible avenues for improving the relations in foreign and security policies in light of the findings of the previous sections.

IMPROVED STRATEGIC COOPERATION BETWEEN TURKEY AND EUROPE

Recent Turkish foreign policy activism suggests that improved strategic cooperation would be beneficial for both the EU and Turkey since it would at least decrease potential divergence and make them more effective in this policy area. As the visions, methods, values and concerns seem to be overlapping, it should be easy to increase cooperation in foreign and security policies. Nonetheless, currently, continuing the political or strategic dialogue mechanism established after the Lisbon Treaty, which consists of a few high-level meetings a year, mainly for exchanges of opinions between the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs and the High Representative of the EU, seems to be the only venue for realizing this increase in cooperation. Otherwise, any communication around the same table between the EU member states and Turkey faces vetoes. As Turkish policy-makers frequently underline, Turkey used to be invited to European summits before 2004, whereas this has not been the case after Cyprus became an EU member. In addition, when the High Representative initially explored the idea of inviting the Turkish Minister to brief the EU Ministers about developments in Syria, Cyprus reportedly blocked the corresponding plans (Rettman, 2011). Since even the accession chapters on foreign policy and energy are blocked, the establishment of more structural but still informal strategic dialogue mechanisms between Turkey and the EU on foreign and security policy (which is being called for) does not seem feasible in the near future.¹³ It is hard to think that an informal mechanism would reassure Turkey and make it more cooperative, even if those countries who block these accession chapters agreed to it. Moreover, informal schemes can hardly secure a convergence of EU positions and those of a country that is anything but a candidate when even the EU's members do not seem to hesitate in overriding the EU in foreign and security policies.

Therefore, a mechanism which will be formal and give a sense of respect to Turkish policy-makers and society seems more important and desirable. This is why fa-

ilitating a permanent structured or enhanced cooperation mechanism between the EU and a candidate country can be a more promising alternative. Such an arrangement would offer the candidate country much needed reassurance that its membership remains on the agenda and act as an incentive for more convergence in foreign and security policies. However, this scheme or any other dialogue mechanism, regardless of its official status, still requires unanimity within the EU in order to proceed, which means that the Union might as well consider what it can do to decrease the impact of the conflict in Cyprus on Turkish accession negotiations.

From a Turkish perspective, the fact that Turkey is firmly situated in the West for security purposes and did its best to defend Western values during the Cold War and its aftermath is under-appreciated by the EU, which affirms its lack of strategic vision as much as its unfairness (Laçiner, 2010: 19). Furthermore, as the EU diplomats also acknowledge, Turkey has been significantly contributing to the EU crisis management missions. In the view of Turkish diplomats, this has been done despite the fact that Turkey is being kept 'in the dark during the planning phases of operations because it is not an EU member'. In the words of one senior Turkish diplomat, 'the EU can't continue to expect to have access to the biggest military in Europe and to treat us as a second-class citizen' (Bilefsky, 2007: 3).

In this context, Turkish policy-makers attribute more importance to the relations with the USA and NATO, where they have a seat at the table for advancing cooperation in foreign and security policies with their Western partners. The expectations of current Turkish policy-makers in regard to the EU focus on principles in three areas, which are mostly about the way the Turkish EU accession process is conducted: the EU should 'abide by the principle of *pacta sunt servanda*', it 'should not allow bilateral issues to hold back the accession negotiations' and 'it should not let Turkey's accession process be manipulated for domestic politics' (Davutoğlu, 2009: 16). There are also more specific expectations, such as a visa liberalization for Turkey, as a visa liberalization has been accomplished in the cases of other candidate countries. In addition, the EU is expected to engage in direct trade with Northern Cyprus so that Turkey can open its ports and airports to (Southern) Cyprus and implement the Additional Protocol fully, as requested by the EU (Anatolian Agency, 2010a; Anatolian Agency, 2010b). In short, policy-makers and opinion leaders, while acknowledging the need for Turkey to continue its reform process in line with the EU *acquis*, argue that 'the EU should do more to preserve the credibility and consistency of political Europe' (Davutoğlu, 2009: 16).

Therefore, the prospects for an improved strategic cooperation do not seem high. In view of the analysis above, it appears that despite Turkish expressions in favour of improved cooperation, attempts to improve the strategic cooperation between Turkey and the EU are highly likely to fall victim to the problems that haunt the Turkish EU accession negotiations, unless a major change occurs in the positions of the

parties. Such a change could lead to the possibility of establishing a permanent structured cooperation or an enhanced cooperation mechanism between the EU and a candidate country in areas where increased cooperation is needed and desirable for both parties. However, this requires a big mental leap on the part of the EU, which means that the EU would have to become more open to differentiated integration not only among its current members, but also between itself and the candidate countries, or possibly other third countries.

(All the translations in the text were carried out by the authors.)

ENDNOTES

¹ This is not to say that there are no criticisms of the reforms required by the EU accession process. Outbursts of criticisms against the EU by the Turkish nationalists can be observed on issues related to minority rights or democratization. In the view of these groups of people, the EU does not understand the risks of territorial disintegration and/or political regime change that Turkey faces if it fully implements the demands of the EU.

² According to the Transatlantic Trends Survey, in 2011 48% of the Turkish population thought that the EU membership is 'a good thing', reflecting a slight increase from 38% in 2010. However, given the fact that 73% of the Turkish population thought that the EU membership is 'a good thing' in 2004, the results of 2011 still mark a downward trend in public opinion towards the EU (German Marshall Fund of the US, 2011: 37).

³ This was a decision which was thought up as a safeguard against the failure of the 2004 referendum on the United Nations' Annan Plan to resolve the Cypriot issue, in case one of the communities on the island rejected it.

⁴ As a result of these, there are only 3 chapters left (public procurement, competition, and social policy and employment), which can theoretically be opened. However, there are big costs associated with reforms in these areas which made previous negotiating countries wait until the EU membership prospect was closer. For instance, with regard to the chapter on competition policy, Turkey failed to fulfil the opening benchmark on the transparency of its state aids system, whereas the social policy and employment chapter requires a complete transformation of the Turkish public personnel regime. As a result, Turkey currently has no chapters to work on since 2010.

⁵ Thomas Friedman appears to be the most 'vocal' commentator on this issue; in 2010 he stated that he found 'Turkey's Islamist government seemingly focused not on joining the European Union but the Arab League – no, scratch that, on joining the Hamas-Hezbollah-Iran resistance front against Israel' (Friedman, 2010). See also Kanter (2010). For examples of similar kinds of questioning in Turkey, see Tınç (2009), Ekşi (2009) and Yetkin (2010).

⁶ The reader should take into account that the authors are interested in outlining the geopolitical vision and discourses of the current policy-makers and opinion leaders in Turkey – which signify the emergence of new elite – and the implications of these for the Turkish-EU relationship, particularly in terms of foreign policy. The article is not an analysis of how successful the Turkish foreign policy, which is shaped by this new vision, has been or can be in practice.

- ⁷ For a comprehensive analysis of this change in the Turkish approach towards the Middle East see Kirişçi et al. (2010).
- ⁸ The situation has, of course, changed with regard to Syria since the Turkish government's firm support to the opposition in Syria during the ongoing civil war.
- ⁹ The new approach to foreign policy led to a definition of Turkey as the 'trading state'. See Kirişçi (2009).
- ¹⁰ See Erdoğan (2010 and 2011b).
- ¹¹ The UN-backed Alliance of Civilizations, a joint initiative of Turkey and Spain, brings together numerous countries and international organizations. The initiative, which aims to spread multiculturalism, also adopted the principle of establishing strategies for diffusion of universal values at different regional levels.
- ¹² For a similar argument on the importance of tolerance towards other cultures for great powers, see the comments in Birnbaum (2011).
- ¹³ See Eekelen (2009), Grabbe and Ülgen (2010) and Barysch (2010).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Altunışık, Meliha (2010) 'Ne İslam Dünyası ne de Türk Dünyası bir Lider Arayışı çindedir', in Habibe Özdal-Osman Bahadır Dinçer-Mehmet Yegin *Mülakatlarla Türk Dış Politikası (Interviews on Turkish Foreign Policy)*, Cilt (Vol.) 2, pp. 1-22. Ankara, Şubat: Usak Yayınları.
- Anatolian Agency (2010a) 'Turkish Minister in Brussels', Anatolian Agency, 30 September.
- Anatolian Agency (2010b) 'Denmark: Turkish Minister Lists Turkey's Expectations from EU', Anatolian Agency, 8 December.
- Anatolian Agency (2011a) 'Bağış Says Turkey Will Not Give Up Cyprus for EU', Anatolian Agency, 27 January.
- Anatolian Agency (2011b) 'Turkey-Germany - Turkish Premier Appears in Interview on German Television', Anatolian Agency, 1 March.
- Babacan, Ali (2008) Speech at the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA), Planning and Budget Commission, Ankara, accessed on 17 March 2010. Online: www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakanligi-ve-avrupa-birligi-genel-sekreterligi_nin-2008-mali-yili-butce-tasarilarinin-tbmm-plan-ve-butce-komisyonu.tr.mfa.
- Bağış, Egemen (2010) 'Letters to the Editor; Turkey is "On Track" to Join the EU', *The Times*, 11 August: 18.
- Bağış, Egemen (2011) 'It's Vital that Turkey Remains Resolute in Its Pursuit of EU Membership', *The Guardian*, 23 November.
- Bal, İhsan (2012) 'Avrupa Bunalımı (European Crisis)', *Analist Dergisi*, January.
- Barysch, Katinka (2010) *Turkey and the EU: Can the Stalemate be Avoided?*, Policy Brief, Center for European Reform, December.
- Bilefsky, Dan (2007) 'Turks Consider Ending Role in EU Peacekeeping', *The International Herald Tribune*, 9 June: 3.
- Birnbaum, Ben (2011) 'Turkey Cites Prejudice in Delay of Bid to Join EU', *The Washington Times*, 31 January: 8.
- Çalış, Şaban (2010) 'Dış Politikada Eksen Kaymıyor, stikamet Düzeliyor', in Habibe Özdal-Osman Bahadır Dinçer-Mehmet Yegin *Mülakatlarla Türk Dış Politikası*, Cilt (Vol.) 2, pp. 65-100. Ankara, Şubat: Usak Yayınları.

- Çandar, Cengiz (2010) 'Türk Dış Politikasının De işmeyecek Hiç Bir Hükmü Olamaz', in Habibe Özdal-Osman Bahadır Dinçer-Mehmet Yegin *Mülakatlarla Türk Dış Politikası*, Cilt (Vol.) 2, pp. 103-123. Ankara, Şubat: Usak Yayınları.
- Çetin, Hikmet (2010) 'Dışişleri Bakanlığ Dışlanmazsa, Dış Politikada Yanlışlık Yapılmaz', in Habibe Özdal et al., *Mülakatlarla Türk Dış Politikası (Interviews on Turkish Foreign Policy)*, Cilt (Vol.) 3, pp. 87-100. Ankara, Temmuz: Usak Yayınları.
- Çetinsaya, Gökhan (2010) 'Türkiye'nin Ekseni Batı Askeri İttifakıdır', in Habibe Özdal et al. *Mülakatlarla Türk Dış Politikası*, Cilt (Vol.) 3, pp. 103-128. Ankara, Temmuz: Usak Yayınları.
- Dağı, Zeynep (2010) 'Türkiye Önemli Bir Çekim Merkezi Haline Geliyor', in Habibe Özdal-Osman Bahadır Dinçer-Mehmet Yegin *Mülakatlarla Türk Dış Politikası*, Cilt (Vol.) 2, pp. 125-139. Ankara, Şubat: Usak Yayınları.
- Davutoğlu, Ahmet (2001) *Stratejik Derinlik (Strategic Depth)*. İstanbul: Küre Yayınları.
- Davutoğlu, Ahmet (2009) 'Turkish Foreign Policy and the EU in 2010', *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 8 (3): 11-17.
- Davutoğlu, Ahmet (2010a) İkinci Büyükelçiler Konferansı Açılış Oturumu (Speech at the Opening Panel of the Second Ambassadors' Conference), Ankara, 4 Ocak, accessed on 20 April 2010. Online: www.mfa.gov.tr/ikinci-buyukelciler-konferansi-acilis-oturumu_-4-ocak-2010_-ankara.tr.mfa.
- Davutoğlu, Ahmet (2010b) Interview by TRT1 (Turkish Radio Television – a State TV Channel) in the programme 'Enine Boyuna', 28 December, accessed on 16 September 2012. Online: www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-ahmet-davutoglu_nun-trt-haber-kanalinda-yayinlanan_akildakalan_programina-verdikleri-mulakat_-26-arali.tr.mfa.
- Davutoğlu, Ahmet (2011) 'IV. Büyükelçiler Konferansı Açılış Konuşması (Opening Speech at the 4th Ambassadors' Conference)', 23 December 2011, accessed on 16 September 2012. Online: www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sn_-ahmet-davutoglu_nun-iv_-buyukelciler-konferansi-acis-konusmasi_-23-aralik-2011.tr.mfa.
- Eekelen, Willem F. Van (2009) 'Transitional Arrangements as Milestones towards EU Enlargement', *Turkish Studies* 10 (1): 37-55.
- Ekşi, Oktay (2009) 'Neo-Ottomanism', *Hürriyet*, 29 October.
- Erdoğan, Recep Tayyip (2010) Speech at the Third Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 29 May, accessed on 16 August 2011. Online: www.basbakanlik.gov.tr/Forms/pDetay.aspx.
- Erdoğan, Recep Tayyip (2011a) 'The Robust Man of Europe; Turkey Has the Vigor that the EU Badly Needs', *Newsweek*, 24 January.
- Erdoğan, Recep Tayyip (2011b) Address by the Prime Minister at the United Nations General Assembly, 22 September, accessed on 16 August 2011. Online: www.basbakanlik.gov.tr/Forms/pDetay.aspx.
- Fletcher, Martin-Erdem, Suna (2010) 'Turkey "Still Seeks EU Entry"', *The Times*, 2 July: 1, 4.
- Friedman, Thomas L. (2010) 'Letter from Istanbul', *The International Herald Tribune*, 17 June: 9.
- German Marshall Fund of the US (2011) *Transatlantic Trends: Key Findings 2011*. German Marshall Fund of the US.
- Grabbe, Heather-Ülgen, Sinan (2010) *The Way Forward for Turkey and the EU: A Strategic Dialogue on Foreign Policy*. Policy Outlook, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

- Hill, Patrice (2011) 'Turkey Leverages Economy for Global Power', *The Washington Times*, 24 January: 1.
- Kalın, İbrahim (2010) 'Turkish Foreign Policy: Values and Mechanisms', *Today's Zaman*, 9 December.
- Kanter, James (2010) 'U.S. "Disappointed" in Turkish Vote on Sanctions', *The International Herald Tribune*, 12 June: 5.
- Keneş, Bülent (2011) 'Turkey's Role in the Arab Spring', *Today's Zaman*, 19 September.
- Kirişçi, Kemal (2009) 'The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading State', *New Perspectives on Turkey* Vol. 40: 34-38.
- Kirişçi, Kemal-Tocci, Nathalie-Walker, Joshua (2010) *A Neighborhood Rediscovered -Turkey's Transatlantic Value in the Middle East*. Washington: Brussels Forum Paper Series, The German Marshall Fund of the US.
- Laçiner, Sedat (2010) 'Yeni Dönemde Türk Dış Politikasının Felsefesi, Fikri Altyapısı ve Hedefleri', in Osman Bahadır Dinçer-Habibe Özdal-Hacal Necefo lu (eds) *Yeni Dönemde Türk Dış Politikası: Uluslararası IV. Türk Dış Politikası Sempozyumu Tebliğleri*, 2nd Ed. Ankara: Usak Yayınları.
- Özdağ, Ümit (2010) Interview, in Habibe Özdal-Osman Bahadır Dinçer-Mehmet Yegin *Mülakatlarla Türk Dış Politikası (Interviews on Turkish Foreign Policy)*, Cilt (Vol.) 2. Ankara, Şubat: Usak Yayınları.
- Rettman, Andrew (2011) 'EU Leaders Tell Turkey to "Respect" Cyprus', *EUobserver*, 9 December. Online: euobserver.com/24/114562.
- Tınç, Ferai (2009) 'Has the Axis Shifted or Not?', *Hürriyet*, 6 November.
- Today's Zaman (2010) 'PM Lashes Out at "Black Propaganda" Sources', *Today's Zaman*, 14 June.
- Traub, James (2011) 'Turkey's Rules', *The New York Times*, 23 January: 32.
- Uzgel, İlhan (2010) Interview, in Habibe Özdal-Osman Bahadır Dinçer-Mehmet Yegin *Mülakatlarla Türk Dış Politikası (Interviews on Turkish Foreign Policy)*, Cilt (Vol.) 2. Ankara, Şubat: Usak Yayınları.
- Yakış, Yaşar (2010) Interview, in Habibe Özdal-Osman Bahadır Dinçer-Mehmet Yegin *Mülakatlarla Türk Dış Politikası (Interviews on Turkish Foreign Policy)*, Cilt (Vol.) 2, p. 304. Ankara, Şubat: Usak Yayınları.
- Yetkin, Murat (2010) 'İnönü-Davuto lu, History and Repetition', *Radikal*, 21 March.

Copyright of Perspectives: Central European Review of International Affairs is the property of Ustav Mezinarodnich Vztahu, v. v. i. (Institute of International Relations) and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.