

IN SEARCH OF LOST TIME: TURKEY AND ITS CURRENT ENERGY POLITICS

By referring to the great French novelist Marcel Proust's novel –A la Recherche du Temps Perdu/In search of Lost Time– this article argues that Turkey is in search of lost time regarding its energy politics. Indeed, contrary to the Cold War period, Turkey does not hesitate to emphasize the importance of its geographical location through diverse energy projects. But what is notable is that although these diverse projects give the opportunity of multi-dimensional engagement, this same diversity may cause troubles down the line.

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It is often said that Turkey became an energy hub since Turkish energy policy acquired a new momentum recently. Not necessary to enumerate all deals signed starting from the beginning of 1990's. I agree with this explanation but it is possible to complete it by adding that Turkey uses the energy approach in its foreign policy as if it wanted to take revenge for the time that was lost during the Cold War era. During that period Turkey was far from being a transit country in terms of energy routes because of the curtain wall, which was dividing Europe into two opposite poles.

What I argue in this paper is that coming toward the end of 2009, Turkey is in search of lost time by using its energy policy as an active tool and that this policy is a continuation of its foreign policy, which means that its current energy policy reveals several principles applied in today's Turkish foreign policy. What I will try to answer, by considering the recent developments occurring in 2009, is on which principles Turkish foreign policy has based its energy approach. Put differently, which parts of Turkish foreign policy's political and security dimension are reflected into its energy dimension? I will then try to see what may be the troubles that may arise from its current energy policy.

Reflections from Turkish Foreign Policy's Political-Security Dimension to its Energy Dimension: Liberal Dominance

One of the main principles of the current Turkish foreign policy is its "zero problem" policy with its neighbors as declared in 2008 by today's Turkish Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, when he was the chief foreign policy adviser to the Prime Minister. This principle, as the name suggests, aims to create good neighborly relations by enhancing cooperation while maintaining good traditional relations with the West.

On this point, it is necessary to add that this approach mainly based on 'balancing' is not a new dimension in Turkish foreign policy. It is indeed the consequence of the Turkish politico-historical background from which Turkey derived lessons that were put into practice. Indeed, the main traditional tendencies of Turkish foreign policy have always been to ensure regional stability and prosperity, to attach importance to regional consensus, to create a ground to conciliate and to balance different approaches by diplomatic means. Turkish attitudes toward recent global and regional issues demonstrate how much attention Turkey pays to these principles: Turkey's desire to ensure a stable Iraq and its contribu-

tion to Iraqi stabilization; its moderate position toward the Iranian nuclear issue that emphasizes that the problem should be solved not by tough military means or by the isolation imposed to this country but by the integration of this country to the international community through diplomatic means; its efforts in 2008 to start talks between Syria and Israel to launch a Middle East peace process; its attitude during Russian-Georgian War in 2008 that tried to conciliate global and regional powers' interests; its perseverance to conclude an accord with Armenia to restore diplomatic ties and open borders may be enumerated to illustrate the peaceful approach interiorized by Turkish foreign policy.

As we have already pointed out, this general approach indicated above finds its continuation in the Turkish energy policy in the form of a liberal approach. In fact, Turkish energy policy's main purpose seems to be to create interdependence between regional states to ensure the stability and to augment regional prosperity. Even just the last events that have occurred in 2009 in the foreign relations of Turkey may be accepted as the proofs of this situation.

Firstly, in May 2009, Turkey became a part of the South Corridor, an EU gas pipeline project that is expected to diminish Europe's energy dependence on Russia. Though still a project, the signature of a first deal between the parties (27 EU countries, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Egypt) in Prague is a crucial sign of European determination to augment alternative energy routes. Also, the portrayal of this new project by Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek as the "new silk road"¹ is critical to understand the general anticipation from it.

Secondly, in July 2009 Turkey signed a deal, qualified as a "historic moment" by Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan,² with EU countries to launch the construction of Nabucco pipeline that aims to transport natural gas of the Caucasus and Central Asia through Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Austria to Europe's west. It is very important to add that this project is largely supported by U.S.

Thirdly, at the beginning of August of 2009 in Ankara, Turkey signed another deal with Russia promising that Turkey would support the South Stream. The problem with the South Stream project, which is a natural gas pipeline project

¹ "EU signs Deal on New Gas Pipeline," *Al-Jazeera English*, <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/europe/2009/05/200958113442753374.html>, 8 May 2009.

² "Europe Gas Pipeline Deal Agreed," *BBC*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/8147053.stm>, 13 July 2009.

lead by Russia, is that Russia launched such a project to compete with the Western Nabucco project. Through this deal, Turkey allowed the construction of one part of the South Stream in its territorial waters in the Black Sea. After the signing the deal with Russia, Davutoğlu emphasized that Turkey does not see these two different projects as “rivals” but as “complementary ones”³ – this is crucial to understand how Turkey evaluates different approaches concerning energy routes.

Another Turkish engagement in 2009 was realized with Iran. After two memoranda of understanding on energy cooperation signed consecutively in 2007 and 2008 between the two states, in 2009 both parts demonstrated their willingness to deepen their ties through several meetings held on different occasions. Especially in October 2009, the visit of the Turkish delegation led by Turkish Prime Minister to Tehran was certainly the most important since Iranian Oil Minister Seyed Mir-Kazemi and the Turkish Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Taner Yıldız not only agreed on further cooperation in energy issues,⁴ but also put this motive under an official framework by signing another memorandum of understanding⁵ during this visit. Another sign of Turkish-Iranian cooperation evolved when the Turkish Prime Minister indicated that Iran may be another supplier of Nabucco in July 2009, despite American opposition.

It is obvious that the year 2009 constitutes a peak time for Turkey in terms of engagement with several countries regarding energy cooperation. What Turkey tries to do is to conciliate different approaches regarding energy routes similarly to what it does in the political arena. In fact, by signing the South Corridor deal, Turkey has one more time demonstrated that it is really motivated to take part in EU projects and that its geographic location is indispensable for the EU’s needs. Thereby, Turkey has also contributed to its accession process to the EU. Likewise, by signing Nabucco, Turkey has again shown that it supports the research of alternative energy routes largely supported by Western countries. Through Nabucco, Turkey also gained the opportunity to enhance its relations with the U.S., which has been a “strategic partner” of Turkey since the end of the 1940’s. Thereby, Turkey deserved the praises coming from the American side: It is not in

³ “Davutoğlu: Turkey, a crossroads of global energy transportation,” *Turkishny* (Turkish-American Web Portal), <http://www.turkishny.com/en/english-news/13214-davutoglu-turkey-a-crossroads-of-global-energy-transportation.html>, 10 August 2009.

⁴ “Iran, Turkey Confer on Energy Cooperation,” *Fars News Agency*, <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8808061543>, 28 October 2009.

⁵ “Iran, Turkey ink gas MOU,” *Mehr News*, <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=972921>, 28 October 2009.

vain that after the signing of Nabucco Richard Morningstar, U.S. Special Envoy for Eurasian Energy, said, “the Intergovernmental Agreement on Nabucco that is a major milestone in opening a new natural gas corridor to Europe, demonstrated the commitment of Turkey and the other participating countries to that project and needs of Europe.”⁶ Similarly, according to U.S. officials, energy and national security are closely linked to each other and a key factor of global energy security is diversification. Diversification means alternative sources of energy, which include “the development of gas resources in the Caspian region and the Middle East and East-West transit routes through Turkey” as it is mentioned in 2006 by Paul Simons, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary for Energy, Sanctions and Commodities.⁷ Thus, Turkey has also contributed to U.S. interests in the Eurasian region through supporting Nabucco.

On the other hand, close relations with Russia show another aspect of Turkish foreign policy. Indeed, a/the Turkey that wants to maintain regional stability gives a special importance to its relations with Russia, seemingly the major power of the region in which both countries are located. In fact, being indifferent towards Russian interests would be a big mistake from Turkish officials’ perception. So, instead of contributing just to Western projects, Turkey, to keep the balance in its foreign policy, prefers to contribute to Russian projects as well, which gives a key role to energy issues in its security strategy.⁸ As mentioned before, the “zero problem” policy emphasizes good neighborly relations, which require in this case good relations with Russia as well. Signing a deal on energy with Russia became inevitable for Turkey as a necessity coming from its foreign policy’s principles.

Another “balancing behavior” has become concrete within the framework of relations with Iran. The deal on energy signed between Iran and Turkey supports Iran’s integration to Nabucco despite American opposition. Once more it seems necessary to add here that the Turkish position towards Iran on energy is clearly a continuation of its politics on Iran, in terms of political and security issues. Indeed, in 2006 when the Iranian nuclear crisis became international with the UN

⁶ Richard Morningstar, U.S. Special envoy for Eurasian Affairs, Remarks Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington DC, <http://www.state.gov/s/eee/rmk/126216.htm> , 17 July 2009.

⁷ Paul Simons, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary for Energy, Sanctions and Commodities, Statement before the Committee on Government Reform U.S. House of Representatives, Washington DC, <http://2001-2009.state.gov/e/eeb/rls/rm/2006/66625.htm>, 16 May 2006.

⁸ Marcel de Haas, Henning Schröder, “Russia’s National Security Strategy,” *Russian Analytical Digest*, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=&lng=en&id=101960>, 18 June 2009.



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Security Council's resolutions demanding Iran to suspend uranium enrichment or face possible economic, diplomatic sanctions (Resolution 1696, 31 July 2006; Resolution 1737, 23 December 2006), Turkey has assumed an attitude that is not hostile to Iran despite tough reactions coming from West. In the summer of 2006, Turkish President Abdullah Gül's visit to Tehran became an opportunity to announce the Turkish official opinion about Iran's enrichment program. In this visit, Gül indicated that each state has the right to develop a nuclear program for peaceful purposes and that the Iranian crisis should be solved through diplomacy.⁹ Therefore, Turkish current relations on energy with Iran should be accepted as a reflection of its political-security position toward this country.

Probable Troubles That May Arise

With all the engagements of 2009, Turkey seems to emphasize that energy security is not a zero-sum game. Even if this Turkish liberal approach is concretized through different deals signed with different states as mentioned above, indeed, the existence of realpolitik should not be neglected. The fact that Turkey is driven by realpolitik is demonstrated by the deals of 2009 enumerated in the previous chapter.

The first example is the deal between Turkey and Russia on the South Stream project. Although Turkey promised its contribution to this project within its liberal approach (so that all parties could benefit from this, so all could win), the project of course is not that idealistic. Firstly, this project that aims to transport Russian gas to Bulgaria and then to the rest of Europe through Turkish territorial waters in Black Sea, will diversify supplies to European countries, which are concerned about Russian-Ukrainian pricing disputes. In fact, as it is indicated on the official web site of South Stream, the project aims at strengthening European energy security.¹⁰ But on the other hand, it will expand European dependence on Russia, which is probably not evaluated positively by Western countries. That is why the real mission of South Stream stays controversial for the moment. Moreover, by bypassing traditional transit countries such as Ukraine, South Stream may create new rivalries between Ukraine and Turkey. Because this project was launched following several cuts to supplies by Russia to Ukraine, Ukraine may end up being resentful toward a Turkey that will become a Russian alternative

⁹ "Nükleer diplomasi: Tahran'da nabız yoklama" [Nuclear diplomacy: Checking the atmosphere in Tehran], *Radikal*, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=191252>, 26 June 2006.

¹⁰ <http://south-stream.info/?L=1>

to Ukraine. Especially, the fact that Putin said that South Stream would help “discipline” Ukraine and other countries that transit Russian gas¹¹ may be an accelerator of tension in the near future.

The second example of Realpolitik, of a clash of interests, stems from Turkish support for Iran in Nabucco. Even though Turkey proposed Iran to join this project so that everyone may win, American opposition to this proposition remains strong. Indeed, after the Turkish Prime Minister repeated that he would continue efforts to have Iran in the Nabucco project in the signature ceremony in July 2009,¹² Richard Morningstar, the top U.S. official on Eurasian energy affairs, indicated that Iranian involvement in the Nabucco pipeline would violate the terms of the Iran Sanctions Act. Therefore, the U.S. will not change its policy unless Iran changes its policy.¹³ Since then, the opposition concerning Iran’s involvement seems not to come to an end. In fact in December 2009, Morningstar did not hesitate to say very precisely that “Iran is not a position to become a part of any projects in the Southern Corridor.” The answer from Iranian side came quickly and Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki said in response that Washington was in no position to make decisions for Europe.¹⁴ Obviously, in this opposition, the fact that the Iranian nuclear crisis could not find yet any solution plays the major role. Whatever the reason is, all the points regarding Nabucco indicated above may help us to understand the deep crisis that still exists between the American and Iranian sides. And in such a context, Turkish attitude concerning Iranian involvement in Nabucco project seems to be not so realistic.

Conclusion

Contrary to the Cold War period, it is obvious that Turkey makes efforts to engage in as many deals as possible. These efforts arise from the post-Cold War international context in which Turkey has emphasized its geographic location.

The efforts made and the number of deals signed with several states makes us think that Turkey is in search of lost time. And in this search, Turkey does not

¹¹ “Putin issues fresh gas warning to Yushchenko,” *France 24*, <http://www.france24.com/en/20091111-putin-issues-fresh-gas-warning-yushchenko-russia-ukraine-austria-pipeline>, 11 November 2009.

¹² “Erdogan says will continue efforts to have Iran in Nabucco Project,” *IRNA*, <http://www.irna.ir/View/FullStory/?NewstId=586865&IdLanguage=3>, 13 July 2009.

¹³ “Nabucco gas pipeline nations wary of Iran-US envoy,” *Reuters*, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/idUKWBT01148220090716?sp=true>, 16 July 2009.

¹⁴ “FM: Nabucco Gas Pipeline in Dire Need of Iran’s Gas Supply,” *Fars News*, <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8809171713>, 8 December 2009.

hesitate to engage in different deals, even if “opposed” to each other sometimes. This diversity of engagement comes from Turkish foreign policy’s principle currently known as “zero problem” policy. By applying this principle to its energy policy, Turkey acts within a liberal approach, emphasizing that energy issue is not a zero sum game. Despite the fact that Turkey has such an approach and that Richard Morningstar rejects the analogy of the “Great Game” to portray American and Russian energy policies,¹⁵ the emergence of rivalry regarding energy issue is inevitable. Indeed, as I have tried to show in this paper, the Turkish liberal approach on the energy issue is limited in some cases because of the fact that it faces or it will face in the near future certain serious troubles. So, although the motive is liberal, the existence of realpolitik is a fact that cannot be denied.

¹⁵ “FM: Nabucco Gas Pipeline in Dire Need of Iran’s Gas Supply,” *Fars News*, <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8809171713>, 8 December 2009.
